

“Whatever it takes”

A fabricator's motto sets tone for success

In 2003, Rob Marelli left his job with a small fabrication job shop to start his own company. He founded Seconn Fabrication in a 2,000 sq ft facility in Waterford, CT. The startup company could only afford to purchase used equipment, nothing newer than 10-year old machines—a turret punch press, a laser, MIG and TIG welders, and a couple of press brakes. Five key employees from the previous company joined Marelli in this new venture. They believed in his character, leadership, and organizational skills, and committed themselves fully to do whatever it took to help get the fledgling company off the ground.

From the first day of operation, Seconn focused on customer service and meeting deadlines.

“We were going to meet the delivery date at all costs,” reflects Marelli. “Whether that meant working nights and weekends, meeting deadlines and creating good will and trust with our customers was our prime objective. We needed to give the customers an experience they didn’t experience with other shops. Forget about answering machines...talk

to the customer directly. And as repeat work developed, we eventually generated enough revenue for profitability. It was all about reinvestment of these profits to right the ship with our employees’ salaries, then investment in technology and floor space. We set a goal for ourselves in the first full year to do \$750,000 worth of business...we did \$3.5 million.”

DRAMATIC GROWTH AND DIVERSITY

And through the years of operation, the company has grown dramatically. After several expansions at the original location, in 2006 Seconn purchased an old Sears warehouse in Waterford and converted it into a 35,000 sq ft facility, which was expanded into 60,000 sq ft in 2009. The number of employees has grown to 77, and sales have jumped to \$10.2-million. Seconn serves such diverse industries as agriculture, retail, defence, medical, automotive, pharmaceutical, OEM, lighting and communications. The company’s largest customer is only 12.5 per cent of its revenue. Its largest industry sector is less than 23 per cent of total business.



In the first year of business, Seconn owner Rob Marelli set a goal of \$750,000 worth of business. Instead, the company did \$3.5 million.

EQUIPMENT & NEW TECHNOLOGY

Seconn has aggressively invested in equipment. Today, the company offers one stop shopping for its customers with such services as laser cutting, punching, bending, machining, welding, powder coating, silk screening, and assembly. One of Seconn's latest acquisitions is the Prima Sincrono laser with TowerServer.

Sincrono is a radically new solution—two machines in one, a dynamic and ultra-lightweight head and a machine with a large work volume that moves with perfect synchronicity and coordination to optimize processing times. The highest dynamics applied to the smallest masses—a rule that allows a combination of high performances, excellent cutting quality, and reduced running costs. Special active compensation of masses and control algorithms govern the formation movements smoothly and without vibrations. With a small force, no vibrations and motions perfectly coordinated, the Sincrono can operate at its technological limits, in real operating conditions and even on the most complex and intricate shapes.

The result is a machine that guarantees previously unthinkable processing times: 6 g acceleration allows more than 1,000 holes to be made in a minute, double that of other laser machines available on the market, according to equipment supplier Prima Finn-Power North America.

Sincrono performs best on thin sheet metal yet also cuts materials such as mild steel, stainless steel and aluminum, with considerable thickness fast and accurately.



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“We chose the Sincrono because our bread and butter laser jobs are in light gauge work, between 11 and 20 gauge,” explains Marelli. “When I saw the speed of Sincrono at FABTECH, I was completely impressed. When I went back to my shop and I compared the cut speeds to the top 50 per cent of my revenue, the opportunity for savings was just huge. It’s the right tool for the right job. That’s what’s at the heart of the dual machine engineering in the Sincrono. With a small, dynamic and light head for minimum masses and a large head for greater masses perfectly synchronized, energy and production time are all maximized.”



Seconn's latest acquisition is the Prima Sincrono laser with TowerServer, an automated work handling system. Marelli liked the lights out capability of the laser machine.

LIGHTS OUT CAPABILITY

Marelli was also attracted by the lights out capability of the Sincrono with the 10 shelf TowerServer automated work handling system. “We can now almost get a second shift unattended—and some weekends unattended. This is a great benefit with the growth we have experienced—20 to 60 per cent—for the three years leading up to the decision to purchase the Sincrono. It wasn’t about replacing a person... it was about relieving a resource that I could place into other revenue-making opportunities.”

Seconn also experiences higher yields with the Sincrono. “Another thing that I didn’t expect, and never factored in, has turned out to be a huge benefit with the Prima laser. For some reason we get much better yield on our material on the Sincrono than anything we have experienced with our other laser machines. With our raw material to sales ratio off of the Sincrono is about eight to nine per cent higher than the other laser cutting machines. If you are spending US \$100,000 - \$175,000/month on material, and you pick up a few percentage points...it’s a considerable savings.”

In the past, Marelli has been disappointed in the lack of service his company experienced with new technology machines. “When Prima was willing to put in the contract an expectation of service agreement, that meant more to me than \$50,000 on the machine. When a company is growing, and is running five to six days a week...your machine has got to be up and running. To be down with our tight deadlines, and wait two to three days to get the machine operational, would be fatal for us. Prima stepped up considerably with their service. They have honoured it to this day.”

LEGACY OF SUCCESS

Seconn's rapid growth has been phenomenal. For example, in 2006 the company grew 30 per cent, in 2007, 57 per cent, in 2008, 34 per cent, and even grew 7.5 per cent in the challenging year of 2009. This remarkable success hasn't gone by unnoticed: Seconn was named in the Inc 5,000 list as one of the fastest growing private companies nationwide.

In 2008, the Fabricators & Manufacturers Association International (FMA) named it Fabricator of the Year.

Seconn was named Small Business of the Year for the Northeast by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and it was one of seven finalists in the Small Business Summit in Washington,



The Prima Sincrono laser with the TowerServer in the background. The system is capable of Lights Out operation, a feature that appealed to Rob Marelli.

DC, for the national Small Business of the Year award presented by the US Chamber of Commerce.

PLANNING FOR FUTURE GROWTH

Seconn continues to take an aggressive leadership position in the industry. The company is in the process of an acquisition of a local sheet metal shop. It has begun hiring in recent months, and continues to cross train its team and implement lean manufacturing principles throughout its shop.

At a time when other manufacturing peers are reducing investments in technology and backing down research and development resources, Seconn has moved in the opposite direction. To position itself for future growth, the company has developed a dedicated floor plan, including floor space, equipment, and personnel for a rapid prototype response department all focused on one mission: analyzing challenges and with outside-the-box mentality engaging and fulfilling new ideas.

That space is currently 2,000 sq ft, set aside from the normal production floor. This shop within a shop includes a laser cutter, press brakes, welding station punch; the same resources as the main fabricating line, supported by some of the most seasoned team members of Seconn's staff.

"Our top guys with decades of experience are part of Pro/Response," says Marelli. "Engineers, operators, and welders are part of the permanent team. In addition, we have full license to ask for support from any other member of the Seconn community. It's not about who solves the challenge, but doing whatever it takes." **CM**

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