



Operating business in a Covid-19 world – Not so different, but new opportunities!



CKCA toured the amazing Group Lacasse manufacturing facility in rue Saint Pierre Sainte-Pie, QC in September 2018. With 527 employees in Canada and 125 more in the US this 375,000 sq ft facility is a great example of advanced manufacturing.

As our industry pivots and many are producing plexiglass barriers for customers, we wanted to see why Group Lacasse invested in this area and the longevity they see for these designs and products.



We talked to **Patricia Klein, Corporate and Marketing Communications Manager at Group Lacasse** to better understand this new line of product they offer.

Have you had any uptake (sales orders) for the designs you have created called “Workplace Distancing Solutions”?

Yes we are generating sales. In fact, it is not so different than our regular business; we are actually involved in many different furniture market segments such as commercial, healthcare, institutional and educational. Adapting flexible spaces, taking needs into consideration such as cleanability or providing more privacy (or protection via screens or other products) were already part of our everyday business.

Why did you create this? Were customers asking or did you anticipate there would be a demand?

I little bit of both. When the pandemic started we put up a reaction team where we had and still have frequent meetings and the goal was to anticipate what was coming but also to get connected to the market and know what is being discussed and requested. Ultimately the goal was to take quick actions and execute them flawlessly. We had to figure out what our customers were going through and respond to their needs with solutions. That is the reason why our first step was to create home office solutions, we knew that many employees were either forced to stop working or they needed to work from home, in a far from a well-adapted set-up like a dining table or the living room sofa. Overall, we created a step by step approach where we were addressing the short term first, then mid-term and we are now rolling out all our efforts on the mid-long terms now.

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Do you think that if a vaccine is produced, that these designs will be obsolete? Or do you think these designs will have some permanence?

Who really knows what will happen? Things keep evolving so fast it is difficult to anticipate. Some believe it will be short term and people/companies will get rid of these protection/rules and some believe it will leave a deeper mark and change things like 9/11 did. Anyhow, we always make sure our solutions are flexible and adaptable to make them evolve easily over time, it's part of our DNA.

What did you have to consider when creating these designs? For example, did you use a 6ft distancing rule, or did you consider the height of barriers to prevent the spread when a person is standing up? What design rules did you create?

Since we're not microbiologists, we needed to learn, read, discuss and make sure we would be in a position to fulfill our customers' needs whatever they or the authorities decide are important. We agreed on a number of rules; teleworking, 6 ft physical distancing, protective measures when it is not possible to respect the 6 ft, increased hygiene and sanitized measures. For teleworking, we created a home office offer and in order to respect the 6 ft physical distancing, we are suggesting our customers to re-orient workstations or office layouts to allow this distance in the office flow. When not possible, we are suggesting some protections such as screens and other elements. Cleanability and maintenance have always been a concern in commercial but also in healthcare markets, we are providing detailed information and a selection of materials to our customers in that manner.

Are you using an anti-bacterial type materials on the market as part of your design?

Some of our products naturally have antimicrobial properties but we are keeping an eye on it. We are attending conferences from specialists and gathering a lot of information to be as knowledgeable as we can in that area. We also need to be aware that a bacteria is not a virus, their behavior in regard to biocide can be similar or can be totally different. The fact is that the entire world is learning now.

Does producing these types of design mean you have to install new or difference cutting machines or anything else in your facility?

Our manufacturing skillset is already pretty vast and part of Groupe Lacasse strategy has always been to have the ability to do custom designs, so very few things needed to be adapted. In that regard, we were very happy to count on our Fuze Laser edgebanding technology, it allows us to create seamless and even more cleanable edgebanded laminate parts.

Are you installing these designs at Groupe Lacasse in your own offices?

We are following our own rules based on Health Canada requirements. Some are working from home, we are attending meeting using Teams/Gotomeeting/Zoom etc. and yes we had to move around a few things to respect the new physical distancing rules.