



Superfici Mini Plus spray machine performing well in a very tight spot for Advanced Millwork Components & Installations in Lindon, Utah, USA

Is Automation The Answer To Your Labor Challenges?

By Jeff Gator Henry

I'll begin this article with full and complete disclosure; I am the Marketing Manager for Superfici America, and of course I want manufacturers to automate their finishing with our solutions. Now with that out of the way, let me present the following case for why automation is more than likely the answer to many of the challenges you're facing in your

attempts to find reliable, hard-working, long-term employees for your company.

According to a **recent survey* of 225 Canadian companies conducted by Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, eighty-five percent of respondents are facing an immediate labor and skills shortage.

The landscape in the USA is very similar as two recent ***parallel studies* reveal that 82% of manufacturers face a significant skills and labor gap, fueled largely by baby boomer retirement and a lack of interest among younger workers in manufacturing, as a viable career path option.

As a provider of automated finishing solutions for North American manufacturers, Superfici America is in a unique position to gain a lot of valuable insight directly from business owners and company executives across a wide spectrum of manufacturing industries. The following list represents the most commonly expressed labor challenges many of our customers have faced, and which were cited as the primary reasons they made the decision to automate their finishing:

- Finding dependable, trustworthy, reliable labor
- Regular callouts, tardiness, and no shows (substance abuse issues)
- Limited production capacity from hand spraying
- Painter burnout
- Lack of consistency in the quality of the finished product

When commenting on the labor challenges experienced by Alka Kitchen Cabinets of Toronto, during a recent phone conversation Production Supervisor Robert Malandrino said that growth opportunities and a scarcity of manual finishers, were determining factors in their decision to buy an automated finishing solution.



* <https://cme-mec.ca/blog/initiatives/expanding-the-skilled-labour-pool/>

** <https://www.reliableplant.com/Read/30044/manufacturing-worker-shortage>

“We were fortunate to have the business volume that necessitated we increase our finishing production capabilities, and to meet this market demand we were facing the need of adding an additional manual spray booth, going from three to four, requiring us to hire another finisher, and then needing to add a supervisor position to manage those four booths. When we started the hiring search for the finishers, we discovered there aren’t any, so the need to automate became urgent and obvious. We looked at many machines at various trade shows and the space required for the ones we were seeing wouldn’t work in our facility, and then we discovered the Mini Plus (Superfici America) with its smaller footprint.



Superfici America Mini Plus spray machine in finishing area at Alka Kitchen Cabinets, Weston, Ontario, Canada

The impact on our company has been amazing, really. The volume of material we can finish in half a day with the machine is more than we could have done in a full day with four booths running, and the cost savings on labor and adding those booths is significant.



Custom kitchen from Alka Kitchen Cabinets, Weston, Ontario Canada

We’ve transitioned from employing finishers, to having operators, and our team is really happy because they get to spend more of their time working on other projects in other departments such as shipping. Now, due to the quality and

production capabilities of the Mini Plus, we’re in the process of expanding our business and revenue streams.”

A quick productivity comparison between hand spraying and an entry level reciprocal spray machine such as the Superfici Mini reveals a stark contrast in daily output capabilities:

- Automatic Spray Machine: 5-10 minutes
- Manual Spraying: 40-45 minutes
- Spray Machine: Up to 1000 pieces per day 2-coat process or 750 per day 3-coat process
- Manual Painter: 120 pieces per day 2-coat process or 80 pieces per day 3-coat process

For those of you that may be thinking “but we’re too small to afford to automate our finishing”, the math says otherwise. On average in the USA, a professional manual spray-painting technician costs about C\$25.00/hour (\$20.00 US), or C\$203.00 (\$160.00 US) per day not considering benefits and other job perks. Contrast that with a Superfici America Mini automated reciprocal spray machine on a 5-year lease, which runs about C\$97.00 per day (\$76.00 US), and most resistance automation starts to crumble.

MANUAL SPRAYING



- Finding dependable, trustworthy, reliable labor today is extremely challenging
- Production capacity limited
- Experienced painters get burned out and leave, and are hard to replace; training new sprayers is very time consuming
- No consistency in quality with every finished piece

AUTOMATED SPRAYING



- Never calls in sick, never needs a break, and needs no benefits, just regular TLC
- Finish up to 1,000 pieces per day
- Anyone with smartphone or basic computer experience can learn how to operate the Mini within minutes
- 100% consistency in quality of finish, every piece every time

It is often stated that necessity is the mother of all invention. Or in the case of automating the finishing process, the current labor crisis which most experts believe is not going to improve in the foreseeable future, is demanding businesses change not just to be competitive, but to survive the rapidly evolving manufacturers landscape.

To this end, and in closing, here are some points to consider if you're still on the fence or perhaps still too nervous to "step off the boat" and onto the waters of automation for your finishing needs:

1. Does your finishing capacity = your manufacturing needs?
2. Have you had challenges with manual spraying that negatively impacted your business?
3. Is the quality of your product 100% consistent and at the highest standards every piece, every time?
4. What does your growth trend or opportunities for growth over the next 5 years look like?