

Dr. Die Cast



Is Zinc Die Casting Still Alive? Understanding Where to Look.

With so many die casting plants being a distant memory, lots of people ask if the zinc die casting industry is still alive. Like many other industries, what we need to do is look at where and how they continue to exist. What are some of the trends? Are there exceptions?

Captive operations: We use the term “Captive operation” to describe a plant within a plant. These can range from a single machine that is producing 100% of the castings for a particular product or range of related products to dozens of machines producing “most” or all of the companies’ products with only a few, if any, castings outsourced. Many of these plants have been in business for decades. Because of their product focus these plants tend to be very proficient at their particular product and processes. Volumes may vary from very low volume to super high volume of millions of castings annually. Examples I have visited incorporate central melt systems with launders, robotic extraction and trimming and high levels of process control. I have witnessed automated machining, assembly and packaging in companies that have progressed with the available technology.

Vertical Integration: Vertical integration is a term that describes keeping most of the processes “in-house”. Plants that practice vertical integration will have casting,

machining, finishing, plating, powder-coating, assembly and packaging under one roof or at least within their company. This is often the case with “Captive Operations” or Niche suppliers. (See the following.)

Niche suppliers: These are companies that resemble “Captive shops” because they specialize in supplying a particular assembly or market. They adapt to the needs of their customers by becoming proficient in the processes necessary to meet their customer’s needs. They practice vertical integration and their processes may include, in addition to die casting, plastic injection molding, machining, finishing, plating, powder-coating, wire-forming, stamping, roll-forming and assembly. Often they are product design responsible (black box design) or they collaborate with their customer to develop the final product (grey box design).

Custom operations: Custom operations are die casting companies that specialize in die casting components for a variety of customers. These range from family owned companies with a few machines to multinational companies with divisions located throughout the world. Today’s customers tend to want a finished or ready-to-assemble product so most custom die casters have been forced to include other services in their repertoire in order to satisfy

the demands of their customers. Custom die casters are the companies who advertise in the yellow pages and online as suppliers of die castings. If shipping costs are a major concern and you have a bulky or heavy casting, finding the nearest die casting supplier might be one of the key factors in sourcing. People often overlook the cost and time delays shipping from distant or off-shore suppliers. Working with a supplier that speaks your language and keeps office hours similar to the customer makes everyone’s lives easier. Some of the larger custom die casting companies are still locally owned.

Where are they?

I’m happy to report they are located in a variety of cities and towns ranging from metropolitan areas in the heavily populated NE to rural areas of the Midwest to SW border towns. In other words, they are everywhere.

How do I find them? Probably the easiest way to find that supplier in North America is by using the NADCA online Die Casting Supplier Directory. Try it some time. (Better yet, if you’re a die caster make sure your online presence is as good as it can be. First impressions matter and your web site may be the first and last impression if it leaves a bad impression.)

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