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There are some people
you'll never convince of a
good thing - meanwhile,
others take advantage of it.
FJ visits Harris Cox.

Below. Though it's a warm 43 degrees
inside, it's not the heat that does the curing.



Imagine how your business might benefit if, almost overnight, you could gain two thousand square feet of workshop space, streamline your production and pave the way to doubling your turnover. Surely there is no single factor which could so dramatically improve any company's prospects. At least, not one that visitors to Plymouth-based Harris Cox are prepared to believe readily. But according to the company's Research and Development Manager, Chris Shaw, one key (yet relatively inexpensive) purchase has enabled him to release space for increased production, rid the company of bottlenecks and provide a production base which will enable it to grow markedly as and when they choose.

Harris Cox works for the fast-paced fashion industry, providing top name high street retailers with cabinets, counters and point-of-sale materials just when they need them. It's a demanding business. The company has to be innovative and efficient - and very, very competitive. Production runs like clockwork. In the summer months especially, the factory is flat out. Yet, remarkably, walk around and there's a relaxed calm on the factory floor. Work flows. There are no bottlenecks. There's even space to spare.

But it wasn't always like that.

"At one time, we had two thousand

square feet of floor space taken up with air drying racks," recalls Chris. "Out of fifty thousand square feet of factory, that's a lot. It was cluttered and there were always people moving racks around. Work in progress was two weeks. We just didn't realise it at the time.

"We used to apply water-based primer which took one-and-a-half hours to touch dry and another twenty-four to cure before nibbing and top coating. The AC top coat was fifteen minutes to touch dry and another twelve hours to transport. All that time it was live on a rack. Hence at any time we had one hundred and fifty racks on the go, which limits how much you can produce, so your production backs up."

That was until Chris discovered the Schubox. Now his sprayers use only five or six racks and the cycle takes just twenty minutes.

"I first came across the Schubox about four years ago," recalls Chris, "But at the time we were doing much more laminated work. Now everyone wants paint - nowadays it's seventy per cent of our production. "When Peter Schubert explained the technology to me, it seemed logical, if a little incredible, but when a guy is so confident in the technology he's offering that he's prepared to take it back if it doesn't work as



Left. Everything is meticulously choreographed. Here the flash-off chamber is loaded. All the VOCs are sucked out and into the Schubox where they are rendered harmless.

Below. The cycle is twenty minutes, after which the panels are fully cured and can be stacked or assembled as required.



Left. Harris Cox bought one Schubox for applying water-based primer and another with a flash-off chamber (right) for top-coating.

Right. One of the two stations in the top-coating bay. The cycle of the Schubox determines the speed at which the two spray bay operators work.



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well as he claims, it gets your attention, doesn't it?

"The Schubox does exactly what it says on the tin."

Harris Cox now run two Schuboxes: both are operated independently. The first deals with water-based primer. The sprayed panels or carcasses are placed on a trolley and moved into the Schubox as soon as possible after spraying. The temperature and air flow is a little higher for water-based and the product is cured and ready for de-nibbing in 15 to 20 minutes. After de-nibbing the first of two coats of AC lacquer is applied, for curing in the second Schubox. As this material is solvent-based there is a VOC problem. Not only is this an ecological problem it's also a health hazard which makes the working environment unpleasant. Virtually all the smell and the VOCs are fed into the Schubox from the flash-off chamber. Once the rack is full, it's pushed into the flash-off chamber. The process runs like a well-oiled machine: timed to perfection. The cycle in the Schubox determines the speed at which the spray bay operators work. They, in turn, are provided with just the right quantity of panels by the machine shop. Everything is meticulously choreographed.

In the case of the top coat, virtually all

the smell - and the VOCs - are fed into the Schubox from the flash-off chamber and converted into harmless gases. "It's a big headache to calculate emissions," comments Chris, perhaps just a little tongue in cheek, "Because the Schubox reduces VOCs so much. But you can't smell solvent here can you?"

He's right. And the cycle time to full cure is also only 15-20 minutes dependent upon film thickness.

The finish Harris Cox's sprayers achieve, even on black, is like a well-laid foil. "The paint cures so quickly that there's no time for contamination to build," says Chris. It also reduces the amount of paint required to finish the highly absorbent edges of modern MDF, which Chris describes as "like Weetabix" in the centre.

Despite the almost miraculous transformation the arrival of the Schuboxes has made to Harris Cox's production, however, there is one problem it has left them with for which even Schubert Technical Services does not have an immediate solution: what to do with the company car park. It's now littered with more than one hundred unwanted racks.

To find out more about how the Schubox could help your production, call: 01226 360900, visit www.schuberts.co.uk or email schuberts@lineone.net



Above. Chris Shaw, Research and Development Manager.