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Canadian Sharpening Service Aiguisatek Benefits from VOLLMER Automation During Pandemic

The global pandemic has impacted businesses around the world, but for Aiguisatek, the impact was compounded by stringent local regulation in the Quebec province that all but shut down manufacturing in the area. Luckily for the Delson based company, its investment in a VOLLMER CHD 270 8-axis TCT circular saw blade sharpening machine with the VOLLMER ND250 automation station enabled the company to run unmanned production throughout the pandemic.

Founded in 1986 by Mario Dion and Conrad Goulet, the 15-employee company designs, manufactures, sharpens and services cutting tools, circular saw blades, router bits, cutter blocks, profiling tools and special tools for the wood, metal, paper, plastic and composite processing industries. Like many businesses, Aiguisatek started with one machine in a garage with the founders focusing primarily on saw blades and router bits. Aiguisatek had a promising start with the combination of highly skilled engineers and a Vollmer Akemat grinding center.

Since its inception, the company has grown exponentially and expanded its product and service offering – something that has been supported down the years by six VOLLMER Akemat circular saw blade sharpening machines. In 2011, the daughter and grandson of company founder Conrad Goulet took over the business. Lisa Goulet and Jonathan Riberdy have since driven the business forward by moving to a new 14,000sq/ft facility, investing heavily in new machine tools and implementing a strategy to diversify into PCD cutting tools.

In 2013, the company realized its saw blade servicing department was reliant on ageing Akemat machines that required significant labor resource to keep up with its weekly demand of 350-400 saw blades. This was compounded by the increasing requirement for 80, 100 and 125mm split scoring saws that had to be manually processed.

THE NEXT GENERATION VOLLMER ARRIVES

The answer was a VOLLMER CP200 4-axis CNC face and top grinding saw blade sharpening machine. Commenting upon this, Jonathan Riberdy says: “The demand for split scoring saws was increasing and each blade would take up to 15 minutes to process manually. Buying the VOLLMER CP200, we reduced production time to 3-4 minutes. This alleviated the pressure and capacity demands on both the Akemat machines and the staff. The VOLLMER CP200 also gave us a lot more - it improved our re-grinding and service quality; it improved our throughput and the versatility of the machine allowed us to produce blades with more complex geometries.”

“Back in 2013, we had several saw blades that were problematic. These saws had to be subcontracted out for re-grinding. Just one example was a 10-inch diameter saw blade with a fine pitch of 130 teeth. The CP200 enabled us to bring challenging blades in-house and eliminate subcontract costs and the reliance on third-party suppliers. The CNC control unit and the software on the CP200 also made the set-up and programming extremely quick and efficient.”

SOLVING GROWTH CHALLENGES WITH VOLLMER

In 2015 Aiguisatek expanded into PCD cutting tools, increasing its offering and market share with existing customers as well as win new clients. Since this diversification, Aiguisatek has witnessed 25% year on year growth, expanding beyond its local customer base to support clients across the Quebec and Ontario areas. Of course, such aggressive growth not just in PCD tooling but also TCT saw blades required additional investment. So, in 2019 the company acquired a VOLLMER CHD270 8-axis tooth top and face grinding machine with the VOLLMER ND250 automation solution as part of a \$1.5million investment program.

Alluding to this growth, Aiguisatek President Lisa Goulet says: “PCD tooling has been a game-changer for us and it has accelerated growth. In a short time, the breakdown of our products is now 35% PCD and 65% carbide tooling. Simultaneously, our TCT saw

blade department has grown by an average of 15% year-on-year and we are now servicing over 1,000 saw blades a week. We wouldn't have sustained this growth without the investment in the VOLLMER CHD270 and ND250. Almost 90% of our customer base is in the woodworking industry. We now have three staff delivering/collecting saws and tools daily to manufacturers of everything from cabinets and furniture through to windows, doors and the construction industry."

With production requirements increasing from 350 to 1,000 blades a week, the VOLLMER CHD270 was a necessity. Commenting upon this, Jonathan says: "While increasing production output, we had ageing machines and two experienced but also ageing operators, running seven machines non-stop every day. This bottleneck was a stressful environment for the operators whose vast experience kept inconsistent quality to a manageable level. We knew we needed a solution and the CHD270 provided it."

THE BENEFITS OF VOLLMER & AUTOMATION

The CHD270 installed in 2019 can process saw blades from 3.15 to 33inch diameter whilst the ND250 4-axis double gripper automation cell has five carriages to accommodate up to 450 saw blades or a maximum load of 1,500kg. This changed the game for Aiguisatek, a growing business in a stagnating marketplace.

Recalling the situation, Jonathan continues: "Saw servicing changed overnight. We went from two operators running seven machines non-stop to one operator working across the CHD270, the CP200 and one or two Akemat machines. With the VOLLMER CHD270, our operator can spend two hours loading and unloading around 150 saws and then setting the machine to run for 24 hours unmanned – giving the operator time and capacity to work on other machines."

"The VOLLMER CHD270 processes one saw at a time, so it's not as fast as two men running seven machines simultaneously all day long. However, we used to have two men working 10 hours a day to produce 150 saws on seven machines – now the VOLLMER CHD270+ND250 runs 24 hours a day 6 days a week, giving us the same weekly production capacity from one unmanned machine as we used to get from two



men and seven machines. Instead of running seven machines simultaneously for 10 hours, the CHD270 reaches the same daily output by running through the night unattended. Not only does the VOLLMER make the time and output up through weeknights, but it runs unmanned over the weekend too. Now, we run about 10-15% of our blades through the Akemat machines for a couple of hours a day with the CHD270 doing most of the saws.”

EXCEEDING QUALITY EXPECTATIONS

Aiguisatek has built an enviable reputation for its service, quality, consistency and innovation, and VOLLMER has been pivotal in supporting this. “The VOLLMER CHD270 instantly improved the quality and consistency of our saw blades. With in-cycle blade probing and automated wheel dressing, the repeat quality really surprised us. It was a huge difference when compared to our older machines. When combining the stability and stiffness of the CHD270 with its in-cycle calibration and automation, the quality is outstanding.”

Like the CP200, the CHD270 has a user-friendly interface that simplifies programming with almost limitless tooth geometry opportunities. As Jonathan states: “Our price point may be a little more expensive than our rivals, but we deliver quantifiable savings with test reports. Our expert engineers will consult with customers on applications and material types to maximize performance, precision and reduce costs. The ability to easily create a variety of geometries with unsurpassed quality on the CP200 and CHD270 supports this service.”

By creating test reports for clients, Aiguisatek can follow the life cycle of saw blades from new through to the final re-grind before blade replacement. Compared to its rivals, Aiguisatek can re-sharpen blades up to 20-25 times before renewing whereas competitors can only achieve up to 10-12 re-grinds before a costly blade replacement. Aiguisatek saw blades can achieve up to 50% greater tool life and they can increase cutting meters by more than 30% per re-grind. This is credit to the combination of expert on-site engineers and the production processes on the VOLLMER CHD270 and CP200. Concluding on this Jonathan says: “With the VOLLMERs we know exactly what we are

taking off each tip every time we do a re-grind. There is no inconsistency, and this gives the blades a much longer tool life. For new customers that query our price point, we show them the VOLLMER machines their blades are being made on – and that fills them with confidence in our quality.”

... AND THE PANDEMIC

For Aiguisatek, the pandemic has been a painful period that has seen some customers enter liquidation, a factor compounded by pandemic market conditions and regional legislation that has restricted trade to ‘essential manufacturing business only’. Commenting on this, Lisa Goulet says: “At Aiguisatek, we had challenges like every business. At the height of restrictions, our business was down to just 30%. The challenge for us was satisfying this low level of production with no staff. Our staff were not at work due to safe-distancing regulations and Jonathan and I ran the business between us.”

Jokingly, Lisa concludes: “If it wasn’t for the VOLLMER CHD270+ND250, Jonathan would have needed to work more than 100 hours a week on the shop floor to get the saw blades out of the door for our customers! It is situations like this that highlight the benefits of automation and investing in quality machines. Moving forward, we are happy to report that we returned to pre-COVID business levels last year and as of October, our annual growth rate of 25% is back on track.” It looks like Aiguisatek may need more VOLLMER technology soon....

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(approx. 1,560 words)

More information on Aiguisatek: <https://aiguisatek.com/en/>

Press Images



Caption: President Lisa Goulet and Vice-President Jonathan Riberdy in front of their VOLLMER CHD 270 8-axis TCT circular saw sharpening machine



Caption: Canadian Sharpening Service Aiguisatek based in Delson, Quebec



Caption: The shop floor at Aiguisatek is home to several VOLLMER machines.



Caption: One of their VOLLMER machines is the CP 200 top and face grinder for carbide-tipped circular saw blades



Caption: Vice-President Jonathan Riberdy operating the VOLLMER CHD 270



Caption: The VOLLMER ND 250 4-axis double gripper automation cell accommodates up to 450 saw blades



Caption: A stack of blades in one of the 5 carts of the VOLLMER ND 250 automation option

About the VOLLMER Group

With its comprehensive range of machinery, the VOLLMER Group – which has sites in Germany, Austria, Great Britain, France, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the USA, Brazil, Japan, China, South Korea, India and Russia – enjoys global success as a tool machining specialist in terms of both production and service. The technological leader's range of products contains the most advanced grinding, eroding and machine tools for rotary tools, circular saws and metal cutting band saws in the wood- and metalworking industries. In offering this, VOLLMER relies heavily on tradition and the company's strengths: Local branches, quick decisions and rapid action by a family-run company. The VOLLMER Group currently employs approximately 800 workers worldwide, with around 550 of these at the main headquarters in Biberach alone, including more than 50 trainees. The company invests around 8-10% of its turnover in the research and development of new technologies and products. As a provider of technology and services, the VOLLMER Group is a reliable partner to its customers.

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Contact for journalists

VOLLMER of America Corp.

Tatjana Low

Marketing Coordinator

115 Enterprise Dr

Pittsburgh, PA 15275

(+1) 412-278-0655 ext. 4000

E-mail: t.low@vollmer-group.com