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PALLET ENTERPRISE

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SECRET OF MY SUCCESS...

Viking Engineering Powers Productivity at R.B. Pallet Service



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Viking Engineering Enables Family Pallet Business to Achieve High-speed Production and Success with Combos

By Rick LeBlanc



The Express 403 is the newest offering from Viking with production capabilities upwards of 1,200 pallets per shift.

For decades Viking Engineering & Development Inc. has been a key component of the success of many pallet companies. It is known for manufacturing in the United States reliable and productive pallet nailing equipment that is combined with top-notch service. Viking has also developed a reputation for designing machinery that can efficiently run recycled lumber with its Express 403 and Champion line. R.B. Pallet Service has found success producing combos using the Express 403 as customers continue to want lower pricing with consistent quality. This case study demonstrates how Viking is at the heart of many future-facing success stories in the pallet industry.

R.B. Pallet Service

Seizing opportunity has always been at the heart of R.B. Pallet's approach to doing business, whether taking advantage of the free cores that were available when it began in the late 1970s, to today, when opportunity is more aligned to investing in the best equipment and getting the most out of it. The trend toward combo pallets and using the best equipment to assemble them has turned out to be a winning combination for the Wisconsin company.

The R.B. Pallet Service story begins like many others in the industry. Ronald Young Sr. worked for a grocery wholesaler. When the grocery business was slow, he would be assigned to drive

loads of pallets to the landfill. One day he said, "Why are we taking these to the landfill? I'll fix them and bring them back good as new." This idea led to Ron and Bernice Young launching R.B. Pallet.

The company stuck with repair and recycling for several years, explained Ron Young, Jr., the current owner. "We would get to work out in the yard with mom for five days a week, and on Saturday and Sunday, we would get to work with dad," Young recalled. He started repairing pallets at the age of 12.

R.B. Pallet outgrew its 40x60 structure by the mid-1990s. It built its current 22,500 square-foot building in 1997. About that time, Ron Sr. retired and Ron



From left: Ron Young Jr, Owner and Joe Hills, Plant Manager at R.B. Pallet.

Jr. took over the helm.

Young's first experience with Viking came in 2001 when he purchased a used Champion from Viking. "I was only running it one or two days per week," Young recalled. "I was thinking, 'Oh man, how am I ever going to pay for this fancy machine?'" As it turned out, the company began gradually picking up orders for a few new pallets here and there as well as combo pallets emerging as a popular product. Young finally sold that

first Champion in 2016. "That was my favorite machine in the shop," he said.

In 2012, RB bought a different nailer, but quickly found that the operation wasn't keeping up with demand. "I said to myself, 'I have to sell that thing and get another Champion in here,'" Young said. He bought a 1994 Champion in 2013, rebuilding it and putting it into service. Still not able to keep up, the company purchased a new 304 Classic from Viking in 2015.

Shortly after that, his Viking sales representative mentioned that Viking was coming out with a new prototype machine they were calling the Express 403. "I said to put my name on it, I'll take it," Young recalled. "I said if you need a down payment, I'll make it right now. I've already outgrown the three machines I've got."

"We went to the Richmond show and ran that machine," Young continued. "Everybody told me I was crazy. You can't build a combo pallet with recycled lumber on a tandem machine. You just can't do it. But do you know what? I'm crazy enough to try it. And we did."

The Express 403 is the newest offering from Viking with production capabilities upwards of 1,200 pallets per shift. It is the industry's most economic tandem option, according to Viking, providing consistent performance and low maintenance.

"The Express 403 uses the same board feeders as the much faster Viking Turbo 606. The entire machine is powered by a single hydraulic power unit. It was designed to fill the gap between the production capacities of the Viking Champions and the Turbo models."

Young stressed that the secret to running combo pallets is to pay close attention to the thickness and width of lum-



Juan Paloblanco, Express 403 lead operator at R.B. Pallet.



From left: Jeff Williquette, Express 403 operator and Aaron VandeHey, Express 403 assistant at R.B. Pallet.

ber. There should be a maximum tolerance of 1/8-inch.

Another critical factor in steady production with no jam-ups is nail selection. Young sought support several years ago when he was having jamming problems with his 1994 Champion. "It seemed like the nails I was using were a little lighter gage, and I always had problems. Viking recommended a switch to Viking nails, and Ron has stuck with them ever since. "The Viking nails resolved the problem with my machines. And it was awesome how Viking worked with me on payment terms."

At R.B. Pallet, cores are dismantled with Hartland band saws. They operate a two-man unit as well as two single operator saws. Young doubles up on the single operator machines, noting that production runs so much more quickly and easily.

Dismantled deck boards fall onto a belt where they are taken to a round table for sorting. Band saw operators drop the separated stringers onto another conveyor, which transports material to equipment designed to prepare the stringers for use in combo pallets, in-

cluding a trimmer, PRS Pallet Doctor stringer sizer and a Hazledine notcher. If solid stringers are of adequate quality, they are notched. The stringer line upgrade was part of a 2016 expansion for R.B. Pallet that also included paving two acres in the yard and the purchase of the Viking Express 403.

"Paying attention to detail is crucial," Young said, regarding sorting pallet components for rebuilding into combos. "If you don't size them, you'll have problems. Preparing the lumber so you can run it on a tandem machine is the most important."

Attention to material sizing has made a difference. While initial production expectations were for 900 to 1000 pallets per day, RB regularly exceeds that amount. "I think our best day has been 1349," Young stated.

Ron is equally enthusiastic about his two Champion machines. "I could just throw sawdust at them and they would nail it," he quipped. "The Champion is by far the best machine out there. You can't go wrong with a Champ."

"Why buy an import when I have the best machine manufacturer (Viking En-

gineering) right next door," Young said, speaking to the advantage of buying USA manufactured equipment. "The machines are reliable and their service is second to none. The call center support guys are awesome." Viking is expanding its customer service by developing a Parts Store and Maintenance Video Library on its website.

As R.B. Pallet looks to the future, Young is mapping out his next upgrade, in which he plans to add a drying shed, a few more loading docks, and possibly another truck or two. "I'm looking at the next two years of doing an expansion, which will probably be the last expansion of my career. My son is 13; he's coming up. If he decides he wants to get into the pallet business, it will be here for him, ready to go."

"Viking is proud that we can help take Ron Young's business to the next level," stated Kurt Larsen, COO for Viking Engineering. "Our machines are built to last and will be there for Ron's son, the next generation." Leveraging the best equipment and achieving peak performance has positioned R.B. Pallet for success years into the future. 