

Proto Labs Finds Space for Continued Expansion

Queens Award winning Proto Labs Limited has recently moved to an expansive, purpose-designed manufacturing facility on Halesfield, one of Shropshire's largest industrial parks.

The company's new, 135,000 sq. ft (12,600 sq. m) home has ample room for its growing fleet of injection moulding machines and CNC machine tools, and is perfectly situated for access to the country's transportation network and nearby Birmingham airport. Proto Labs Managing Director Mr. John Tumelty says that the move marks a significant point in the company's expansion:

“Five years ago, when we began our operations in the UK, we set some very aggressive growth targets. I'm happy to say, we have reached or exceeded every one of those targets, not least because we continue to invest in technology and people, focusing resources on developing a world-class service and a team of highly trained engineers. As a result, our business in the UK and Europe has expanded at an impressive rate. This new building will give us the space and the facilities we need to continue that growth for a long time to come.”

Proto Labs offer two services: Firstcut produces CNC precision-machined prototype components perfect for 1 to 10 parts, and Protomold provides rapid injection-moulded parts in batches from 10 to 10,000 parts. Both operations employ powerful computers and proprietary software to help designers to optimise a part for production, meaning that even customers with absolutely no manufacturing experience can still use its on-line, automated quoting and ordering system.



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Eighty five percent of space at the new factory is dedicated to manufacturing operations, yet the company's seamless relocation was completed over the course of one week, in late spring, 2011. Mr. Lee Ball, Proto Labs' Operations Director explains how the move was coordinated to cause minimum disruption to production:

"Moving to the new facility was timed to coincide with an additional investment in new CNC machine tools and expansion of our powerful ultra-fast compute-cluster," he said. "As a result, production over the transition period was continuous and our service to our hundreds of UK and European customers was uninterrupted."

The new, expanded *ultra*-compute cluster is the 'brain' that powers the company's online operations and services, including ProtoQuote® and FirstQuote®. Housed at the new factory in an environmentally controlled room, the ultra-compute cluster allows the company to analyse and process thousands of 3D CAD models every day.

To support activities across Europe, Proto Labs has sales and technical support offices in France and Germany, and is a perfect example of how high-tech manufacturing organisations can thrive in Europe, despite low cost competition from the Far East.

"In recent years, the business press has given a great deal of coverage to the migration of high-volume, low-value manufacturing to Asia," adds Mr. Tumelty, "What's reported far less often, is that many UK and European companies are leading the world in advanced engineering and manufacturing. These are companies that have invested in new technologies and better and faster ways to make products or provide services. The UK, and this region in particular, are very good places to build high-tech manufacturing businesses, which is why we are continuing to invest here."

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About Proto Labs®

Based in Shropshire in the UK, Proto Labs Limited has radically changed the economics and lead times associated with the production of prototype and low-volume parts for European manufacturers. Proto Labs' customers include companies from all sectors such as medical, aerospace, automotive and consumer electronics. With two service offerings: Firstcut® delivers machined parts (ideal for quantities of 1-10 parts) in over 30 production-intent materials including aluminium and brass while Protomold® delivers injection-moulded plastic parts (ideal for quantities of 10-10,000+) in just about any production-intent material. Using an 'ultra-fast' compute-cluster Proto Labs offers a web-based quoting system which includes a detailed manufacturability analysis and an accurate all-in production price in just hours **and** can ship orders in as little as one business day. For more information please visit www.protolabs.co.uk

About Protomold®

Protomold is the injection-moulding service offered by Proto Labs, Limited. Designers and engineers can submit a 3D CAD model of a part to the Protomold web-based quoting system, ProtoQuote®, and receive a detailed 3D model manufacturability analysis and an accurate all-in production price in hours rather than weeks. With ProtoQuote, customers can easily react to last-minute design changes, uploading as many iterations as they need to get the right model, material and cost. This in turn greatly reduces the time-to-market for a new product. In addition to all this, Protomold can deliver injection-moulded prototype and low-volume plastic parts manufactured from a choice of hundreds of production-intent materials in as little as one business day. For more information please visit www.protomold.co.uk

About Firstcut®

Firstcut is the machining service offered by Proto Labs, Limited. Designers and engineers can submit a 3D CAD model of a part to the firstcut web-based



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quoting system, FirstQuote[®], and receive a detailed 3D model manufacturability analysis and an accurate all-in production price in just hours rather than weeks. With FirstQuote, customers can easily react to last-minute design changes, uploading as many iterations as they need to get the right model, material and cost. This in turn greatly reduces the time-to-market for a new product. Firstcut allows customers to make a fully functional prototype much earlier in the development cycle from a range of over 30 production-intent materials such as ABS, Nylon, PEEK, aluminium or brass produced in as little as one business day. For more information please visit www.firstcut.eu/gb

For initial enquiries about Proto Labs/Firstcut/Protomold, please contact Richard Vaughan, European Marketing Manager at richard.vaughan@protolabs.co.uk (+44 (0) 1952 683031) or visit www.protolabs.co.uk

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