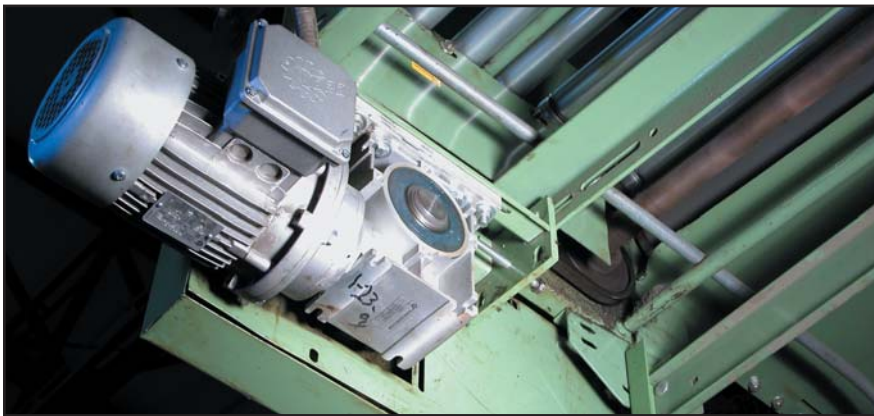


## TOUGH SHOES TO FILL AT A DISTRIBUTION CENTER WITH PROBLEMATIC GEARS



*Flexbloc® gearmotor running on Famous Footwear's 17 mile conveyor system.*

Costs were on the rise at the Famous Footwear distribution center in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, as maintenance intensive gear reducers continually caused excessive downtime and high inventory levels. The reducer manufacturer had abandoned the product line without providing an adequate substitute, and for three years, Famous Footwear's search for the perfect retrofit yielded only disappointment. And then there was NORD.

NORD Gear Corp. (Waunakee, Wis.) assisted in bringing the facility and its 17-mile conveyor system back on track by providing maintenance free reducers with universal mounting capabilities.

When Roger Corning, maintenance support supervisor of the distribution center, accompanied a sample of his cumbersome reducers to NORD in July of 2003, he met with an application engineer by the name

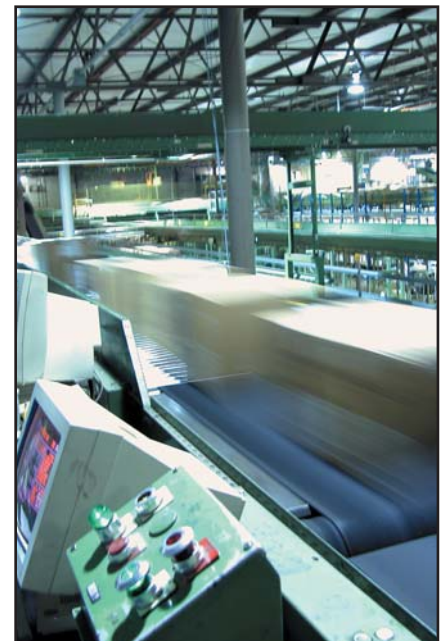
of Jim Alt. Following a thorough assessment, Jim identified NORD's FLEXBLOC® gearmotor units as easy retrofits that would meet Famous Footwear's demanding performance requirements.

*"The coupler system for the drive is outstanding.."*

No changes would need to be made to the existing sprockets or conveyor configurations, only slight adjustments to accommodate NORD's smaller base-to-center height. Aside from a link or two that might have to be taken out of the chain, a simple riser block would be fitted between the unit and the machine base – a device that Roger elected to create himself – bringing up the basing center almost exactly to where the old one had been.

While the old, discontinued units were notorious for leaking oil and required constant monitoring, the UNICASE® one-piece housing of the FLEXBLOC® ensured that the replacements would be lubed for life. Between this and the fact that the input shaft was completely supported on both sides by oversized bearings for superior alignment and overhung load capacity, the potential for the FLEXBLOC® units to incur the same maintenance issues as their predecessors at the facility was eliminated.

The FLEXBLOC® also surpassed the old unit in versatility, its output shaft "plug-in" insert making the prior need to stock both a dedicated left hand and right-hand



*Products speed down a sorting and conveying system at Sun Prairie, WI facility*



Shoebboxes waiting to be sorted at Sun Prairie, WI facility.

unnecessary. It could be mounted on either side, right-side-up, upside-down or off-the-face. Additionally, one NORD unit would be able to replace two separate sizes of the old. "By switching to FLEXBLOC® units, we functionally replaced four gearboxes with one,

*"It's a 15-20 minute change versus an hour or two."*

resulting in direct cost savings, less installation time and saved space," reports Roger, almost a year later.



Flexbloc® gearmotor unit, with riser block designed by Famous Footwear

"Whereas before we had been keeping 12 reducers on the shelf, we now only keep two or three.

"With 75,000 pairs of shoes zipping down the conveyors in a day, unit change-out time was another critical factor for the distribution center – one that NORD's units were apt to handle. "They're so much quicker to change out!" exclaims Roger. "The coupler system for the drive is outstanding. If you get a bad motor – which we haven't had yet on a NORD, but if we did – you just take out four bolts, pull it off, put another one back on, four bolts and it's in!"

The motor shaft on Famous Footwear's old gear reducers constantly welded the motor and gearbox together, necessitating a time-consuming change-out of both components at once. "It's a 15-20 minute change versus an hour or two," notes Chris Laundy, facilities maintenance manager, "and we're only out the gearbox or the motor, we're not out the whole

It had been difficult to even locate replacement and spare parts for their old units, not to mention cost prohibitive – the manufacturer raised the prices of parts as they became less available – but the unusually high inventories that Famous Footwear discovered being kept at NORD meant replacement or additional FLEXBLOC® parts and units would be readily available as needed.

*"By switching to FLEXBLOC® units, we functionally replaced four gearboxes with one."*

However, it doesn't appear that replacements will be required any time soon. "We're coming up on a year now for the longest one," reflects Chris on the oldest NORD installation. "Generally if they don't go out in the first year, they're going to keep – then you're set." And as the population of NORD units at Famous Footwear continues to grow, the pairing of the two companies is looking to be a perfect fit.



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