

# Stannah lifts now custom configured

*Stannah Lifts' CAD and PLM development work has already helped it quadruple effective capacity for one of its product ranges. Brian Tinham reports*

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**S**oftware that supports collaborative cross-company product development while also automating custom design work has no less than quadrupled Stannah Lifts' capacity to build retail store platform lifts for the disabled. "We're moving towards total automation of design and manufacture, with computers taking care of everything," says Stannah CAD development engineer Martin Lee.

Stannah sees it as little short of a revolution in CAD, which is the result of investment in 3D modelling with Autodesk Inventor, followed by integration with applications in production and the back office, plus work with PLM (product lifecycle management) functionality.

Inventor initially replaced the company's 2D CAD three years ago, but Stannah now has 20 seats. "We still have some seats of the previous software but mostly for adapting

older designs, although Inventor reads the legacy data well," says Lee. For him, one of the main advantages of working in 3D is the freedom it gives users to work on new concepts. "We have a very large range of lifts and we are always looking at new ideas. Having a 3D model means there is no need to make early prototypes. You can get accuracy on the screen and see how everything fits together and will work. Because of this, our work is not just quicker; it's more accurate."

## Going collaborative

However, it's not just the 3D model that's making the difference here: it's the data behind it. Early on, data from Inventor was harnessed to feed directly into the company's Radan CNC programming systems, eliminating one manual data entry stage. Now Stannah is implementing modular data management, using Autodesk Productstream PLM. The first stage of this – Autodesk Vault – makes it easier to share data, by providing a single, secure repository. Apart from making data easier to locate and access, this also guards against overwriting current work, or using the wrong version for departmental development.

"We then plan to use the next stage of Productstream to automate and manage ECOs [engineering change orders] and also to automate our BoMs [bills of materials], linking them straight into our ERP," explains Lee. "We do currently enter this data into the system, but it's done manually. This is time-consuming in itself, but then every change has to be followed through – which takes even more time and is full of pitfalls. The new system will mean we have a seamless transfer of data, from the design stage throughout the operation."

And hence the design-to-production revolution. "We see Productstream as having an integral role in our move towards complete integration of data," he confirms. "One of its big benefits is that, although other departments can access the data and add supplementary information and comments, they can do this without overwriting the original design data itself. This helps us maintain accuracy, and at the same time, keep the whole process moving smoothly and quickly."

Meanwhile, at the front end of vertical platform lift customisation, Lee's team has automated the design process even further. "The platform design remains constant, but other features such as floor-to-floor and headroom dimensions are tailored to suit each customer," he explains. "We've created a program so that we just enter these variables and Inventor automatically draws the whole thing. The process takes less than half an hour, whereas before it would have taken days."

By accelerating the development of each platform lift in this way, the team says it has been able to bring forward delivery times and also help fuel demand. "By completely automating the system we've at least quadrupled the number we can produce," claims Lee. ■



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