

PERFORMING ART



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Carrylift prides itself on developing the right solution for the right application. At the North Shields site of Formica Group, the company’s ability to provide and maintain all manner of equipment has helped it establish a strong and enviable working partnership.

Formica Group is a leading provider of branded, designed surfacing solutions for commercial and residential customers worldwide. As the world’s largest manufacturer of High Pressure Laminate (HPL), the company has an international network of design, manufacturing, distribution and sales operations maintaining the recognition of Formica® as a global brand.

A type of electrical insulation still used today, mica, gives a clue to the company origins, with Formica® originally created back in 1913 as a type of replacement (“for mica”). By 1927, the Formica Corporation had patented a barrier sheet; and by 1950, with the addition of decorative papers and textures, the Formica® laminate we know today was born and revolutionised the interior design industry forever.

Investing In The Future

Since 2016 the team at North Shields have been focussed on the delivery of a capital investment programme having secured £30m of investment to be used on seven capital projects on site. Any visitor to the site cannot fail to be impressed by the ongoing upgrades

currently being undertaken. At the heart of the activity is Senior European Category Manager at Formica Group Europe, Steve Betts.

Steve has been co-ordinating the MHE aspect of a three year, £40m investment programme into staff and facilities in the UK plant and head office, that has also seen multiple pieces of new kit, huge production machines and upgrades to the building fabric.

“The investment has come at a good time for the site and this part of the world,” says Steve. “Processes have been streamlined and production is more efficient and environmentally sensitive than it has ever been. It is therefore incumbent upon us to ensure the investment in new equipment is spent wisely. Working closely with Carrylift to improve our material workflow has been an important part of that.”



Steve Betts (left) & Peter Rush, President EMEA - Formica Group, with Carrylift Group’s Tony Forrester (centre).

Upscaling The Fleet

“A lot of equipment has been upscaled,” adds Carrylift’s Tony Forrester. “and there is an art to getting new specifications right. As a result of the production improvements, equipment has been upgraded to take wider, heavier raw materials and enable the team to work more efficiently.”

The name of the game hasn’t just been adding equipment however. In fact, together with Tony’s help, Steve has undertaken a large rationalisation programme, increasing utilisation whilst reducing the overall fleet through improved reliability and adding multi-purpose machines.

Despite being the incumbent supplier for many years, Carrylift were



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also part of a new tender process, undertaken before the MHE upgrades got underway.

Three rounds of tendering, looking at service delivery, first time fix KPIs and, of course, the commercial matters, meant a full audit and financial exercise was undertaken.

“It allowed us to map out the material flow for the whole site,” says Tony. “The recent changes meant there were new one-way routes, assigned areas, even new doorways in existing buildings. Historically, we might have seen a truck for loading and one for unloading, now one does both.”

For a business closely associated with decorative surfaces, carefully handling paper rolls is surprisingly important. The hard laminate surface is actually made from paper, the colours, patterns and textures, each starting with resin-soaked paper.

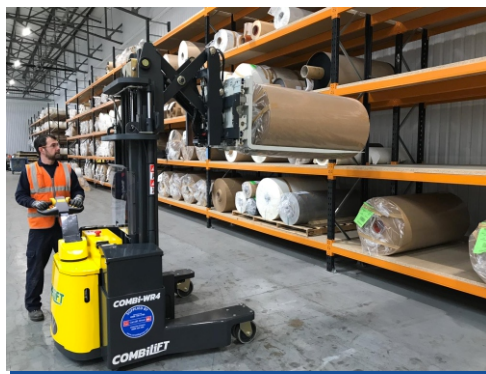
The inside, or filler, is made from brown paper bathed in an amber-coloured phenolic resin, which is applied by rollers.

The resin soaks through the paper, which is set in a drying oven, giving Formica® laminate its strength and thickness. Advances in technology have brought in new innovations to the

decorative surfaces industry. Formica Group offers Formica® laminate for exterior cladding, washrooms, interior design as well as a world class work surface range. In addition to nine new TCM counterbalance trucks, three with paper clamps, the Carrylift-supplied equipment also includes Combilifts, Aisle-master articulating VNA, trailers, tractor powered pedestrian tugs, tipper skips and specialist scissorlift tables.

The scissorlifts are important, as they help feed the state of the art storage areas, where the treated surface paper resides. Here, strength and weight is also a key consideration as anyone that has attempted to lift or cut a work surface will certainly know.

Like all successful fleet replacements, the outcome is a smoother, more efficient working process. Some of the innovations appear relatively simple - chamfered forks for paper rolls to prevent collateral damage; pedestrian powered tugs to simplify manual handling; bespoke trailers to match existing tow hitches.



The cumulative effect, however, cannot be understated. “As a result of the work here,” says Steve, “we are advising sites elsewhere in the world on how we are doing things faster, safer and, ultimately, cheaper.”