

The armoured cable specialist

When cable manufacturer Phillips Cables closed its Brockville, Ont. operations in 1996, a group of its employees decided to start up their own cable company. The six partners—Shelley Bacon, Richard Trapp, David Chartrand, Kevin Charlebois, Joe Brunner and Todd Stafford—launched Northern Cables Inc., which was a decidedly risky venture considering the group had no business plan.

"We started out without a product, facility, machinery or market," explains Bacon, adding, "It took us six months to figure out what to do and where to start."



That was then. With a staff of 85 at its 65,000 sq. ft. Brockville plant, Northern Cables today operates 24/7 manufacturing three million metres of armoured cable monthly for industrial and

commercial markets. It sells to major cable distributors in Canada and the United States, and has come a long way from those formative years.

Northern expansion

From its inception, Northern Cables focused primarily on manufacturing interlocked armoured cables. Its first product, Teck90, is a low-voltage, armoured power cable tailored to light commercial or industrial applications. The waterproof and ultraviolet-resistant power cable is sold to major distributors across Canada.



When Teck90 sales peaked in Canada several years ago, the company looked southward with the aim of penetrating new markets. It secured a UL-listed licence for the production and sale of

Metal-Clad Cable in the United States. First sold in the Northeast, the armoured cable line was eventually marketed throughout the country. By 1999, Northern started producing its third line: AC90, another low-voltage cable (similar to Teck90, it is designed for dry, interior applications).

Over the past five years, the company has expanded the range of available sizes for these three products. It currently offers armoring in both steel and aluminum up to four inches in diameter, and can make coloured jackets up to two and a quarter inches in diameter. Composite constructions are also possible. In fact, Stafford says, Northern has the capacity to design, manufacture and test both standard and custom cables.

Charlebois says expanding the range of cable sizes was a smart move, as was the push to find new markets in the United States. "We encounter seasonal swings from one



market to the next, so by being in both markets we can switch our production over from one product to another when demand so warrants," he says, adding, "It helps us remain stable."

Rolling with the punches

Like other manufacturers, Northern took a hit when the prices of raw materials started to soar not too long ago. Indeed, there was little the company could do except hold its breath when the price of copper doubled over the past year. "Some of our cables contain as much as one-third copper," explains Chartrand, "and even though a lot of other important materials—such as aluminum, steel and some polymers—have seen sharp price increases, we didn't want to lose any customers." Thankfully, Northern's customers accepted the fact they were going to have to pay a little more during these unforeseen increases to get quality product.



To stay abreast of developments in the cable industry, Northern joined Electro-Federation Canada's manufacturing group, the Electrical Equipment Manufacturers Association of Canada (EEMAC), last year. Members manufacture distribution equipment, industrial controls, lighting, motors and generators,

wire and cable, transformers and wiring supplies. Membership gives Northern a voice on those very committees that consider changes to standards for licensing products.

Trapp says Northern does not drum up business using fancy marketing campaigns or promotional efforts. "When you do something as well as we do," he says, "word gets around, and repeat business serves as recognition in itself." He believes Northern has been accepted as a manufacturer that can be trusted to build and deliver a good product.

Even though sales have been really good with existing lines, Brunner says the company will be dedicating more resources to research and development in the coming years. He sees the addition of new product lines over the next two years, dictated by market demand. "No secrets to reveal yet, though," he says.

For more information on Northern Cables Inc., visit www.northerncables.com.

Northern Cables Inc.

We insulate all copper conductors for RW90 and THHN used in the manufacturing of our cables. Our custom extrusion lines have thermoplastic PVC-Nylon dual insulation, and thermoset cross-linked polyethylene capability. We also jacket cables up to 2.25" in diameter with ultra-violet resistant PVC. A full range of armoring machines includes high speed dual drives units. Custom length cables and long lengths can be produced as required to meet customer needs.



Northern Cables Inc. provides custom interlocked armor services on other manufactured cores supplied by the customer. The most common materials for armor are aluminum or galvanized steel. Choice of material thickness and grade can vary depending on the physical properties required by the end user. Other materials are available upon request.



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