



TIP OF THE iceberg

HVAC parts maker warms up to cool punch technology that saves tools, time and dollars

Whether you're in Atlanta or Anchorage, Malibu or Milwaukee, heating and air conditioning are no longer considered luxuries. For people living in some of the world's most challenging climates, temperature control is a life-sustaining technology.

Oppressive heat and bone-chilling cold are two of the common elements that

Price Industries fights on a global scale. The manufacturer of industrial heating, ventilation and air conditioning components, Price runs fabrication facilities in the U.S. and Canada and a distribution network encompassing the U.S., Canada, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Its fab shop in Suwanee, Georgia, makes parts for HVAC equipment found in hospitals, offices and schools. In a busi-

ness that demands fast turnaround and high-quality components, Price Industries faced a significant challenge when operators working with thicker sheet metal consistently damaged the punching tools.

In addition to rapid production schedules, operators had high-volume run requirements. CNC Turret Manager Jimmy Hollis decided something needed to be done. "We weren't necessarily wear-

Punching

ing out the tools; we were breaking them,” he says. “We were punching 20-gauge sheet with small-diameter tooling and were breaking tools left and right.”

Compounding the problem, Price Industries’ shop ran two different types of machines: air-blow systems (ABS) and non-air-blow systems (non-ABS). When tools broke on both machines, Hollis’ tool replacement costs doubled, while downtime lengthened.

“We have three different sets of tools for an ABS machine and we have a different set for a non-ABS machine,” he says. “I had to purchase two different types of tools for each of the different machine types. For as fast as we were breaking tools, this practice got expensive in a hurry.”

Universal solution

Hollis explored ways to curb costs and discovered a product from Minnesota-based Wilson Tool International after participating in a demonstration. Called EXP Punch Technology, the option provides punch tooling in a standard holder with universal punches, and is designed for thick and thin turret punch presses as well as multi-tools. EXP punches are manufactured with high-speed steel for durability and resistance to galling.

“We’re definitely saving money on tooling purchases and less downtime is an indication we’re more productive overall,” says Hollis. “The tips last longer. We don’t buy as many as we used to before switching to the EXP punch.”

After implementing EXP tips, Hollis saw a significant drop in the shop’s spending for tooling. Manufactured using Wilson Tool’s proprietary Ultima premium tool steel, the EXP tips give fabricators twice the tool life when compared to most standard punches. With this characteristic, tool breakage for Hollis and his team became less frequent, as did downtime when tips required replacement.

“With this option, we just purchase a holder and the tips for each type of machine,” Hollis says. “Things are a lot easier if a tip breaks, because we just have to stock tips and that is far less expensive than replacing full tools. The EXP tips last longer, but when one does break, all we have to replace is the tip, so we’re saving money.”



To insert a new punch, the operator simply pushes the tool into the punch holder and turns the key to lock it into place.

“We’ve been using the EXP tooling for at least two years and this is saving us a good deal of money.”

Jimmy Hollis, CNC Turret Manager

The tip technology is a proprietary design that is available for use in both A and B station thick turret assemblies as well as A and B station Ultra, B station FAB, and MTX Multi-Tools. The universal punches can be used with all types of guide assemblies, and individual punch configurations include rounds, shapes and specials, and other options for fabricators.

Designed for quick changeover, inserting a new punch simply involves pushing a universal punch into the punch holder, then turning the key to lock it into place. To remove a punch, operators just as easily turn the key to unlock the punch and pull it out of the holder.

Operators at Price Industries enjoy the new punch tips as well. While changeover time hasn’t reduced by much, having the flexibility to keep multiple tips on hand allows operators to maintain a set of tools that’s exclusive to their machine.

“Because it’s affordable for us to stock up on tips, operators don’t have to borrow a tool from another machine,” says Hollis. “It gives the operator some flexibility and he or she also has control of their tools—that helps me manage the workforce. Individual toolboxes are a big

deal around here. Everybody likes to keep their own tooling.”

Ancillary benefits

With production up to speed, less tool breakage and longer lasting tips, Hollis says, “fabrication operations at Price Industries have been enjoying a number of ancillary benefits that came from implementing the punch tip technology, such as storage space and a stronger bottom line.

“We have a lot more storage space now with the tips,” he says. “The tips take up only about 60 percent of our storage, so I’m saving about 40 percent of available space. That is a major difference from when we used full tools.

“We’ve been using the EXP tooling for at least two years and this is saving us a good deal of money,” he says. **FFJ**

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