Even small companies can play big

**REAL STORY: MARTEC PRECISION**

**Location:** Brampton, Ontario  
**Equipment:** Four Okuma CNC Lathes, One Okuma machining center  
**Employees:** 6

**Challenge:** In 2006, Dawson and Marlene Marks decided it was time to fulfill a longtime dream. They wanted to experience the rewards of owning a machine shop, where they worked for themselves, doing things the right way, and producing the utmost quality. The initial hurdle, however, seemed high. How could they get the right kind of equipment to accomplish this, without compromise, and with the financial limitations of a start-up?

**Real Help:** Okuma and distributor EMEC provided the specialized support Martec needed to get the right equipment, right away, so they could deliver quality to their customers from day one.

**Today, Martec is planning to double in size and expand to two shifts.**

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**The man and his machines**

Dawson Marks is a machine shop wizard. His customers and colleagues call him “the MacGuyver of Machining.” As his career evolved, he rose to the position of lead hand wherever he worked. And he became the man to go to when the challenge was tough and required ingenuity, craftsmanship, and attention to detail.

His career started as a machine operator with Rockwell International in Berrie, Ontario, working large parts for the Alberta pipeline. He advanced to machinist. Then on to Orillia, Ontario, where he laid hands on his first Okuma. He went on to experience a variety of different shop environments, and the gamut of machine brands and configurations.

“In my early experience, I noticed the Okumas were the type of machine that helped to do special things, especially in jobbing shops. Handling things like restarts on can cycles, they made things easier, working for me, not against me,” recalls Dawson. “Afterwards, when I started running other machines, I was surprised when I had to do things like restarts in a more cumbersome way. Then I realized how unique and beneficial the Okumas are.”

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“One of the things I’ve learned is that quality is in the details. The Okumas have the strength and reliability, no doubt. Where they really shine is they intuitively work for me, not against me.”  

-Dawson Marks
Going for it all

In 2006, after 26 years honing his craft, Dawson began to realize that the time was right to act on his dream. A potential customer promised a purchase order in an amount that would cover start-up costs for a building and the first machine. Dawson’s wife Marlene enthusiastically offered her support, and took a leave of absence from her twenty-year career as a teacher to assist with the business. There would be no better time to get started.

The right equipment, right away

Countless hours were spent conducting online research and talking with industry contacts. Machines and capabilities were meticulously compared. A plan was devised to target demanding, but desirable, markets in aerospace and other high-end parts.

The research confirmed what Dawson already suspected. An Okuma was the right tool to set the course for quality in his shop. The question was, could his start-up afford it?

He and Marlene attended CMTS 2005 with open minds, aware of their limitations. They kept their options open, and visited several of the machine builders’ booths.

An initial meeting with Okuma representatives and Bill Mara and Tejal Mara, principals of Okuma distributor EMEC Machine Tools, was promising. The Okuma/EMEC team initiated a detailed evaluation and needs analysis. And while it would’ve been easiest, and the safest bet, to specify the more sophisticated options from their equipment lineup, Okuma and EMEC recommended a collective challenge. It was a creative solution: an entry-level Okuma. Dawson’s exceptional machining skills, combined with the extra support Okuma and EMEC were willing to supply, would make the most of it.

“Okuma and EMEC asked a lot of good questions to help us truly understand what we needed in a machine,” Dawson recalls. “They were very knowledgeable and developed a detailed package that not only covered all our bases, it was one-stop shopping. We were able to buy the machine and they took care of everything else. They made it so simple.”
“Surprise beginning” yields a successful sales strategy

With the machine ordered and a building leased, Martec Precision opened its doors, equipped to deliver the quality products that live up to their value promise. The company motto, “Where Principles Count” was created to express this commitment.

Just as they were setting up shop, they learned that the purchase order commitment from their first customer had fallen through. There was no turning back now. They put full energy into cold-calling prospective customers to drum up the work they needed. Marlene located a list of 600 area machine shops, and set about personally calling each one. This activity created the orders they needed to launch the business, and they continue this tactic today as a means of keeping the sales pipeline flowing with incoming orders.

Often, the cold-calls result in an invitation for prospective customers to personally tour the Martec shop. “When they walk in, they see our Okumas, and they know they’re top-of-the-line machines,” says Marlene. “I don’t think there’s been one person that’s come into our shop who hasn’t given us orders.”

Growing up Okuma

The sales efforts cultivated enough business to keep Martec’s first Okuma busy, and within three months they bought a second. Two more Okumas followed soon after.

The specialty of the house is a combination of craftsmanship and ingenuity, blended with rigorous standards for high quality. The word is out that Martec is a place where customers can bring their challenges, and be confident of the results.

Most of their work is in aerospace and mold, with some excursions into heavy commercial work. Certainly, these jobs require the power and the strength that Okumas are known for. But for Dawson, it’s special features like the absolute encoder that really set the machines apart. When restarting, the spindle is warmed up, then the machine is shifted into auto and cycle start. With no need to zero home, time is saved and consistency of the custom settings for the job is maintained.

“One of the things I’ve learned is that quality is in the details,” asserts Dawson. “The Okumas have the strength and reliability, no doubt. Where they really shine is they intuitively work with me. The best tool always feels like an extension of yourself.”

-REAL STORY: MARTEC PRECISION

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Controls maximize quality control

MacMan-Net machine management tools are used to closely monitor production runs to ensure optimal, efficient quality control. Preventative alarm systems signal potential problems before too many parts are run. Automatic setting of offsets is particularly useful given Martec’s tight tolerance requirements.

Restarts are intuitive, going back to the previous position, which is more time-efficient than zeroing in and starting over. And the graphics on the interface simplify the process, providing one-touch access to features like power save, and real-time display of entries to confirm the accuracy of job set-ups.

The controls also standardize processes, establishing an easy-to-use platform for consistency when employees are added and trained.

Quality means always, not sometimes

The support provided by Okuma and EMEC during the machine selection process was just the beginning of an ongoing collaborative partnership. As with any growing company, maintaining uptime is critical as orders flow in from new customers. Quality of service is essential to their ability to deliver the quality their customers expect.

“The support is amazing,” says Dawson. “If we have a power surge, or a machine goes down, and one them gets stuck, or was in the middle of a tool change, they have a guy out here in an hour for us. They understand we can’t afford a machine down. It affects production and delivery dates. They make sure they’re here when we need them.”

Poised for growth

In four short years, Martec has been able to position themselves for success. Seizing the right opportunities, choosing the right markets, and devising a successful sales strategy have all played critical roles. But many competitors do these same things.

What sets Martec apart is what their customer experiences - a level of quality they can’t get elsewhere. The right man, equipped with the right machine, can achieve new standards of excellence.

Today Martec is planning to double in size and expand to two shifts. Even in challenging times, and perhaps especially so, quality sells. And it’s not just for the big boys.