Revolving success

Manitoba-based Vidir Machine Inc. is a leading manufacturer and distributor of motorized storage, fixtures and display systems, specializing in systems for spooled products (wire, cable, hose, tires) and rolled products (flooring, textiles, paper) as well as other custom applications. David Soyka of US Industries Today reports on how this company's business gets things on a roll.

An essential merchandising concept is to sell product "off-the-rack." Equally important to having stock on hand, it allows the customer to see the way merchandise is displayed. An eye-catching display that makes it easy for customers to browse the wares and get what they want is almost worth its weight in gold.

Canadian display manufacturer Vidir Machine, Inc. would probably prefer to get paid in gold if it could, given that 90 percent of its business is conducted in the U.S. and the current exchange rate of the Canadian dollar is 1.03 cents in U.S. currency, a significant decrease from only two years ago when 65 cents American equaled a Canuck sawbuck. However, like any business, Vidir has learned to roll with the punches.

Rolling, in fact, is a unique feature of its products. Vidir makes merchandising carousels and displays that store and handle rolled products such as carpeting and sheet vinyl. Go to the flooring department of your local Home Depot and the rugs you'll see on display are housed on a Vidir machine.

Like most innovations, this device was invented out of necessity. In 1985, two Dueck brothers who owned a lumberyard were looking for a convenient way to store their rolls of vinyl flooring products, but at the same time display it for their customers without having to lug rolls off of shelves. They did what any good sons do; they asked their father, who had operated his own machine shop since 1979, to figure something out. He did: a motorized carousel that became the cornerstone of the company's success. Sales representatives who visited the store were sufficiently impressed with the unique machine that it created considerable buzz in the industry. Consequently, in 1986 the Vidir built their first carousel for resale, and soon thereafter followed up with an advance on the original innovation that truly was cutting-edge: a carousel that not only stored and displayed carpet and vinyl, but also cut it on the spot.

The family business started manufacturing and acquired its first national account, Beaver Lumber, a chain that was eventually purchased by Home Depot (Canada), which recommended the carousel to its U.S. counterpart. Today, nearly every Home Depot store in North America has one or more of these Vidir machines. Vidir employs teams of driver/technicians to deliver the carousels with the Vidir trucks and set them up in the store, which Dueck says takes up about two days to get in and out.

Today the carousel group provides industrial carousels to many of the Fortune 500 companies, including GM, Honda, and others. Each industrial carousel is custom built to meet each customer's specific requirement and then delivered and installed by Vidir's trained technicians.

Willows Inspiration

You might expect that the family name is Vidir, for which the company might be named, but it's not. Vidir is an Icelandic word for willow trees, of which there are copious amounts in Arborg, Manitoba, a city north of Winnipeg, explains Raymond Dueck, co-president and son of inventor Willie Dueck.

With about 160 employees and a sales office in Clermont, Fla., Vidir also sells its machines through partnerships with Brockie International Accu-Cut Cutting Machines and Complete Storage Systems Australia.

Another major big box customer is Wal-Mart, where Vidir supplies bike racks. Bikes are latched and raised using fluid motion controlled pneumatic springs. The bike carriers can be moved in and out.
so bikes are not stored directly above an active aisle way, and are well away from customers and store associates. Each level can be accessed independently. Storing the bikes in a horizontal position allows for up to four levels of storage in less than 17 feet of ceiling space.

"We are currently producing our patented Bike Merchandising Systems at the rate fast enough to meet the needs of 2 new Wal-Mart stores per day," Dueck says. "There has been a lot of positive reaction to the use of our bike racks and we expect that every store will have our racks over the next several years."

Another patented product is known as "Tug-a-Rug" enables a single person to fasten, raise, lower and remove the heaviest rugs quickly, simply and safely.

The machines are manufactured at plants in Arborg, Teulon, and Morris, Manitoba about two hours away from each other. "The distance is unfortunate, but the Morris plant became available at a reasonable price. The Morris plant manufactures the Bike Merchandizing Systems and grain storage bins, and specializes in powder coating, a finishing process that is both environmentally friendly and highly scratch-resistant and durable.

Morris and Arborg facilities are each about 80,000 square feet in size. Dueck notes that the Arborg plant in particular is currently "bursting at the seams" in terms of production capacity and that has led to the expansion to another rural community of Teulon. One option he isn't likely to consider, however, is going offshore.

"It's true that Asian factories pay something like 5 percent of what we pay workers here," Dueck says. "But any savings in labor expense is offset by shipping and handling costs, not to mention an ability to monitor quality control on-site. So China really can't compete, and I don't see us seriously considering moving our manufacturing offshore. We might source some components, but we couldn't respond fast enough if we moved assembly offshore."

Vidir also makes a variety of overhead storage systems, industrial motorized carousels, waste management, and related accessories. Dueck points out that. "Like any business, we're always looking for opportunities to develop products for new markets."

**Biomass Roll-Out**

One that ventures a bit astray of the core product line, but exemplifies the company's history of uniqueness in applying technology to solve a problem, is the biomass fired Greenhouse Gas Displacement System, BEST. The inspiration, once again, arises from local circumstances.

"We had a neighbor who started building stoves that were fueled by sunflower shell pellets, which cost next-to-nothing. With fuel prices rising the way they are, a lot of people are turning to coal as an alternative to oil and gas, but coal is getting expensive too. So we started to think about what we have here that's readily available and relatively inexpensive we could use to heat, much as our neighbor was using these pellets," Dueck says.

Manitoba is farming country, and farms typically can produce a lot of baled straw. "The experts say you can't use straw as a fuel source because the process of burning creates silica which tends to clog up the machinery in a furnace," Dueck says. "But we came up with a technology that eliminates the silica creation. So here we have a cheap and renewable biomass resource that is capable of running at 85 percent efficiency. This makes a superior heat and energy producer ideal for any large-scale operation. An added benefit is the low greenhouse gas emissions compared to fossil fuels."

While Vidir has the patent on the technology, Dueck concedes that there's a lot to be done to convince the market on its practicality. "Everybody likes to talk about biomass as an alternative fuel source, but so far we've been one of the few with the guts to do it. Right now market acceptance is low, so our challenge right now is to educate people about its potential. Particularly as petroleum prices continue to rise, I think more and more people are going to be receptive to the idea."

After all, they never thought you could roll out carpet as easily as you can today. It would seem that the practicality of biomass represents a "straw man" that Vidir will easily "rack up" as yet another of its innovative accomplishments.

Check out [www.Vidir.com](http://www.Vidir.com) for more information.
Company on a roll

Ask Raymond Dueck about the success of his company, Vidir Machine Inc., and wait for his look of reserved pride and quiet optimism.

’Pride goeth before a fall,’ according to the Christian principles that have helped guide this prairie manufacturing company from a small, family-owned enterprise into the business big leagues. But, despite the co-president’s modest approach to success, there is no disputing that the company has come a long way in the space of less than 15 years - and it's future business potential remains tremendous.

Established in 1987, Vidir Machine Inc. has earned a solid reputation as a leading manufacturer and distributor of motorized storage, metal fixtures and display systems. Vidir specializes in storage systems for spooled products (wire, cable, hose, tires) and rolled products (flooring, textiles, paper) as well as other custom applications. Innovation has to be the one element that has been a key to Vidir’s success.

In 1985, Raymond Dueck (co-president) and his brother owned and operated a lumberyard. They realized they needed a carousel to store and handle rolled products such as carpeting and sheet vinyl. Their inventive father, Willie Dueck, came up with a well-designed and efficient carousel. This carousel appealed to several sales representatives who soon spread the word about this unique machine. The sales person who sold Vidir their vinyl was so impressed that he brought his bosses in to see it. They built that carousel in 1986 and in 1987 sales were increasing rapidly.

Their next innovation was the dual cradle-cutting machine that not only stored carpet and vinyl but also cut it efficiently. Scott Brockie of Brockie International became Vidir’s marketing partner and took this invention to his customers. It has been a very successful.

Effective marketing led to Vidir’s recruitment of its first national client in Beaver Lumber's chain of lumberyards under the Aitkenhead banner. The chain was subsequently sold to Home Depot (Canada) and recommended Vidir’s products to its U.S. counterpart. Now, nearly every Home Depot store in North America has one or more of Vidir’s machines.

The next step in the company's growth was to develop an overhead storage system for Wal-Mart warehouses.

Today, Wal-Mart is a major client of Vidir's. A product line Vidir Machine developed for Wal-Mart is a bicycle merchandising system for the retail floor. This new product line is currently being introduced to the retail market.

The Tug-A-Rug, a motorized area rug display system, lifts and lowers even the heaviest rugs safely at the touch of a button. This unit holds full-size area rugs and allows an individual to look through the carpets as though they were merely pages of a very large book. Aimed at retailers, the product enables store staff to electronically retrieve area rugs quickly and safely without the use a big ladder or manually lifting heavy carpets.

Well-positioned in the global marketplace, Vidir exports about 80 per cent of its products to the U.S., Australia, the Middle East, Chile, and Europe. Like most businesses today, Vidir machine recognizes the increasing challenges in meeting customer schedules and requirements. In response to these challenges, Vidir has embraced a continuous improvement philosophy, which enables us to provide the same reliable, quality products in an efficient and timely fashion.

Excellent communication between the partners, Peter, Raymond and Sid Dueck combined with their commitment to Vidir Machine's success guarantees complete customer satisfaction.

"Most people grow old within a small circle of ideas they have not discovered themselves"

Achievement

"Remember - Nothing will ever be accomplished if you wait for everyone's approval or for the plan to be perfect."
- John Maxwell

"Success is the result of perfection, hard work, learning from failures, loyalty and persistence." - Colin Powell

What concerns me is not how things are, but how people think things are.

"With creativity and tenacity you can do almost anything. Honesty and Integrity still count in today's world." - David C. Bentall

"There is only one failure in life possible, and that is not to be true to the best one knows."

"There is no expedient to which a man will not go to avoid the real labor of thinking." - Edison
High Loonie Puts High Tech in New Plant

Carousel maker Vidir buys labour-saving machines

Posted November 16, 2007

By Bill Redekop

TEULON -- When the Canadian dollar is high, reduce your costs by investing in technology.

That's the thinking behind Vidir Machine Ltd.'s latest and third manufacturing plant in rural Manitoba that opened last month in Teulon.

"The dollar is absolutely terrible, but fortunately this plant will help reduce costs," said Ray Dueck, co-president of Vidir Machines, based in Arborg. It has increased its staff from 16 a decade ago to 160 today.

Vidir's feature product is large vertical carpet carousels in big-box stores. The new Teulon plant is primarily serving Menards stores in the United States, which are taking two to three carousels each for storage of carpets and vinyl.

But the Teulon plant will also soon be manufacturing Vidir's latest venture -- automatic propane vending machines for the barbecuing market. The automated propane dispenser developed by Vidir allows customers to exchange and purchase propane tanks with just a credit card and no attendant.

The 7-Eleven chain in Texas recently purchased 40 propane vending machines, and sales to other 7-Eleven stores could go as high as 600, Dueck said. Vidir also expects to sell 200 to Menards and is fielding numerous inquiries after appearing at the recent U.S. trade show for convenience stores in Atlanta, Ga.

"It could be thousands of units in the near future," he said.

The higher Canadian dollar has cut into margins on all sales to Vidir's main market, the United States. "The orders are still coming in, but it's a lot tougher to put black on the bottom line," Dueck said.

The new Teulon plant reduces labour costs by automating four to five positions, thus reducing per-unit cost, which is the only way the manufacturer can reduce expenditure, he said.

Also, because many components come from the United States, the costs of upgrading technology are lower.

"Now, with the Canadian dollar higher than the American, I'm very happy to get this plant underway," Dueck said.

The plant employs 15 staff.

Vidir paid about $300,000 for a 30,000-square-foot building in Teulon that formerly made clothing. Refurbishing the building and new equipment cost another $450,000, for a total of $750,000, he said.

The Teulon plant has three automated improvements that would require five employees if done at the older Arborg plant:

- Powder coating will replace wet-paint finishes, freeing two people to do other work. Powder coating is baked and takes just two hours to dry, versus 24 hours for wet paint.
- A fully automated pre-painting wash bay that normally requires two people to operate.
- An in-house design machine that will automatically flip over 30-foot-long steel carousel frames for welding the other side. Currently, a forklift is used to lift and turn the heavy steel pieces.

Vital Vidir Vittles

- Vidir Machine Ltd is based near Arborg.
- The company employs 110 people at its Arborg plant, 40 in Morris, and 15 in Teulon.
- The Arborg plants specializes in carpet and vinyl carousels as well as many other products including carpet cutting machines.
- The Morris plant, built in 2001, primarily makes hopper bins for agriculture and overhead bike racks.
- The Teulon plant primarily makes carpet carousels and will begin making propane tank dispensers in 2008.
- Its customers include chain stores Menards, Walmart, Home Depot and Rona.
- Since 1987, Vidir has supplied more than 2,000 carpet and vinyl handling machines worldwide.

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Spinning gold out of Straw

A biomass gasifier that turns straw into heat is proving a huge money-saver in rural Manitoba. Vidir Machine Inc., which employs about 100 people in the Interlake, has slashed its electric heating bill from $50,000 per year to just $2,500. That's the cost of a baler picking up straw that farmers more often burn off their fields. It may cost another $2,500 for electricity to run the gasifier, and manual delivery of round straw bales.

Straw is slowly shredded and transported into a chamber heated to 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit. That turns the straw into a gas. The gas moves into a second chamber at a temperature of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit and heats water in pipes. The water then works as radiant heat in old-fashioned radiators, or fanned through common forced-air systems.

All that's left from burning of a 1,000-pound bale of straw is a lump of silica glass smaller than a softball. "(Dueck's gasifier) is one of those things that could put a community head and shoulders above everyone else," said Routledge. It would help municipalities slash heating costs, and attract industry to rural industrial parks, he said.

Right now, the gasifier's application is strictly rural. But Dueck's dream is to heat 200 homes in a loop system in the new Waverley West development in Winnipeg. If installed from the outset, pipes to carry heated water would be placed along side sewer lines and would not require new trenching.

Dueck's father Willie actually started the gasifier in 1979, turning wood into gas to heat the manufacturing company he founded: Vidir Machine, which makes department store carousels for carpets and vinyl.

While looking across their farm fields one day, Ray wondered if the leftover straw would make a fuel, and tried to improve on his father's design. He developed a mechanism for slowly feeding the straw, and a system for removing waste material.

"We were told we couldn't burn straw because the silica plugs the system," Ray said. So he built a system with two chambers instead of one. The silica condenses in the second chamber, and runs down the tank walls into a catcher at the bottom.

The United States patent office has rejected Dueck's efforts to register his gasifier, saying a patent already exists. Dueck says the office doesn't understand how his system is different, and he is prepared to go to Washington if necessary to explain it. It reduces greenhouse gases, and other emissions are less than smoke from a single home's wood fireplace.

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