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A string of successes reaching all the way to the Antarctic

With a new vinyl window production line, Aleksandar Vugrek and Marijan Rauš are once again pulling out all the stops. 13 years ago, the two friends founded their company, Marlex, with a combination of intrepid entrepreneurial spirit, a passion for cutting-edge technology and elumatec equipment. Fast forward to today, and Marlex is one of the fastest growing companies in Croatia, making windows that have even found their way to the Antarctic.



The Marlex company in north-Croatian Varaždin

It sounds like a Hollywood story: Two friends have a dream of establishing their own company, and not only do they make that dream a reality, but they also manage to conquer the market in the process. It's the kind of happy-ending tale that normally only happens on movie screens, but it's also the story of two real-life people who started their journey in the city of Varaždin, in Northern Croatia, exactly 13 years ago. Since then, Aleksandar Vugrek and Marijan Rauš have seen their company, Marlex, grow at a dizzying rate. The numbers don't lie: The production area, which was originally limited to a modest 200 square meters, is now the size of two football fields. The number of employees working for the company has grown from two to 140. And the company's market has kept expanding further and further beyond Croatia's borders. So much so, in fact, that Marlex windows are installed in shipping container houses in the middle of the Antarctic to protect their inhabitants from the cold as of this writing. The secret to the friends' success? A number of factors that complement each other perfectly: entrepreneurial spirit, know-how and perhaps most importantly, a clever business strategy. "We have always adjusted our portfolio in line with the needs of the market and made sure to establish strong partnerships with technological leaders such as elumatec", explains owner Aleksandar Vugrek. An example is how Marlex used only plastic for its products at the beginning, while it now is able to work with a broad variety of materials in any combination: vinyl, vinyl and aluminium, aluminium, aluminium and wood and insulated glazing. In addition, the company's vinyl windows and doors are made with a centre gasket according to the latest safety standards.

Quick to adapt, well-versed in the particulars of the industry, and always one step ahead technologically

The two owners, who are fascinated by technology and can always be seen with their smartphone or tablet around, know that having the latest technology is the key to always being ahead in the market. “We make high-quality products. That means that having top-of-the-line quality is just as important as having high throughputs so that we can deliver the excellence expected from our brand even under tight deadlines”, owner Marijan Rauš points out. Because of this, Marlex regularly invests both in training for its employees and in state-of-the-art equipment. These two go hand in hand, and Marlex’s resounding success shows just how well this policy has been implemented, resulting in a perfect combination of quality, delivery reliability, service and an outstanding price/performance ratio that has proven to be a boon for the company’s continuous growth. Marlex’s largest market is Croatia, which takes up sixty percent of sales, with units being delivered both to construction companies and to end customers. The remaining forty percent goes to dealers in Europe and from there to the rest of the world, with Marlex focusing on production and on organizing order fulfilment operations. Meanwhile, selected subcontractors are the ones who install the company’s windows for end customers, enabling the company to remain lean and flexible while providing customers with one-stop solutions. In order to keep driving its expansion, Marlex recently invested in a new vinyl window and door manufacturing system made by elumatec’s partner Stürtz. The goal: To increase production capacity by maximizing automation. “Stürtz’ technology is way ahead of the competition in everything having to do with machining and automation. By relying on it, we can also be one step ahead in our market”, says Marijan Rauš when explaining the decision behind the investment. For the new line’s planning, both owners turned to Nebojša Wosel, who is the Regional Director for Southeastern Europe at elumatec and not only has been in charge of looking after Marlex since the latter’s foundation, but has also provided expert support every step of the way. “Nebojša knows our company and our needs like the back of his hand. This means he knew exactly where we wanted to head and was able to provide us with a perfectly custom-tailored solution”, Aleksandar Vugrek points out. Together with Stürtz staff, the elumatec expert trashed out the new line down to the smallest detail, after which it was delivered on time to Varaždin on 27 trucks and installed there professionally.



A product range with every desired combination



Fully automated production line

Automation with finesse

The result? One of the most cutting-edge and effective production plants in all of Europe. Every single step – from length cutting, through profile machining, to installation – is automated, meaning that the system can produce 600 window units in a single shift efficiently and effectively. The flagship unit behind this new production line is a modular profile machining centre for vinyl and steel-reinforced vinyl windows and doors. With its eight stations and a 12-tool changer, it can carry out all required standard machining operations simultaneously, including gasket relief milling and transom notching. The two high-temperature turbowelding lines downstream of it perform further work on the machine. Moreover, the automatic allowance adjustment mechanism ensures that different frame installation depths can be handled without a problem.

A single-head and a dual-head machine then take care of the cleaning work. These two machines feature add-on units for special machining operations (arrowhead routing, tilt/turn hinge drilling and corner strap drilling). After this, the line splits: The frames that are ready to go are stacked, while the sashes are assembled and fastened with a fully automatic process in one-minute cycles and are then taken to the frames via a buffer line. After the frame and sashes are assembled together, the glazing is installed. For this purpose, the glass handling system provides the glass panes just in time, with the delivery system relying on barcodes that are used to identify every single part. Finally, the assembled units either go to the assembly area for blinds or directly into the finished goods storage area.

Twice the throughput and capacity

With this system, Marlex has doubled its capacity and productivity: “Instead of 600 window units, we are now making 1,200 units in two turns – and with the new line, we only need half the personnel we used to. Or to put it another way, we’ve laid the tracks for further growth”, Aleksandar Vugrek confirms.

And in order to catch up with its aluminium operations as well, Marlex has already ordered an SBZ 628 from elumatec. This pass-through centre is designed for non-stop profile machining, making it possible to feed blank bars and obtain fully machined individual profiles sawn to length that can be used for windows, doors and façades. “We want to keep expanding our capacity and increase our productivity and our planning accuracy by means of optimized processes”, Marijan Rauš explains. And, not surprisingly, both he and his partner are putting their trust in Nebojša Wosel once again for this investment. Ultimately, they know that this is one of the many steps towards their ambitious goal: to expand their dealer network in Europe.



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