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"Maximizing Your Investment in State-of-the-Art Equipment" by Ben Hershey

As with any industry, labor is scarce in the prefabricated wood component industry. Unfortunately, the problem is not going away any time soon. So, to improve production and increase revenue, many manufacturers are investing in newer, faster automated machinery. But, that may not be the only solution. A truss plant could have the best machinery available and be less productive than a plant with older machinery.

To maximize investment in state-of-the-art machinery, the first thing component manufacturers should do prior to purchasing equipment is study the materials flow in their plant to determine problem areas. A question that must be answered is whether the processes in the plant are organized such that materials flow through the plant efficiently. Then, it should be determined how the new machinery will affect the current materials flow.

Once the materials flow study is complete, an extensive review of new equipment should be done to determine the payback. Along with figuring the costs of new equipment, the review should consider issues such as:

- Implementation costs.
- Interface of plant management software with the new equipment.
- Ability to increase production as the result of new equipment.
- Exchanging automation for the lack of skilled workers.

These are just a few issues. Because every company is different, there may be many more issues to consider. Many component manufacturers do not take time to evaluate such issues, so they get the best equipment but fail to reduce labor costs or increase production.

Upgrading and automating equipment is a necessity due to the skilled labor shortage in the industry. However, it is as important to consider efficiency of material flow and software. By taking the time to analyze every issue that could affect a company with the purchase of equipment, component manufacturers can invest wisely.

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