

# Why consider custom masking

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*Cut your costs and simplify your finishing process.*

The goal in every production process is to keep it simple. To do this there is a need to break the process down to simple steps. Steps that are easily documented can be consistently repeated and are easy to teach.

When it comes to masking, however, the reality is far from that. “We aren’t sure how to mask them as Joe normally does those”, “I’m not sure how we did that batch last time”, “Didn’t we...?”

In order to cut your finishing costs you need to make the masking process easily repeatable. You need to remove the complexity. That’s why you need to consider custom masking.

Custom masking can involve an investment, but it can bring the masking time of a product down from multiple minutes to seconds. That time saving can easily justify the investment. Consider the typical masking environment, the part is placed on the bench, tape is applied to the part and the tape is then trimmed with a knife. Compare that to the rapid peel and stick of a custom die cut mask or the rapid push on of a custom molded cap or plug. Custom masking will reduce errors, ensure consistency, speed up the process and deliver a quality product.

Take a product that takes 4 minutes to mask by hand. Investing in custom masking may reduce that time to 30 seconds per item. If you run 500 parts each month that custom mask will save you in excess of 29 hours per month. Multiply those savings by the number of times you run the product over its lifetime and it’s not difficult to calculate the time savings and the impact of custom masking on a job like this. But it’s not only jobs that have a lot of parts or that repeat month after month, where custom masking can help you.

Over and above the obvious savings at the masking stage, are the savings that can be seen by bringing consistency to the process. Those savings can be seen in many areas throughout the business. Inspection times can be reduced, as there is confidence in the process. Reworks, which often include costly stripping processes and risk damaging the component, can be eliminated. Production planning can be easier and more precise: knowing that the process has consistency means production times become known and are repeatable. Customer service is improved, as customer service agents are no longer dealing with issues regarding badly masked products. Accounting people are no longer spending their time researching and issuing credit notes. Quality control personnel are no longer completing non-conformance reports for customers. Good masking can positively impact all the areas of a business.

If you are experiencing any of the following, it’s time to consider custom masking.:

**Complaints.** It's never good when a customer complains. That customer can be the end user of the product or it can be the department who has to perform an operation or process on the product after your department has finished with it. If you are experiencing customer complaints where the root cause involves masking or the finishing process. It's time to look for a custom masking solution.

**Lead time issues.** Long lead times or production bottlenecks in your finishing department can be addressed. As you have read, custom masking can dramatically save time and can therefore impact lead times. Custom masking can also reduce bottlenecks in the flow of the production process, ensuring that parts pass freely and quickly through the finishing area onto the next step of the process.

**Capacity problems.** You may want to increase production of a particular product, but there simply aren't enough hours in the day using the masking methods you are currently using. If that is the case, consider using a custom masking solution to free up more hours in the day and increase your capacity.

**Unable to take on additional work.** Sometimes customers want to give you more work, but they can't because you can't get to it or they know it will overburden you. If that is the case you may only be getting a small percentage of the work that your customer has. Could you consider custom masking for a few items in order to gain more work from a customer that you enjoy dealing with?

**Rework.** Do you seem to be constantly reworking parts due to bad finishing? Could custom masking help reduce the rework? It may be that the part requires a human touch to get the masking line absolutely perfect, but could a custom cap, die cut mask or plug cover 80% of the part and give the masking person time to do a better job on the 20% of the part that requires human intuition.

So the question becomes not why to consider custom masking, but how to consider it. That is where a good masking company can help you. A good masking company understands your problems and is able to listen to your concerns. They will be able to help you review the jobs you are working on and suggest custom masking solutions that will remove the complexity and simplify your process. The advantage of working with a masking company is they know what can and cannot be delivered in terms of design, materials and tolerances.

For a good masking company, custom masking isn't only about providing an unusual shaped die cut mask or complex mold. It is about being engaged with the customer. It is about listening to the customer's needs and providing a solution based on those needs. It may even go beyond delivering the custom product into assisting with application instructions for the product.

So take the time now to review your production and see what steps are involved in the process. Then talk to your masking company to see how they can help you reduce the complexity of those steps. Doing that will start you on the path to reducing your costs and simplifying your finishing process.

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