

Teaming up for quality

14-Oct-2008 21:04 GMT



Photo Etch leverages the expertise of the Supplier Excellence Alliance to produce its displays.

Engineers have made huge strides in recent years regarding end-product quality, and it is not just a matter of improvements on the plant floor.

Eliminating or reducing problems has become a team effort that includes representatives from all parts of a company, often with input from suppliers and customers. More companies are realizing that spending time and money to improve operations provides a long-term payback.

"Poor quality in products, processes, or services adds cost to a business," said Max Mills, Director, Quality and Product Safety, **Gulfstream Aerospace**. "Improving quality by reducing rework, scrap, supplier issues, and warranty costs to correct issues significantly decreases cost to a business."

The payoffs can be significant. Over three years, **Goodrich Corp.** cut its quality escapes by 70% while trimming the costs of poor quality such as scrap, rework, and warranty costs by 40%.

"That saves our customers and ourselves over \$100 million every year," said Steve Wells, Vice President of Quality and Continuous Improvement, Goodrich. "Quality can be a source of improvement for operating margins."

Throughout the aerospace industry, suppliers and OEMs have realized that they can all benefit by teaming up. Many companies participate in groups that study quality issues and share the results. Groups such as the **Supplier Excellence Alliance** (SEA) provide well-defined processes that can be implemented to increase efficiency and quality. "SEA provides an A-to-Z road map that's one of the best things we've seen," said Randy Fry, President, **Photo Etch**.

Photo Etch completed the first of three phases detailed by SEA, stabilizing its company's processes, this year. That included a review of all aspects of design and manufacture, including a contract review cycle that was trimmed from two weeks to 24 h.

It is not just groups such as SEA that help smaller companies improve their quality processes. Large companies often set up programs to help their suppliers meet their quality requirements, helping the smaller firms learn new techniques and assuring the customers that they all get quality parts.

"We use the **United Technologies** Supplier Gold program to assist key suppliers in a better understanding of lean and variation reduction," said Aaron Gleixner, Director of Group Quality at **Pratt & Whitney**.

Whether the company is large or small, that reliance on suppliers is critical for success. Photo Etch, which produces display and control panels, typically takes lessons from SEA and its large customers such as **Boeing** and **Lockheed Martin**.

But the company is now also attempting to work with suppliers to improve their quality and on-time delivery records. "If my suppliers fall down, I fall down, too," said Fry.

Terry Costlow