

A CUT IN TIME FOR FA BLINDS >>

A SMALL FAMILY OWNED RETAIL SHOP TURNED SUCCESSFUL BLIND MANUFACTURER HAS FOUND BUSINESS BOOMING IN DIFFICULT TIMES.



The FA Blinds Team

FRANK AND ANNA Cucek started FA blinds as a retail window furnishings shop in the early 1990s. All the Cucek family members had worked for blind wholesalers and had experience in blind making, so when a few suppliers let them down, they began making sample blinds for their shop. When other suppliers were wanting blinds like the samples, the Cuceks started supplying their own suppliers. Customers liked the FA Blinds products, particularly their roman blinds and the business grew. Soon Frank and Ann were joined by their kids, Markk Cucek his sister Annnarie.

"It's an uneasy relationship being in competition with your own suppliers, so we made a decision to change course and become manufacturers," Markk Cucek says.

"We started out making just the roller blinds and have never looked back."

Products now range from roller blinds, romans, sunscreens, verticals, and aluminium venetians. Currently they are moving into timber venetians and a new line in look-alike shutters.

In January 2010 FA Blinds moved from their tiny 230 M²

factory to a new 1000 M² factory, and bought an Aeronaut fully automated cutter. Cucek says this move was a bold step, but until the Aeronaut cutter was installed, FA Blinds was hand cutting with two cutters on a shift, who had to be rotated due to strain and fatigue.

"Now we have one operator on the machine who has time to spare helping in production by preparing the fabric rolls and working on venetians."

"Most small companies move from hand cutting to a simple single-side blind cutter and although this may improve quality and accuracy, it does little for productivity or waste."

"It has made an incredible difference to our production, the machine will cut a normal day's work by tea break."

Output has more than doubled. From the 50-60 blinds per day which were cut by two people, the Aeronaut cutter can produce over twice this many with just the one operator.

Waste is also down to four percent.

"When you can nest and cut more than one pattern on a length of fabric on the table,

it's a lot easier to get the best fabric use."

"Now, the amount of waste from a day's production could easily fit into a small plastic shopping bag, which represents a huge saving in expensive fabric."

Accuracy is up from their allowance of 1.50 mm to .50 mm, and mistakes are a thing of the past, even at busy periods.

Asked if the staff like the machine? Cucek replied "Everyone loves it... except for the packers. They are the ones who have the extra workload, packing more product."

"Using a fully automated blind cutting system can save a lot of time, so we spend that eating a lot of chocolates and drinking coffee," Cucek jokes.

"Seriously, the time and manpower saving has allowed us to expand our range of products and look at adding on the timber and shutter lines."

Initially Cucek was the only one trained to use the machine by Johnny Wilkins of Aeronaut, who in Cucek's words is a 'Legend'.

Cucek has three people now taking shifts on the machine all of whom he has trained himself.

"Training takes about two days, but the girls have focused on really fine tuning the whole process, so everything is running at optimum efficiency."

"This might include fabric batching and making good use of the laser bullseye to cut around imperfections in fabric."

When deciding on which machine to purchase for cutting blinds, Cucek did quite a lot of research, with an emphasis on word of mouth recommendations.

He found the most praised feature in the Aeronaut system was in the Aeroblinds software.

"Aeroblinds is by far the best in the industry and was the swaying factor in his decision."

"I can't fault the machine"

"We wouldn't buy another cutter, but two to three or more. Next time I will be looking at the Aeronaut ultrasonic cutters."

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