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The machinery pacemaker

New TRUMPF software makes work more productive than ever before.

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A photograph of two men in a factory setting. One man is kneeling in the foreground, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, looking towards the camera. The other man is standing behind him, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and a name tag, also looking towards the camera. They are surrounded by industrial machinery, likely a conveyor system or a large metal structure.

Building Long-Term Customer Partnerships

Creating and nurturing close relationships is the cornerstone of Counterpart's success.



Building Long-Term
Customer Partnerships:
Sometimes it's **HUGE.**



Boston's famed Green Monster and scoreboard, which Counterpart helped bring back to life.

Counterpart creates partnerships to take on big, tough jobs. Even if one of those jobs happens to be a Green Monster.

One winter day in 2001 in Brookings, South Dakota Jeff Jacobson saw three semi-tractor trailers roll up to the loading docks of Counterpart, Inc., the company owned by him and Don Deibert. It was a job from their largest customer and Brookings neighbor, Daktronics, a leading manufacturer of electronic displays and scoreboards.

This would not be just another job. This was part of a monster: the Green Monster, the storied, 37-foot high wall that separates Fenway Park's left field from Boston's Lansdowne Street. It's the biggest outfield fence in baseball, a sports icon, a virtual national monument, and near and dear to Red Sox fans everywhere.

One of the charms behind the Green Monster's mystique is its quaint, manually operated scoreboard – a scoreboard that was showing its age. So Red Sox management threw >



Co-owners Jeff Jacobson and Don Deibert assess their next project.

“(TRUMPF’s) ability to provide training has been a real bonus.”

Daktronics a curve by asking for not just a full restoration of the original scoreboard, but also a new manual scoreboard that would be an exact replica of the original right down to the last part.

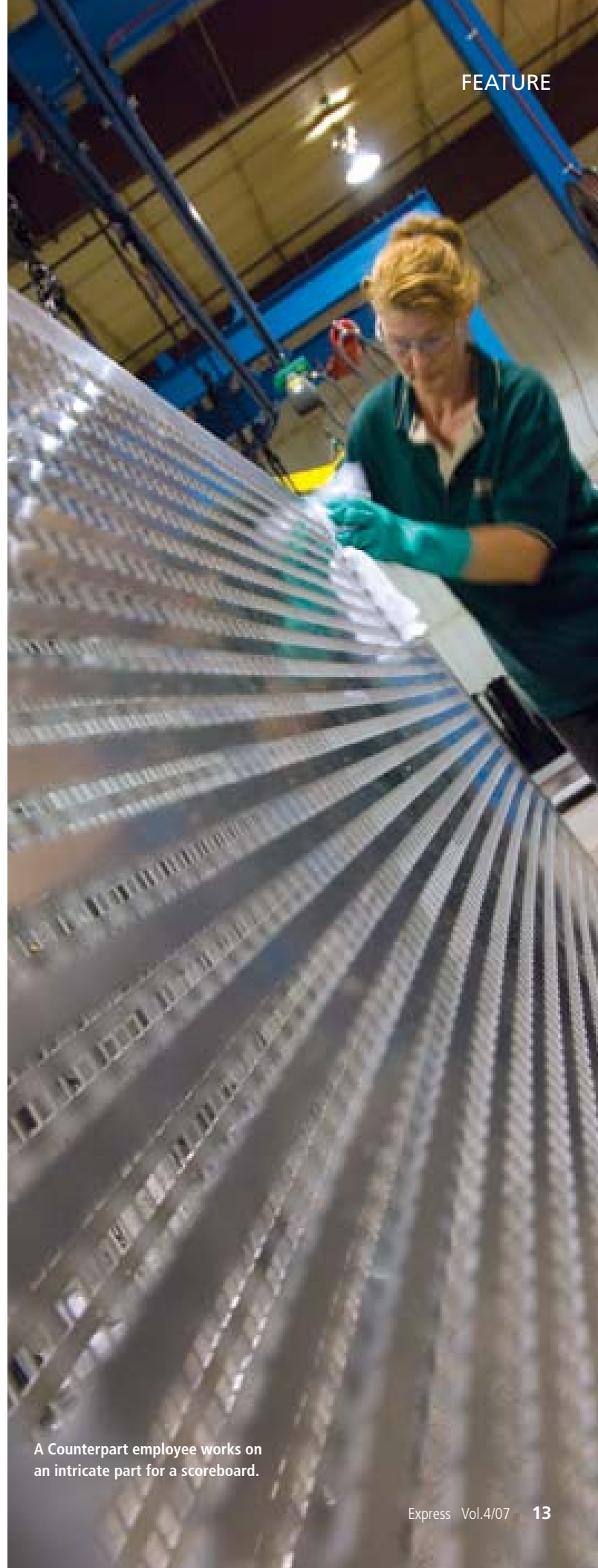
That’s when Daktronics asked Counterpart to step up to the plate. Jeff and Don’s company was more than up to the task. Even so, “when the scoreboard arrived, we were kind of surprised,” said Jeff. No matter. Counterpart is staffed and equipped to handle big projects on a moment’s notice with high quality and fast turnarounds. After off-loading the scoreboard, Jeff and Don started an inventory of tasks and soon discovered that the venerable scoreboard has hundreds of different parts. “The odd thing was, there were virtually no common parts, most everything was unique,” said Jeff.

Son of Green Monster is born

When the Red Sox’ front office decided to replace their original 15-foot tall by 60-foot long scoreboard, they knew they had a monster by the tail. Would the rabid minions of Red Sox Nation embrace the progeny of the original? At first, the Red Sox were going to restore the old scoreboard and place it on the exterior wall of what was to be a totally new Fenway Park and put the replica scoreboard into service inside the new venue.

In the end, the Red Sox decided to renovate and keep playing in the current 95-year-old Fenway Park. But they still needed to replace the scoreboard. To avoid any potential misunderstanding that would lead fans to perceive that their beloved Monster would lose its low-tech charm (which it wouldn’t) the replacement scoreboard was cloaked in secrecy.

“With all our customers, we ask ourselves, ‘what can we do to add value to their product?’”



“We built it during the first half of the (2001) season and (the Red Sox) replaced it during the All-Star break so there wouldn’t be much public knowledge,” said Don. The fans are delighted, because the replacement is an exact replica, right down to the original materials. The original scoreboard, meanwhile, has undergone a full, loving restoration and gone into retirement with the distinction of being the world’s largest piece of sports memorabilia.

Since then Daktronics and Counterpart have continued to be the birthplaces of the revitalized Green Monster. Jeff recounts many additions to the project over the years. “In 2003 we built 14 more sections to add National League scores and additional advertising space,” he said. “In 2005, we built sections for American League East standings >

A Counterpart employee works on an intricate part for a scoreboard.

“With TRUMPF, we get excellent personal service to help us make the best use of our equipment.”

and add more ad space, with still more panels in 2006.” Counterpart has also built replacement steel panels for the actual wall itself. Working in close concert with Daktronics, they have remanufactured almost the entire left field wall and all its scoreboards.

Jumping through hoops

The Green Monster project is a perfect example of what it takes to be the ideal outsourcer – the ability to extend a relationship beyond that of vendor/customer to one that’s partner/partner. Creating and nurturing close partnerships is the cornerstone of Counterpart’s success, if not the inspiration for the company’s memorable name.

No matter what the project, understanding the customer’s needs is critical. “We almost become a part of the customer’s organization,” said Jeff. “With all our customers, we ask ourselves, ‘what can we do to add value to their product?’ By taking on more of their internal processes, they can save money on having to handle a part a second time.”

Matt Kurtenbach agrees. Matt is the manufacturing manager at Daktronics and relies on Counterpart to add efficiency to the production of Daktronics’ mass produced products. “Counterpart allows us to concentrate on our made-to-order products, said Matt. “They (Counterpart) produce the items that have more volume that can be scheduled in advance.”

Matt also appreciates it when Jeff and Don help speed delivery on popular Daktronics products like basketball scoreboards. “This is a high volume product for us and we have a short lead time for our customers,” said Matt. “At one time we’d receive the scoreboard shell from Counterpart and we’d install the wiring harness,” he said. This involved pulling the shells off the delivery pallets from Counterpart, installing the harnesses and

then strapping them back onto the pallets for inventory storage.

This was neither efficient nor fast, so Don and Jeff said they’d step outside their company’s traditional role of metals fabricator and install the harnesses at Counterpart. So now the shells delivered to Daktronics stay on their pallets right up to the time they’re custom painted and delivered immediately to each customer. “We save all that extra handling at our end,” said Matt. “Counterpart isn’t the traditional supplier who says, ‘that’s not our business.’ What makes them a partner, rather than a vendor, there’s a great example. A partner steps up and helps you.”

Fast growth, fueled by locale and technology

Jeff and Don worked together in manufacturing at their previous jobs at Daktronics. While there, they were awarding contracts to job shops hundreds of miles away while ever-shrinking delivery deadlines created the urgent need for more locally sourced components. “We found they were really in need of (local) fabrication,” said Jeff.

What was staring them right in the face was opportunity. So the two did their due diligence, worked up a business plan, and with the blessing and encouragement of Dr. Al Kurtenbach, founder of Daktronics, started an independent job shop in their hometown of Brookings.

Born 11 years ago, this baby would grow fast

So much so that Jeff and Don have moved into a succession of bigger plants until finally settling on a large plot of land with ample room to grow. Their original facility was 35,000 square feet. Last year they expanded to their current 50,000 square feet and are a major employer in their area with more than 85 employees.



“Our company growth has been somewhat phenomenal,” said Jeff. “We’re growing at a rate of over 30 percent a year.” Chances are, Counterpart will be pushing out the walls again – and soon. But they’re ready for it. “We have room for another 30,000 square feet,” said Don.

Counterpart has many on-going customer partnerships, most in heavy industry. Aside from Daktronics, this includes a manufacturer of bodies with storage compartments for service maintenance trucks used by gas and electric utility companies. Counterpart turns out approximately 750 of these bodies, nine to 15-foot long, each year. “What we do is their standard product,” said Jeff. “With our technology, we can do it for less than our



A Counterpart employee riveting a part in place.

customer can in-house,” he said.

That technology includes six pieces of TRUMPF equipment – a 2D laser cutter, 2 punching machines and 3 press brakes. “Our TRUMPF 3030 (TruLaser 3030) opened up a lot of avenues for us that allow heavier gauge materials,” said Don. Their TRUMPF TC 5000 punching machine’s (TruPunch 5000) are fully automated, “which is a big key for us,” said Don. “With TRUMPF, we get excellent personal service to help us make the best use of our equipment. Their ability to provide training has been a real bonus.”

And it could be just what they need for when the next monster job rolls up to their door. □

