



MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

MAKING A PATIENT’S LIFE A BIT MORE COMFORTABLE

HILL-ROM

Ask the people at Hill-Rom how they got to be a world leader in medical equipment manufacturing, with 10,000 employees in several facilities around the globe, and they will likely answer you in a few key words: quality, innovation and a commitment to enhancing outcomes for patients and caregivers.



“We look for that same degree of dedication in our supplier partners,” says Steve Mathes. “Fortunately we’ve found it in BLM GROUP USA”. Mathes is Director of Operations at Hill-Rom’s Batesville, Indiana manufacturing facility. In addition to medical architectural products, the plant supplies hospitals and care facilities around the world with hi-tech beds designed with the needs of both patients and caregivers in mind, making over 30,000 beds per year. Hill-Rom Batesville and BLM GROUP USA have a long history of working together. “We established a relationship with BLM GROUP USA in 2003 when we bought an LT652 CO2 Lasertube, followed by a LT702 CO2 Lasertube in 2004.”



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, RESTRAINING COST

“I believe that we were among their first Lasertube customers in the country,” Mathes notes.

“We were early innovators, and it paid off. Laser technology gave us great flexibility in terms of design and enabled us to overcome some of our volume constraints.”

Hill-Rom’s drive for innovation and process improvement didn’t stop there. It couldn’t. “We often speak of the voice of the customer,” says Mathes, “and the importance of listening to that voice. One of the loudest of those voices belongs to the hospital administrators and they put a high priority on quality and controlling costs”.

“Ours is a highly competitive industry,” added Mathes. “We need to continue to improve our operation if we hope to keep costs in check and stay ahead of competitive pressures”.

“Cost pressures driven by consolidations in the healthcare industry continue to increase, as does the ongoing need for innovative solutions that deliver superior performance and outcomes”, says Mathes. “Laser technology has played a key role for us in terms of both cost and innovation. This thought process has led us to investigate fiber laser technology for tube cutting”.

Hill-Rom was aware of the potential of fiber technology because they already employed a fiber laser in sheet metal processing. Tube cutting, however, was another story, and for insight into this process they turned to their partners at BLM GROUP USA.

After investigating the available offerings, it was determined that BLM’s new LT FIBER fit Hill-Rom’s present and projected future needs. The LT FIBER system is specifically designed and developed for cutting tubes of any section with the fiber laser source. It offers significant advantages in terms of a wider range of materials that can be processed, and a considerable productivity increase is obtained based on the material’s thickness.

“We were impressed by the system’s software as well,” recalls Ray Werner, Hill-Rom Manufacturing Technician. BLM GROUP USA’s programming software, a three dimensional parametric Artube CAD/CAM package, is specifically designed for tube applications. “Our people have found it relatively simple to use, even for novices”. He also appreciates the fact that it enables automatic and programmable setup, tube and bar management, and rapid changeover as well.

“Those features are real time savers,” he remarks.

Hill-Rom personnel were equally impressed by the overall system “We felt that this machine was best in class,” says Mathes. But they wanted more. As Mathes explains, “What we want from our suppliers is performance and support, and also an understanding of our needs. For instance, we didn’t want to rely on estimated cutting speeds, we wanted accurate numbers for our planning.

So a team of people went to BLM GROUP USA’s headquarters in Wixom Michigan, and worked with us and a similar machine on actual parts so we could make intelligent estimates”.

This is a key and often overlooked benefit of laser processing. With traditional processing methods the time and cost required to perform an operation can vary depending on a number of factors, including the machine operator’s skill level. With laser processing the time and cost required to produce the part can be tallied in advance. These numbers remain the same whether you produce one of these parts or a hundred. This degree of certainty about cost and quality eases planning and constitutes a business advantage for laser users.

MULTIPLE ADVANTAGES

The LT FIBER laser is now on the Hill-Rom floor and should be making production parts shortly. It will have a decided difference compared to the other conventional production systems it replaces.

“There are designs that we would not be able to achieve without this machine, which allows us the flexibility to bring these designs to life.” notes Kevin Eagan, Hill-Rom Manufacturing Engineer.

As a result, Hill-Rom will reduce part count, production time and cost. “The speed of manufacturing with the LT FIBER lets us bring robust new designs to market faster observes Eagan.

“When our New Product Division staff come up with new design ideas that they want to investigate we can now use the laser to produce rapid prototypes for them. This allows them to quickly check out their concepts and see if they meet our customers’ needs and our business objectives”.