


TOOLINK ENGINEERING, INC.

For reliable hydraulic and manual workholding solutions, this company's line of König devices is providing maximum repeatability to some of the world's top manufacturers.

By Russ Willcutt





It was an offer that Tom Lang found hard to refuse, so he didn't. Having owned one third of Toolink Engineering, Inc., in the mid-nineties, he'd sold his shares in 2006. Then, in early 2007, he was approached by Horst König, the owner of König MTM—the German workholding manufacturer the company represented—who said he wanted Lang to take on the line.

"My immediate response was that I couldn't," he says, "because he already had a contract in place with the current owners. So he said 'Well, why don't you buy the company?'"

Lang had just wrapped up his tenure as vice president and general manager of Kapp Technologies at the time, and he was heavily involved in launching Aerocom Industries, Inc.—a premier supplier of commercial and aerospace gearing—but he respected König's product line and could see potential in the opportunity. He also had a clear vision of what the company he ended up purchasing could become.

"Toolink is basically an engineering company," he explains, "and our mission is to sell and support König's workholding devices throughout North America, where we are the sole authorized service and repair center. But our model is a little different from some other companies because such a high degree of engineering knowledge is required. That's why we have 'sales engineers' internally who augment the activities of our network of representatives out in the field."

These individuals are industry experts, with backgrounds in mechanical or manufacturing engineering, and they are equipped to apply their understanding of a customer's needs to crafting the perfect workholding device to suit their particular application. "And that's a very important capability for us to have," Lang says, "because all of our products are custom designs. König doesn't manufacture a line of stock items, everything is designed with the end user's exact needs in mind."

Determining these needs keeps Toolink's inside sales engineer, Tim Peterson, very busy, sometimes traveling to meet with customers when required. His efforts are supported by a König counterpart who visits the United States frequently in order to join him on these site visits. While most devices can be built from the customer's drawings—and Toolink's knowledge of the types of machines they'll be matched with—situations such as automating a particular process with new equipment often require a site visit.

"We have a certain procedure that each order goes through, beginning with the request and then moving through the information gathering phase," Lang says. "We


then produce a design to present to the customer, and once it's been approved the device is manufactured and shipped. Throughout this process, however, the customer's input is welcomed and incorporated into our calculations so that it will not only meet their needs, but exceed their expectations."

In addition to the "personal seal of approval" he provides by using König workholding devices in his own operation at Aerocom Industries, Lang points to a stellar lineup of companies that are also longtime users. "The people who use our tooling are the Fords and General Motors of the world," he says, "as well as aircraft manufacturers such as Sikorsky and Bell Helicopter. They're all our customers because they have firsthand experience with how well these devices work, and how long they last."

An example of this is found in a recent repair order Toolink completed for one of its customers. "It was manufactured 17 years ago, and this was the first time it had required service," Lang says, adding that all devices are evaluated at the company's Longmont, Colorado, facility and either directly repaired or shipped to Germany for re-manufacture. "These devices are extremely robust, and they're typically good for anywhere from 50-80,000 cycles, which is a high level of production that only places like automotive plants might be expected to reach. For everyone else, they'll just last that much longer before some type of service is required."

In addition to durability, König workholding devices also provide an incredibly high degree of accuracy and repeatability. "Historically, we've been manufacturers of hydraulic workholding devices, which are extremely accurate," Lang says. "As for our runout, we're right there in the 'plus or minus a couple of microns' range, and that's very repeatable."

Not all König products are 100-percent hydraulic, however, with mechanical devices available that are activated hydraulically. "We've also gone to some special multi-taper designs that are ideal for holding internal/external gears for hobbing, grinding, shaping, and even tool manufacturing," he says. "Others incorporate hydraulically activated colletting devices—as opposed to actual collets—which provides greater dimensionality and very tight tolerances."

Although future plans for the company include hiring additional sales engineers and exploring complementary product lines to increase its value to its customers, Toolink's primary responsibility is representing König. "The gear manufacturing industry is really looking for innovative and dependable workholding solutions right now," Lang says, "and that's exactly what we're here to provide." 

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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