



guest editorial

BY JASON CLARK

DOING MORE WITH LESS

A common theme with our steel service center customers is the ongoing need to receive, cut, pull, ship and process more material in less time, with fewer people or less equipment. The demands of just-in-time manufacturing have dramatically changed the business. Canrack has seen first hand customers that only order and receive exactly what's required for a small production run with an even smaller delivery window. Service centers are under pressure to get orders out the door while keeping operations lean and cost-efficient. Canrack has spent the last 35 years helping them to do exactly that.

When Canrack started in 1979, metal service centers often consisted of large buildings with a crane and inventory piled on the floor, a labor intensive and nonselective poor use of space. Some service centers started to adopt a breakthrough in material handling—cantilever rack that moved product up off the floor allowing for selectivity, and reduced or eliminated product damage. It was at this time that Canrack Metal Center Systems (Canrack Storage Systems Inc.) was producing the Palmer Shile rack design in Canada (an adjustable premium Cantilever Rack).

At Canrack, we supply more than just a set of storage racks. We follow an engineered system approach that looks at a service center's operation, from the vehicle (normally a sideloader), to how material is received, pulled, processed and stored. All Canrack projects require this level of detail and onsite one-on-one interaction, eliminating doubt about system solution compatibility. We have developed a number of service center-specific products that echo our core beliefs—each Canrack system must improve safety, quality

and productivity.

One area of rapid growth has been in laser flat sheet. Many customers have invested in cut-to-length lines that supply stress-free/super-flat sheet. These lines produce high volumes but do a poor job with small run orders, where exiting product and packaging is the slowdown. Canrack has two system solutions that help: CTL Inline Packaging and the Bundle Splitter.

Our CTL Inline Packaging system is en-

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gineered to each customer's CTL and packages product lifts at a rate equal to, or faster than, the production rate of the line. This alleviates the usual bottleneck at the end of the CTL, where a crane clears and packages on an ergonomically incorrect setup.

The bundle splitter option is an evolution of an existing system. Traditionally, our bundle splitter splits sheet orders—say, peeling off 2,000 pounds from a 10,000-pound stack and package for a customer. This has been offered to service centers for the last 13 years where surface critical sheet orders are required. It has also proven successful in allowing certain CTL lines to produce what we call a master stack—a 15,000-pound to 30,000-pound stack of

sheet produced in one lift.

Customers want to speed up their CTL, and our Bundle Splitter would eliminate the multiple skid inductions normally required (average three - four minutes each), replacing it with a dwell on the CTL to place a separator in the stack (30 seconds). For some customers that can mean an immediate increase of 25 percent or more in tons/hours on their line. Once produced, the master stack is taken offline to our bundle splitter where it's packaged ergonomically, without the need of a crane to split the lifts.

We have also successfully paired our PMI Accu-Cut CNC shear feeder with existing CTL lines. Our shear feeder allows customers to balance what they produce as stock or inventory, versus short run reshear orders. Our feeder is a true grip and feed system designed for up to ¼-inch sheet and can hold and shear to a tolerance of +/- 0.005 inches. This system has been installed in a large number of service centers without CTL pairing and has some machines as old as 32 years still in full tolerance operation.

Canrack's focus is on more than just flat products. Metal centers that store and handle long products can take advantage of our bar order filling stations. Because not all customers need a large, heavy automated system, we developed scalable systems. Going back to our engineered system approach, we look at existing handling equipment, volume, packaging standards and offer a system that will have a ROI of months instead of years.

As steel service centers grow and customer demands increase, looking at ways to improve material handling is a worthwhile exercise. An investment in equipment built exclusively for service centers with 35 years of proven ROI will certainly help you do more with less. ■

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