



From left, Robert Fink, technologies specialist; Tim Van Zeeland, director of sales and marketing; and Mark Van Steenburgh, president, pose in front of the lockset durability test system that the company is building at Emerging Technologies in Manitowoc. SUE PISCHKE/CTR MEDIA

Major emergence

MANITOWOC TECHNOLOGY FIRM GROWS FROM BASEMENT TO PENTHOUSE

BY TARA MEISSNER | FOR HTR MEDIA

MANITOWOC — Mark Van Steenburgh started Emerging Technologies, LLC 15 years ago. In his basement. With no start-up money. He and his wife, Connie Van Steenburgh, had three young children at the time. She had recently left a project management position to be home with them. She remembers it as a stressful time, trusting her husband, now of 27 years, to launch a company that would earn enough to replace a comfortable salary.

"Mark would go in the basement every morning to his office trying to find a client,"

she remembered.

In September 1999, the family had a savings of six weeks' pay from Mark Van Steenburgh's previous employer. He had worked his way from maintenance helper to business manager when he resigned. He earned an associate degree in electrical power engineering technology from Lakeshore Technical College.

To make the six weeks of pay stretch to three months, the Van Steenburghs cut the family's living expenses in half.

"I had three months to get a first order off," he said.

Mark Van Steenburgh was prepared to then return to work half-time, continue to live on a reduced expenses budget, and devote half his time to getting the business running. If the business didn't take in six months, he was prepared to hang it up and return to work full time.

"I had our first order in two weeks and haven't been without work since," he said.

Major player

Today, his small, Manitowoc-based company is positioned as a major player in the market of developing and servicing custom-built test equipment.

"We would like to be a \$10 million per year company. We are shooting to be there in 2023," Van Steenburgh said.

Van Steenburgh said the infrastructure is in place to reach that goal. The company relies on a strong, diverse client base, a reputation for excellence, and a skilled sales and marketing staff.

"We believe we have what it takes to get there," he said.

The majority of the engineering firm's clients are Fortune 500 companies; some are Fortune 100 or larger. Emerging Technologies is in a vertical

market that serves OEM customers, including electrical controls manufacturers that design and build items such as circuit breakers, motor starters, and motor drive systems. One example is a test system for the automobile industry. They created a system that tests one facet of the Aston Martin luxury vehicle.

"I'll never get to drive one, but I have a hand in making them," Mark Van Steenburgh said of the James Bond-type vehicles.

You do what?

Director of Sales and Marketing Tim Van Zeeland said he has a hard time explaining to his kids exactly what making test equipment for Original Equipment Manufacturers means.

"My first year was like drinking out of a fire hydrant," he said. "Kids ask me what I do, and I say, 'I work for myth busters.'"

Test equipment is used in manufacturing to ensure the parts used in the production of a product are reliable before being installed into the final product. Testers are used to validate that the sub-assemblies and end product function correctly, eliminating the need for rework after assembly.

Emerging Technologies works with the simplest tester, which plugs onto a wire harness. Some test equipment costs \$90 for a simple tester. Other testing equipment is more complex, with a \$600,000 tester being the largest one sold to date. Van Steenburgh said the "sweet spot" is \$30,000 to \$100,000 equipment. Emerging Technologies has some equipment quoted at \$14 million.

Van Steenburgh has been in a related field since 1986. The seven-member staff includes 50 years combined experience in this highly specialized, niche of engineering.

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ATTORNEYS

From left to right: Doug Schmidt, Gary L. Novak Sr., Jeremiah Novak (Owner)

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John Olderman, technologies specialist, programs LabView, a computer application for the lockset durability test system that he and a group of specialists are building at Emerging Technologies in Manitowoc. This system will test locks for the automotive and other industries. SUE PISCHKE/HTR MEDIA

Emerging

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Emerging Technologies' customers are national and worldwide. Most customers are headquartered within a 200-mile radius of Manitowoc, but business comes from plants in China, Brazil, the Netherlands, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Canada.

Van Steenburgh operates his business with three steps: define, execute, and track. Within this system, there is opportunity to make course corrections before it costs extra money.

Steady growth

Growth at Emerging Technologies has been steady. About a year after forming the company, the first employee was hired, who was home-based. Gradually, the need to subcontract work during peak times was needed.

In 2001, the company outgrew the basement. In 2002, they bought a building on North Rapids Road, where the company is still located. The company began doing engineering service work and evolved to manufacturing those designs, thus necessitating a building.

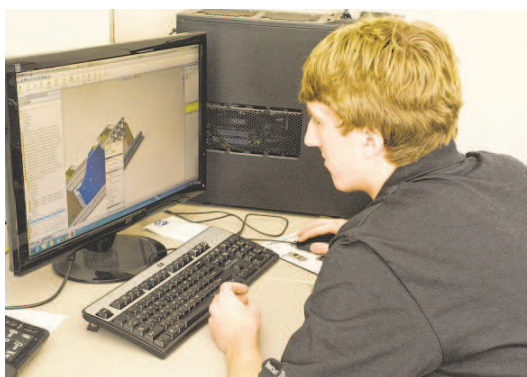
Recruiting staff is Emerging Technologies' biggest challenge. The company relies on qualified technicians who know the field and want to live in Manitowoc. The training for employees can take up to two years, which Van Steenburgh is prepared to do for the right person with a degree, an advanced degree or extensive experience. They need a background in computer programming, mathematics, and/or electrical or mechanical design.

"A person can have the best degree and not the right experience. Our staff represents a good cross section of experience and education," he said.

Because Emerging Technologies is continuing to grow, Van Steenburgh is always looking for the right people to join the company.

"If we meet someone who can add value to our company, we will hire them. If needed for immediate needs, we use other resources such as subcontracting or overtime," he said.

As Emerging Technologies grows, it will focus on geographic expansion rather than offering more services. Emerging Technologies has built a reputation in a specialized field and is successful focusing on custom-built testing



Aaron Van Steenburgh, technologies specialist, uses a 3-D modeling program to develop a durability test fixture for a client at Emerging Technologies in Manitowoc. SUE PISCHKE/HTR MEDIA

equipment.

After 15 years in the business, Van Steenburgh said the progression is to brand Emerging Technologies as offering quality, expert services and products.

"I am looking to change the mindset that Mark Van Steenburgh is the company," he said.

Over the years, the talent has been developed throughout the staff and those employees are prepared to represent Emerging Technologies.

"The synergy of the group now runs the business," Van Steenburgh said.

Family affair

Connie Van Steenburgh is Emerging Technologies director of administration and finance. Since the start of the company, she did accounting and administration. In the early days she even did soldering and wiring. Now she focuses strictly on management.

The couple's three older children — Austin, Aaron and Hannah — secured work permits and started working at age 12 with cleaning and helping out. The youngest Van Steenburgh is 7-year-old Owen.

Currently, Aaron, a 2013 Lincoln High School graduate, works full time on 3D

mechanical design at Emerging Technologies. He has a background in drafting and computer design.

Emerging Technologies may send Aaron to training in individual

courses that add value to the company.

Austin is a 2010 Lincoln High School graduate currently studying chemical engineering at Michigan Tech. Hannah, a sophomore at Lincoln High School, works on application briefs.

The Van Steenburghs are loyal to Manitowoc, buying from local suppliers and hiring local subcontractors when available.

Emerging Technologies gives to three local charities a year with the amounts of donations reflective of profits for the year. Of the three charities, the employees pick one.

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