

# Marking Industry

August 2012

MAGAZINE



**GOLD MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR:  
Durable Technologies • Worcester, Massachusetts**



Left to right: Jim Maybach, Matt Martin, Kari Lunden, Clem Malinowski and John Brummer.

# Durable Technologies

## WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

by Anne Shadis and David Hachmeister

**When you consider the broad range of products and applications that fall under the heading of marking and identification, our 2012 Gold Manufacturer of the Year, Durable Technologies, exemplifies a company that spans that spectrum. By consistently expanding through acquisitions, organic growth and strategically serving customers across a variety of markets, the company has positioned itself as an expert in delivering marking and identification solutions, particularly in direct part marking.**

The company's capabilities can be divided into five major categories: marking tools and supplies, marking machines, custom engraving, package date coding and hot stamping. By capitalizing on the technology and locations of the various divisions within its corporate family, Durable Technologies handles everything from short-run jobs from one-person shops to large-volume manufacturing for Fortune 500 companies.

A walk through one of their plants offers a glimpse at their unique array of projects: metal coding type used in bakeries to date code the plastic clips found on bread bags; pharmaceutical type for marking lot numbers and expiration dates on their

packages; decorative hot stamp dies for personalization and book binding; custom steel stamps and dies used for part marking and internal traceability in the automotive industry; and custom engraving for aerospace parts. They serve a wide range of industries including automotive, metal fabrication, defense, aerospace, firearms, medical, food and beverage, pharmaceutical, jewelry, electronics and personalization.

The Durable Technologies group of companies consists of Durable Mecco (Franklin Park, Illinois), VisiMark, Inc. and Durable Machine (Worcester, Massachusetts), Kay Gee Sign and Graphics Co. (Auburn, Massachusetts), and A.A. White Company (Uxbridge, Massachusetts). They employ approximately 55 people across all of their loca-

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## GOLD MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR

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tions (see sidebar, p. 10).

In October 2011, the company officially introduced its new corporate identity, Durable Technologies, to coincide with the launch of its new website, [www.durable-tech.com](http://www.durable-tech.com).

David Hachmeister and Anne Shadis of *Marking Industry Magazine* visited the Durable Mecco facility to learn more about Durable Technologies' growth and operations. They spoke with Kari Lunden, president and CEO, Durable Technologies; Matt Martin, director of sales and marketing, Durable Technologies; Clem Malinowski, general manager, Durable Mecco; John Brummer, production manager, Durable Mecco; and Jim Maybach, vice president of operations, Durable Mecco.

### GROWTH THROUGH ACQUISITION

**David Hachmeister:** How did the company evolve into what it is today?

**Kari Lunden:** In the mid-1970s, I moved from Finland to work for Ken Mosman at Worcester Stamp, who was the president of the Marking Device Association. At that time, Worcester Stamp was just a small, traditional marking device company. We learned early on that in our industry, you have to focus on more than just organic growth if you really want to grow.

We started actively looking for potential acquisitions that fit into our business model and contributed to our overall strength. We changed our name to North American Marking Equipment Corp. or NAMECO, and during our time together we bought eight companies and had one startup in New England.

In 1985, we formed our own company in Worcester, VisiMark, Inc., with Chris Podles and another former principal. Since its inception, VisiMark, Inc. has acquired a total of nine additional marking device companies, most of them small companies located throughout New England.

In 2005, VisiMark, Inc. acquired Durable Engravers of Franklin Park, Illinois as a wholly-owned subsidiary from the Maybach brothers, Jim and Ted. Their father founded the company in 1952, and Jim is still with us today as vice president of Operations.

Our acquisition of Durable was one of the defining moments for our company. Their presence in the Midwest offers a competitive advantage due to its central location. Durable's technology changed the landscape of our company from a manufacturing standpoint, allowing us to pursue new markets and opportunities that were previously unattainable.

In 2006, Durable Engravers acquired the traditional marking division from the former Mecco/M.E. Cunningham Company out of Pittsburgh, which for

many years was an industry leader in indent marking technology for heavy-duty industrial applications. The two companies merged to form Durable Mecco.

Currently, Durable Technologies is the all-encompassing, corporate identity for all of its subsidiaries and divisions and a melting pot of startups and 14 acquisitions.

**DH:** Can you describe how you're set up from an operations standpoint?

**KL:** Our business model has always been to operate lean and centralized. Our corporate office, central sales and marketing and accounting are located in Worcester, Massachusetts. We manufacture in four locations: in Franklin Park, Illinois, there's Durable Engravers and Mecco/M.E. Cunningham Company's stamp division, formerly located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In Worcester, Massachusetts, we have VisiMark, Inc. and Durable Machine. In Auburn, Massachusetts, Kay Gee Sign and Graphics, and in Uxbridge, Massachusetts, we have A.A. White Company, which was recently relocated from Providence, Rhode Island, where they were the 21st oldest active company in the state, an achievement which we're very proud of.

We also own all four commercial properties housing our operations and

Durable Mecco, formerly Durable Engravers, recently celebrated its 60th year in business.

The Durable Mecco production team.



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A.A. White Company photo taken in Providence, Rhode Island in 1860.



Kay Gee Sign & Graphics Co.  
of Auburn, Massachusetts.

operate them as separate realty entities. Our philosophy is to pay rent to ourselves and build equity. We lease the excess space to companies in related industries providing complimentary services, such as neon sign fabrication, rubber and polymer printing plate manufacturing and magnesium etching.

**AS:** What prompted the name change to Durable Technologies?

**Matt Martin:** I think it just sort of evolved over time as Kari and I were discussing the future goals for the company and all of our divisions as a whole. We had two different websites for VisiMark and Durable Mecco and wanted to leverage all of our experience and multiple locations to our advantage to form one big entity. It was also a way to streamline our internal processes and systems. We wanted to operate as if we were one company, even though we're in different locations.

We recently upgraded to a new phone system that enables each of the locations to stay connected, and it's seamless as far as the customers know. Before we'd have to say, "Let me have someone call you back," in order to transfer a call over here to Durable, whereas now we just put the customer on hold and have someone

from Durable pick up. We really liked the name "Durable" from Durable Engravers and Durable Mecco and added the "Technologies." A big part of it was re-branding the company: Now we have the new website and corporate logos for the different locations. I think the new company name and website have been very well received by our current customers and new prospects.

### NEW APPROACH: WEBSITE AS PRIMARY SALES CHANNEL

**AS:** You mentioned that you're shifting more to inside sales, concentrating on generating sales through the website.

**MM:** The marking industry and our business model have really evolved over the last five years or so. When VisiMark first started in 1985, our customer base was very much a local one. Our salespeople would hop in their cars and go door-to-door selling rubber stamps out of their briefcases. Today we have customers located all over the country and far beyond.

All of the new sales inquiries generated through the website, whether it's somebody submitting an inquiry online or calling us directly, now go through our

Worcester office. Depending on the nature of the inquiry, we'll decide if it makes more sense to handle at VisiMark or forward the prospect to Durable. It really just depends on the product and where they're located geographically.

**AS:** Are these prospects finding you through Google searches?

**MM:** I'd say the majority of our new website leads come from Google (through organic searches) or direct traffic (when people come directly to our website through our URL address), and to a lesser extent through referrals (inbound links from other websites) and social media channels.

**AS:** Are they pretty good leads?

**MM:** Yes, for the most part the leads that we're receiving are pretty targeted and for specific products. Our new sales and marketing strategy of utilizing our website and social media to enable people to find us is often referred to as "inbound marketing." With this new approach, we can be more efficient in our sales efforts and reach so many more people through our website than we could in a lifetime of tradeshow and door-to-door selling.

The purpose behind building our new website wasn't just to give it a new name and a facelift, but to really take a look at the guts of the site and how it was built. There's so much that goes into it from an SEO (search engine optimization) stand-

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## Durable Technologies COMPANY OVERVIEW

### CORPORATE OFFICE • Worcester, MA

- Central administrative office for marketing, sales and accounting for all companies and affiliates.
- Central call center receives all inquiries and directs accordingly.
- Research and development.

### DURABLE MECCO • Franklin Park, IL

*(Began as Durable Engravers in 1952. Comprised of Quality Die, Fredrick's Marking, and Mecco/M.E. Cunningham's stamp division, formerly located in PA)*

- Primary manufacturing plant for industrial marking products.
- Products manufactured: steel stamps; roll dies; hot stamping dies; coding type; embossing type; mold engraving; part marking.
- Primary markets served: United States, Central and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia and the Middle East.

### VISIMARK, INC. • Worcester, MA

*(Acquisitions include VisiGraphics, Colonial Steel Stamp, Springfield Steel Stamp, Graphics Consultation, NAMECO, A&M Marking, Ideal Engraving, A.D. Joslin Manufacturing)*

- Secondary manufacturing plant for industrial marking products.
- Products manufactured: printers' type; coding type; hot stamping dies; burning brands; mold engraving; part marking.
- Primary markets served: United States, Central and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia and the Middle East.

### DURABLE MACHINE • Worcester, MA

- Industrial marking machine sales and service, established in 2011.
- Products sold: marking presses; dot peens; CNC marking tools; industrial lasers; inkjet printers; hot stamping machines; numbering machines.
- Primary markets served: United States, Canada and Mexico.

### KAY GEE SIGN & GRAPHICS CO. • Auburn, MA

- Products manufactured: painted, illuminated, neon, carved, vinyl and electronic signs; truck lettering; digital printing; crane service; sign installation and maintenance.
- Primary markets served: Massachusetts, New England.

### A.A. WHITE CO., Uxbridge, MA

*(Acquisitions include Central Stamp, Crown Stamp)*

- Products manufactured: rubber stamps; pre-inked stamps; Xstamper; seals; corporate kits; interior signage.
- Primary markets served: Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New England.

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point to ensure that we rank on the first page on Google search results.

**Clem Malinowski:** There is so much information that needs to be organized as far as the different products that we offer—steel stamps and dies, hammers, coding type and all the technical information that goes with it—that when somebody does go online, there are a lot of search options. They can navigate through our website to get more specific product information and hopefully find exactly what they're looking for.

**MM:** Content—including keywords, page names and titles, photos and videos—is very important to our SEO rankings. The biggest challenge we face with our site is that we have so many different products it's hard to optimize all of them. If we only sold steel stamps, it would be easy—we would optimize our entire website around steel stamps. But since we have over 250 unique product pages on our site, it takes a lot of time to go through each one individually.

**AS:** Are you doing that internally?

**MM:** Yes, we are for the most part. We had some local consultants who helped us when we changed over from the old website to the new one. We're not writing code or anything like that, but with the system that we have in place now, I can go into the website and make a lot of the changes myself. It could be adding new text, a new product photo or application video, or even a customer testimonial on our blog. We use blog posts and e-mail blasts just to keep in touch with our customers. We used to do mailings, even just a few years ago, but it became so costly and every time the price of stamps would increase a couple cents, it would kill us. The entire sales process has really evolved and today we're using technology to our advantage.

**KL:** And there's also the performance monitoring of our website...

**MM:** That's true. With our current platform, it's very easy to monitor the website's performance. You can see how many people are visiting the website every day and where they're coming from, both geographically and how they found us—whether they typed in our URL address or did an organic search for steel stamps and we came up on the Google rankings. You can also follow trends and study conversion rates—how many new leads we received in a given time frame and how many of those leads were converted into new customers.

**AS:** It's a wealth of information from a sales perspective.

**MM:** Absolutely. I don't think we're even fully utilizing all the different tools that we have at our disposal. There are so many different ways to cut it up.

**KL:** In the foreseeable future, most companies will probably create a full-time position to optimize and maintain their company's website. It's not just that you create and build the site and are done with it; you really have to work hard to maintain it. In our organization, I see the shift from our current partial outsourcing to one day having it done in-house by someone

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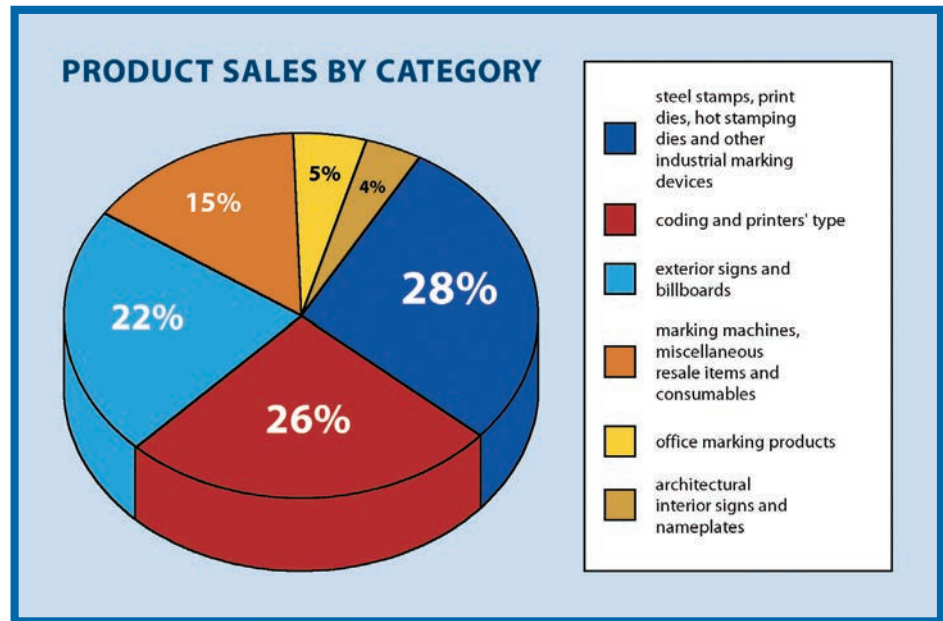
who's dedicated to working on it exclusively.

**AS:** Are you doing anything with Google as far as paid searches?

**MM:** No. We may consider getting into that someday. For the time being, we've got just about all that we can handle. Since we launched the new website in October of last year, we've quadrupled the amount of new incoming leads and doubled the amount of visitors to our website. If that tails off or we continue to grow, we may find the need to pay for clicks. But for right now, we're happy with the results we're getting.

**AS:** Are you hiring more people now to handle the inside sales?

**MM:** We hired a new inside salesperson last year for our Worcester office. Otherwise, we're still able to handle the



normal workload that comes at us on a daily basis. We're actively working towards continued growth, which will enable us to add more people over time.

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### Equipment Headquarters

- *Vulcanizers*
- *Liquid Photopolymer Machines*
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**DH:** So you don't have sales reps on the road any more?

**KL:** We don't have direct salespeople on the road exclusively making calls. However, we do still have some independent reps selling our products throughout the country. Even though we have fewer reps today than we did five or ten years ago, we still recognize the value they offer, considering all of the relationships they've built over the years.

**MM:** Clem used to be the primary outside sales guy before he became the general manager, and he still has certain accounts that he visits regularly. That will never change, but it's more limited to local accounts now.

**CM:** I spent 20 years in sales before I took over as general manager five years ago. There are still customers who I go out to see, but not nearly as much anymore. They might need technical advice or have a specific problem they want me to come look at. I don't get to do it as often these days, but I still enjoy going out on the road and visiting those accounts who have contributed to Durable's growth through the years.

## SPECIALIZED MARKING AND IDENTIFICATION NICHES

**AS:** I know VisiMark is a leader in manufacturing the replacement metal date coding type for all the different OEMs. What other specific niches are there among the different divisions?

**KL:** Our product mix consists of 28 percent in steel stamps, hot stamping dies, print dies, and other industrial marking devices; 26 percent in coding and printers' type; 22 percent in exterior

signage and electronic billboards; 15 percent in marking machines, miscellaneous resale items and consumables; 5 percent in office marking products; and 4 percent in architectural interior signs and nameplates.

Each location has its specialty. At Durable Mecco, we manufacture the full range of industrial marking products with special niches in precision dies for the jewelry industry and embossing type for the canning industry. At VisiMark, we manufacture coding type for the packaging industry and specialize in printer's type for hot stamping. I believe VisiMark is one of few companies still producing type for book binders and for decorative applications.

**MM:** Monogramming and personalization is very popular right now. We've got some very well-known retailers using our decorative brass printer's type to personalize their handbags, wallets, belts and more. Most of the time, they're putting the consumer's monogram on the product. They have the option of debossing directly into the leather or they can use a colored foil, usually gold or silver, to make the letters pop.

**KL:** Our sign company, Kay Gee Sign and Graphics, designs and fabricates exterior signs for banks, retail stores, restaurants and billboards and specializes in "way-finding" consulting for hospitals and universities in the area.

A.A. White Company manufactures interior signs and office marking products, along with specialty product lines for the Rhode Island jewelry industry.

## ONGOING BUSINESS CHALLENGES

**AS:** What are some of the problems that you encounter, as far as materials, production issues, equipment or personnel?

Top row: Ray Hutchinson, CNC electrode engraving; Vinnie Coluccio, traditional pantograph engraving; Alex, Kim and Cathy, the Durable Mecco customer service team; Robert Plante, CNC brass type engraving. Bottom row: Jane, Vicki and Tara, the VisiMark customer service team; Gail Plante in the type inventory room; Paul Knapp, EDM operator; hand engraving.



**CM:** I think it's probably the equipment for me. It's only a couple years before OEM software becomes outdated. Then you have to upgrade, especially if your customer is upgrading.

If one of our machines goes down, like some of our EDMs (electrical discharge machines) for example, there are only a handful of companies that have the expertise to be able to come in and repair it. In these cases, we're kind of at their mercy; they come in whenever they feel like it and charge a premium for the repair service.

**KL:** Our manufacturing equipment is the latest technology and not always specifically designed for our industry; we usually retrofit our proprietary tooling or programming to EDM and CNC machines in order to perform our machining.

When Jim Maybach purchased Durable's first EDM back in the late 1960s, the technology was new to our industry, and they developed and wrote all the required programming which we still use. Some of our machines are state-of-the-art and require a very high-level operator expertise and skill set.

**MM:** I think it's not only keeping the equipment and the software current, but also keeping the operators educated on all the machinery. These guys have to take courses to update their training and familiarize themselves with the newer technologies.

**KL:** That's an ongoing challenge in most of our companies: to find technically skilled CNC programmers and operators. In some applications, training can take years before they're totally up to speed.

**MM:** It's very specific skilled labor.

**DH:** That's been in the news lately. The demand is enormous for people with the skills like these guys have out here, but you can't find them.

**KL:** I believe in this country we have to make a greater effort to encourage entry into the trades. It's becoming increasingly more difficult to find individuals with the appropriate skills and experience required to operate highly technical equipment.

**John Brummer:** Basically, with CNC machines, there are programmers and there are operators. A lot of them come from backgrounds where they're just CNC operators—they're not doing the actual programming. Our guys are able to do the entire job from start to finish. They're able to program and operate the machines, and that's tough to find these days. You've got to find the type of person that can multitask that way. That's how we've trained people in the past—start them off with operations they're comfortable with and then slowly expose them to new areas. Cross-training is the key to our success in manufacturing.

**DH:** We noticed as we toured the plant that it wasn't just one guy operating a single machine; many of the operators were actually operating several machines at one time, which must require a great deal of skill.

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**JB:** Yes, but it takes time before they get to that point. Most of these guys have been working at Durable for 15 years on average. We've got some younger guys here now that have only been with us for a few years, but they're fitting in nicely so far. Overall, I think the average age is probably mid-40s.

**MM:** Our production employees have a wealth of experience and industry knowledge. Replacing all that talent is something we need to consider as we move forward and grow as a company. Eventually, some of these guys will be retiring, and we need to be bringing in a new group of talented, skilled tradesmen.

**KL:** Strong middle level management is vital to the success of any small to mid-size company looking to grow. Companies like Durable Technologies typically struggle with the decision to appoint from within or bring someone in from outside of the company to fill these positions. This is especially challenging when the position requires a high degree of technical knowledge and on-the-job experience.

We prefer to appoint from within whenever possible and give those employees who have shown great potential the chance to succeed in their new higher-level positions. Unfortunately, these employees are not always best suited for these managerial roles. It doesn't mean they're not valuable employees, it just means they are not in the best position for them to be most successful. We have refined our internal promotional processes to ensure that candidates are qualified and have the ability to grow and lead us into the future.

### DIVERSE RANGE OF MARKETS

**KL:** One of the challenges we've faced at Durable Technologies is the depletion of our manufacturing customer base. Here in the Franklin Park area, for example, we've lost several sizable manufacturing customers to outsourcing. Fortunately,

our diversity into many industries across a wide geographic area has softened the impact of "off-shoring" and recession.

**JB:** For example, if we were primarily selling to the automotive industry, I think the recession would have really hurt us. But we're so diversified, doing everything from pharmaceuticals to aircraft parts, and that flexibility comes from the knowledge of the guys in the shop. If we didn't have these guys, with all of their different backgrounds and experience, we wouldn't be in the position to do so many different things.

**MM:** That was one of Jim Maybach's original goals when he first became a manager at Durable Engravers—to have a really diversified business model. He recognized that you can't have all your eggs in one basket. I think that's really been the key to our success: evolving as a company and being able to service all those different industries so that we're not really as affected if one industry is slow.

**Jim Maybach:** We do a lot in the food and beverage industry. It may slow down, but it never goes away. People are never going to stop eating and drinking.

**KL:** Food and pharmaceuticals is definitely a large, stable segment of our business. Thanks to all of our acquisitions through the years, we currently have a customer database of about 33,000 individual accounts with varied amounts of activity. This geographical diversity helped us sail through the economic downturn. Outsourcing has also provided added growth and stability; we are actually manufacturing selected product lines to OEMs and for some of our competitors.

**MM:** We've lost some of the direct business due to companies switching to newer technologies, but we've more than made up for that loss thanks to the outsourcing opportunities. These companies have chosen to redirect their finances and their sales efforts toward newer technologies, and even though they might have a pretty solid customer base still using these

traditional marking products like steel stamps and metal type, they've decided that it's not efficient for them to keep the work in-house anymore. Based on our history in the marking device business—we've been here so long and our name is so widely recognized—they consider us when looking for a strategic outsourcing partner. We make it on their behalf and their customers don't know the difference.

**KL:** We've seen a decline in the demand for traditional, industrial marking products in recent years due to new technologies—lasers, thermal printing and inkjet, being the major ones. What we've found is that even if the overall market for traditional, industrial marking devices is slowly shrinking, we are getting a bigger and bigger share of the shrinking pie and growing in the process. We are happy and privileged to be flourishing in an "under the radar" industry which is too small, technical and costly to attract newcomers. Also, in the office marking market many years ago, there were hundreds, if not thousands, of rubber stamp companies; today, there's a lot less competition.

**DH:** There is a third to a half as many as there were at the peak in the mid-1990s.

**KL:** The same with the steel stamp companies. There are still several of them out there, but they mostly serve local markets and specific niches. Some of them have not been able to keep up with technology and don't offer the broad line of industrial marking products that we do.

### POINTS OF PRIDE

**AS:** What are you most proud of regarding the company?

**KL:** The thing I'm most proud of is how our company has evolved over the years—products manufactured and supplied, manufacturing methods, technology and equipment, sales and marketing efforts, markets and industries we serve, devoted skilled employees... we've built a

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true “Marking Device” company from scratch.

**AS:** Earlier, you also mentioned the importance of your employees and their cumulative knowledge base.

**KL:** Yes, we have a very talented pool of employees, and we definitely could not have done it without them. We have very little or no turnover in our organization. We recognize the fact that we may have some of the best technology and equipment, but they are meaningless without good skilled employees operating them. I am very thankful and proud of all current and past employees.

**MM:** These guys could speak about this more than I could, but they’ve always taken great pride in the quality of their work. They’ve never taken shortcuts or compromised their standards even during the most difficult economic times.

We are always looking at our suppliers, manufacturing methods and internal procedures to make sure we’re operating as efficiently as possible. And when it comes to the quality of the products that we make, it’s first-rate. We’ve never sold on price alone, and I think that’s what’s really helped us establish our reputation.

**CM:** Many times we’ll get a call at the last

minute when somebody forgot to order a die and they’re in panic mode. We want to get them here as customers and maintain them, so if we have to turn it around in a couple of days, that’s what we do.

Many of the guys in the shop get called on a lot to stay late or come in early to get the job done. Everything starts in the machine shop for us. If the blanks aren’t made, and you say the customer needs it in a couple days, the guys will do whatever it takes to get that order out. They’ll reschedule things and coordinate with other departments to have it out by the customer’s deadline.

We had a rush job come in last week. I told the guy we’d at least have a partial out to him by Friday. He called on Monday and said, “I just want to thank you. You’re the only vendor that kept his promise last week.”

**AS:** You win the Vendor of the Week award!

**CM:** Thank you! I thought to myself, “Wow, that’s nice to hear.” You usually don’t get those types of calls. It feels good when we can help our customers out of a jam. It’s a total team effort.

**MM:** One of the things that has helped us get to where we are is our “small business” mentality when it comes to customer service. Obviously, we’re not

a small company by any means, but we still have that “customer comes first” mindset. Like Clem said, you can call us at five o’clock on a Friday with a rush order; we’ll stay late, go pull your type, and bring it to the UPS drop box so you’ll have it on Monday. We’re not too big to handle those types of situations and our customers really appreciate that level of service. I think that’s how we’ve really kept a good grasp on our customer base and why people do come back to us year after year.

### INSIGHTS GAINED

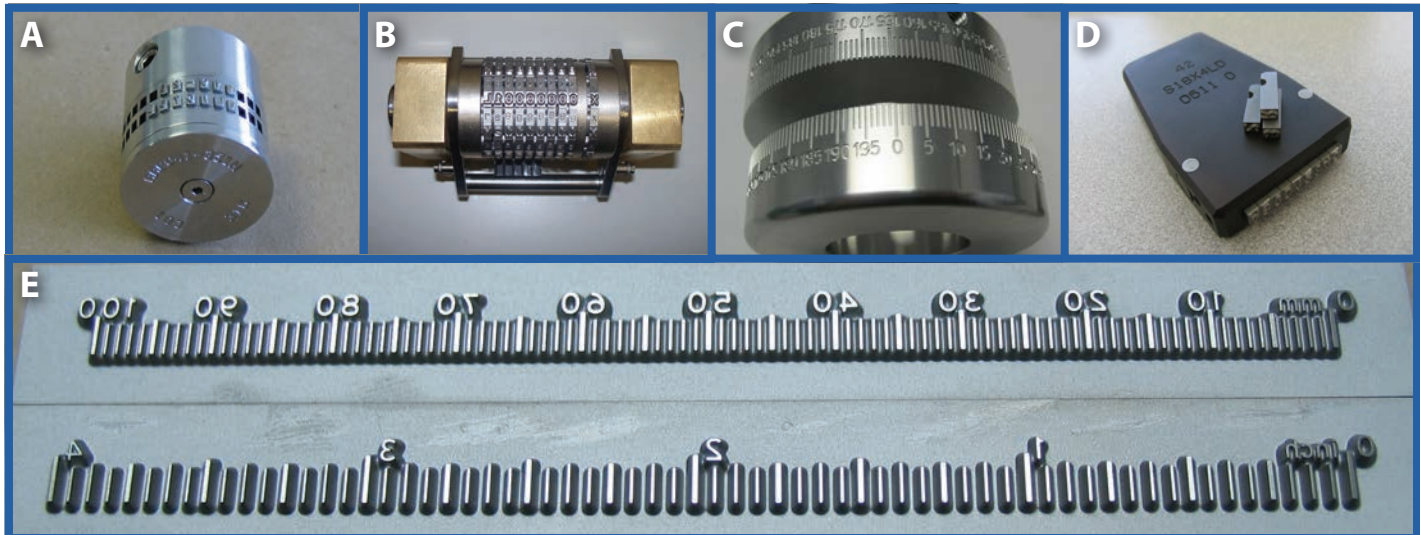
**AS:** Have you learned any lessons along the way—ways to do business, things to always remember?

**JM:** The most important thing that stands out to me is customer service. You’ve got to respond quickly. If you promise something and you can’t deliver, you have to let the customer know so they can plan accordingly.

**MM:** Our response time and communication skills are very important to our new inbound marketing strategy. Our inside salespeople in each location are the first line of defense—it’s up to them to create a positive first impression with our

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A: Custom rotary type holder for date coding cartons. B: Custom automatic numbering head. C: Precision engraved steel dials. D: Handheld type holder for industrial marking. E: Precision steel hot stamping dies.



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customers and new prospects. We talk about the Durable Difference all the time and it definitely starts with the level of service that we provide. We want it to be a very enjoyable and memorable experience so that the customers want to do business with us again in the future.

It's always been the service and quality that set us apart from our competitors. I think that starts from the top—from Kari, Clem, John, Jim, as well as Chris in our Worcester office—and works its way down to all the other employees. One of our most experienced saleswomen at our Worcester office, Jane Lewis, always says, "If we don't service our customers, someone else will." It really is all about the customers for us.

**KL:** We learned early to diversify and focus on our strengths and to direct our efforts towards what we do best. Over the years, we acquired a few companies that were outside of our normal comfort zone and had mixed success with those companies. We still own and operate two restaurants that we acquired from bankruptcy. They are now successful four-star restaurants. However, the credit for the success goes to the qualified and experienced managers hired to run them; so if lacking in expertise, you should surround yourself with competent people or just stick to what you really know and are familiar with.

Rubber stamp companies quickly recognized the importance of diversification when industry component suppliers entered into end-product manufacturing, and it drastically changed the landscape of the office marking industry. Today's stamp manufacturers are branching out into signage, digital printing, personalization, engraving, awards and other related items.

### CAPITALIZING ON STRENGTHS

**AS:** Can you give examples of some of your unique projects? I know you mentioned the high-end jewelry account when we toured the plant.

**JB:** The jewelry line has turned out pretty good for us. We bought an Agie EDM machine for one high-end manufacturer and it's worked out well so far. It's great to see the roll dies come out really nice. It makes us all feel good that we can do it. This particular account has really opened the door to some great opportunities in the jewelry field.

**KL:** Also, what has really helped us over the years is that from our inception, we have defined specific operating and manufacturing standards and procedures.

**JB:** What we're proud of is that we can pretty much make any kind of metal type a customer sends us. We can turn it around a lot quicker than if they were to bring it somewhere else. It's neat because here's some odd piece of type, and we've got the tooling and production guys that can turn the order around in a week

or two. We've easily seen hundreds, if not thousands, of different type styles come through this shop over the years.

**CM:** Countless.

**JB:** There are only certain products that we make for stock, but it's gotten to the point where the stock stuff isn't even our niche. The niche is actually being able to make a custom product to whatever specifications our customers require. We can make just about anything from a sample or a print and we take a lot of pride in that.

And we like challenges. The guys enjoy it because the work doesn't get stale. I think that's one reason why the guys stay here for so long—because there's always something different. It may be the same type of sequence, but it's always different in some way.

**MM:** For as long as we've all been in this business collectively, we still see new products and applications come in every week. These guys have the opportunity to put their heads together and say, "OK, how are we going to make this work?"

**CM:** I have to say that for all the years I was on the road selling, I always had good support from the inside. I knew that I could take something in, promise it, and it would be fulfilled. I brought in a lot of unique applications.

Probably 15 or 20 years ago, I got a request from a confectionery company to make Arabic type. Part of their product line was Arabic candy, and they had to mark a manufacturing date and expiration date on the wrapper. I brought it back to the factory and we figured out how we could incorporate the Arabic font and design a type blank that would fit into their machine to mark two lines of Arabic text. It worked out really well. At the time, it was a huge order of type.

**KL:** We certainly have made our mark on the industry when I really think about it. The markings made by our products have ended up anywhere from the White House to the surface of the moon. Striking dies made in our Rhode Island facility were used for White House medals. I can walk into any market and in minutes find any number of goods that were marked with our coding products.

**JB:** Date codes on the water bottles, chip bags, aerospace parts, forgings...

**CM:** We even did embossing seals for the Library of Congress many years ago.

### LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

**AS:** How is your product mix changing? Are you planning to pursue any new marking technologies?

## GOLD MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR

**KL:** Long-term product diversification is a challenge. However, for the time being, we will still continue to place a strong focus on the traditional product lines. We probably will be one of the last companies in the country to produce type and are very optimistic about the future of our traditional steel stamps and dies. But we're also hedging against a slow decline in traditional marking product sales as a result of companies switching to newer technologies like inkjet and laser. We just recently established our machine division, Durable Machine, located in our Worcester facility.

Since 2006, we've been the exclusive North American distributor for the Couth line of impact presses that we import from Spain—something that we acquired in our deal with Mecco Marking/M.E. Cunningham Company. But little by little, we've been adding other machine technologies into our product mix. We are basically looking for machinery where as we sell the machine, we also get the consumables business. If we sell a hot stamping machine, we get the metal type and foils. If we sell a portable inkjet printer, we also sell the fluids that go with it. We are delving into thermal transfer printing and laser marking, too.

**MM:** We recognize that technology is changing and we're trying to evolve with it. We've done a lot of research and teamed up with some strategic manufacturing partners to be able to present a full line of marking equipment including impact presses, dot peens, inkjet printers, hot stamping printers, thermal transfer and lasers. We don't always exhibit at the trade shows, but we do try to make it a point to at least walk the shows and hopefully identify new and different products that will fit into our sales and marketing strategy.

I think the fact that the government has been introducing more and more requirements for part marking and traceability has been great for us. That's why we continue to see new applications and receive new inquiries from all over the world through the website.

**JB:** We're even getting requests and orders for custom steel stamps from China!

**MM:** That's right—we just received an order for a few hundred custom hand stamps that are being shipped to different divisions of this particular company all over the world. They're inspection stamps with the company's initials.

**AS:** And these orders are coming in through the website?

**MM:** Yes, it's really opening up new opportunities for us that we otherwise would never have been exposed to. It's surprising to me sometimes that we receive so many international inquiries; you would think they'd be able to find someone more local to them.

**JB:** We're also taking the time to create samples to make sure that what they're buying is going to work for them. We go the extra mile just to assure them that we're looking out for their best interests.

**MM:** It's a cliché, but I think we go above and beyond what people would normally expect from a marking company. That's why we have the reputation that we do after all these years in business.

**AS:** Thank you all very much for taking time to talk about Durable Technologies. Best of luck in your future endeavors!

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A: Custom steel hand stamps. B: Precision steel roll dies. C: Steel hot stamping dies. D: M-E-Conomy sledge holder with OE striking hammer. E: Custom brass hot stamping dies. F: Custom brass printer's type for decorative hot stamping.

