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AHEAD

> OF THE INDUSTRY

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QUABBIN WIRE AND CABLE Co.

www.quabbin.com / 2008 proj. revenue: \$23 million / HQ: Ware, Mass. / Employees: 80 / Products: Electronic cables / Kevin B.

Drummond, director of sales/mktg.: "We've become one of the go-to guys for tough products other wire and cable companies don't touch."

AHEAD OF THE INDUSTRY

QUABBIN WIRE AND CABLE IS HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH TRADE ASSOCIATIONS TO PREDICT THE NEXT TREND IN CABLE.



QUABBIN IS A PIONEER IN THE ELECTRONIC CABLE MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY.

In the fast-paced electronic cable manufacturing industry, top players like Quabbin Wire and Cable Co. Inc. need the ability to forecast what the next big trend will be before most customers even realize it.

Quabbin stays on top of the latest waves by getting involved in trade associations, such as the Telecommunications Industry Association and the Building Industry Consulting Service International, and sitting on committees that develop the new standards for wire and cable, according to Kevin B. Drummond, director of sales and marketing.

"Part of the reason for us being on

these industry committees is that it gives us a heads-up of what is to come by at least a year," Drummond says. "When the industry has moved from this performance spec to this performance spec, we hear about that when the specs get written, and we'll kick off an R&D project along with it."

QUABBIN TODAY

Quabbin was founded in 1975 by Paul Engel in a 140,000-square-foot facility in Ware, Mass., and was named after the Quabbin reservoir that supplies Boston with its water.

Today, the company has two plants at its facility. One plant is dedicated to communication products, such as

high-speed local area network cables, industrial network cables and telecom. The other plant handles control, instrumentation, audio/video and security cabling. Thirty to 45 percent of Quabbin's orders are custom constructions, and those specialized products often end up in the company's own product line.

"We don't do everything, but the stuff we do, we do it well," Drummond says. "We've become one of the go-to guys for tough products other wire and cable companies won't touch, including the tricky private label products for some of the industry leaders."

Specifically, Drummond says,

Quabbin is one of the pioneers in stranded patch cable, which is used to connect electrical devices to local area networks.

The company continues to expand this niche by developing products for the latest 10 gigabit networks as well as producing an extended flex life family for controlling robotics in automated assembly applications.

NUMEROUS APPLICATIONS

Other applications for Quabbin's products include process control interconnect, computer peripherals, high-speed data transmission and point-of-sale equipment.

"Some proprietary methods allow us to meet the TIA electrical performance specs without splines and separators in our products," Drummond adds. "It makes our profile smaller and allows our customers to process assemblies faster because they don't have to remove those separators. That's some of the tougher stuff that the competitors won't touch.

"Anyone can meet spec with an electrical separator in the product, try doing it without one. It does give a cost benefit too because we don't have to carry the cost of the separators in our product."

Quabbin will install a new production line, as well as upgrade and expand its existing capabilities by spring of this year. The new equipment will be devoted to the high-speed data line, which will be in high demand in 2008, according to Drummond, because its industrial robotics cable family is about to take off and as the volume builds, it will need the added capacity. "We should have it running by mid-spring, but if we had it now we could use it now," Drummond says. "The new stuff we'll make is leading-edge. Bringing in this line will bolster some of our capabilities, and we'll be able to do things we couldn't do in our plant before. The extra capacity will knock some time off of our deliveries, too."

FINANCIAL AID

Quabbin earned a \$200,000 matching grant two years ago from the

Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development to use in its management, strategy or lean programs. Drummond says without this grant, the company would not have been able to implement its current lean initiatives.

"We earned that and it has been real

helpful," he says. "It's huge.

"We probably wouldn't have done a lot of [lean initiatives] if we didn't have that help. It is wonderful."

Once the company earned the grant, Quabbin hired outside consultants to take a look at its facilities to see where »

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» improvement was most needed and then trained employees in the implementation of lean processes. Drummond says the company took a “supermarket” approach to the manufacturing process, which has helped Quabbin manage its finished goods with less work in progress (WIP) inventory instead of keeping all finished goods in stock.

“We find the points where common subassemblies meet at the fork in the road and stock it that way,” he adds. “We’re not committed to what it will be at the end, but it is far enough along so we can turn it into any number of products quickly. This reduces WIP and still decreases turnaround time, which has been the biggest benefit of lean for us.”

When Quabbin implemented many of these lean techniques, Drummond

admits employees had some difficulty adjusting to the new work processes. But after witnessing the improvements first-hand, employees are more than willing to give lean a shot.

“If not for the early success, it probably would have been harder to convince people to give all these things a chance,” Drummond says. “After doing it a couple of years, everyone has seen the improvements. We now have across-the-board buy-ins, and we can suggest things and at least they will try them.”

MAKING LEAN FUN

Quabbin has also made it fun for employees to embrace lean. For instance, one training boot camp makes a game out of running drills to minimize down-time on product changeovers.

“They get a kick out of that because line teams can compete against each other about once a year,” Drummond says. “All employees get T-shirts and pizza, but what they are really after is the bragging rights that come with being the best.”

Quabbin says it is also dedicated to designing, manufacturing and selling consistently high quality products.

To ensure its products and service meet customers’ requirements, its quality objectives are:

- > To exceed industry and performance standards
- > To employ vendors who share a commitment to quality
- > To ensure employee understanding and support of its quality system

“Commitment, teamwork and dedication to quality are leading Quabbin to a future of prosperity,” it adds. **mt**

