



<b>OPERATIONS</b>	
<p><b>Big consulting expertise available to small companies</b></p> <p>Small manufacturers are at a disadvantage when it comes to acquiring expertise to improve operations. Affordable help is available through the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), a network of centers in every state linked through the Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards, and funded by federal, state, local and private resources. The not-for-profit centers offer "extremely high-value services) for far less than could be had elsewhere, says Mark Sessumes of the Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center (TMAC).</p> <p>Ft. Worth, Texas-based Photo Etch – a growing manufacturer of lighted displays and control panels for aircrafts – went to TMAC for guidance in lean planning and defining its ERP implementation requirements. "They helped out," says Photo Etch President Randy Fry – bring about a 20-percent reduction in manufacturing costs, a 30-percent increase in capacity, a 25-perent inventory reduction, and near-perfect on-time delivery rate.</p> <p>Information about MEP is available at <a href="http://www.nist.gov">www.nist.gov</a>.</p>	 <p><b>Photo Etch President Randy Fry says the Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center empowered Photo Etch with lean manufacturing expertise at an affordable price point.</b></p>