DANIEL KURR

Chopping wood in the Smart Factory

Fabricators don't have to be in major urban centers to be successful. EMIT Technologies is based in the wide-open prairies of Wyoming – yet it is seen as a pioneering force in its industry. Digital manufacturing and robust partnerships across thousands of kilometers easily make up for any downsides their location may have, says CEO Casey D. Osborn.

The small prairie town of Sheridan in the north of the U.S. state of Wyoming lies no more than a hundred kilometers from the craggy heights of the Rocky Mountains. Once home to Buffalo Bill, the town makes its money from coal mines, winter sports and the romance of the Wild West. Yet Sheridan has also built a reputation for catalytic converters, compression systems and steel fabrication. Casey D. Osborn, owner and CEO of a local industrial fabricator, argues that its remote location is actually one of its strengths. "I don't think we would have the same corporate culture if we were based in a metropolitan or industrial region," he says.

A core business with significant fluctuations

As a second-generation owner, he is determined to keep the company strong despite its relative isolation – and that means embracing diversification. "Our core business – compression systems for natural gas plants – experiences significant fluctuations," he says. "That's why we decided to branch out by offering our material processing and fabrication skills to other industries as a custom manufacturer and job shop."

Minimal market research

Osborn first heard the name TRUMPF in 2009. "We needed some new machine tools and were looking to boost automation and integrate our material store," the CEO recalls. "We did some minimal market research, but TRUMPF immediately stood out as the best option. We liked how they were so receptive to our ideas, and we were impressed by the sheer variety of their

portfolio and their willingness to engage with our modest, small-scale business. We've been happy ever since and never had any reason to look elsewhere."

Shared direction: EMIT's new smart factory combines production and administration under one roof. That's the only way to get great results, says Casey D. Osborn.

Flexibility: EMIT is a long way from any major industrial region. So it often comes down to the employees themselves to create the solutions their customers need.

Chicago smart factory offers inspiration

When EMIT decided to transform itself into a smart factory in 2017, TRUMPF was immediately on hand to help. Aiming to establish a completely digital manufacturing system, Osborn merged his two existing sites into a new building covering a good 10,000 square meters. His team drew on various sources of inspiration, including the TRUMPF smart factory in Chicago. They invested in TruTops Fab software, a material storage system from STOPA and a TruLaser that slotted seamlessly into the fully integrated concept.

Pushing the envelope

Osborn is clearly proud of their new equipment – especially since it allows the company to make inroads into new markets. "Great tools don't end up being expensive. Obviously, they do require some investment, but they also motivate employees to perform at their best. They become a kind of extension of our creativity and work ethic." TRUMPF machines are designed so you can get the best out of them, he says. "And we want our people to have the confidence they need to experiment and push the envelope of what those machines can do!"

Facing challenges head-on

At the end of the day, survival in the Wild West is about being resourceful. "A major reason we have grown and acquired skills is because we couldn't simply cross the street to get hold of what- ever expert we needed," Osborn says, reflecting on the pros and cons of their location. If the EMIT team wants to respond fast to a customer request, they generally have to come up with the solution themselves. "We'll figure it out," is the company's go-to motto. "Challenges need to be tackled head-on, with no excuses. You have to believe you can do it!" Osborn sees clear parallels to TRUMPF in that attitude: "I don't see TRUMPF as a company that just sticks to the status quo. They choose to take calculated risks and never take the easy path."

"We want our people to have the confidence they need to experiment and push the envelope!"

Casey D. Osborn, CEO of EMIT Technologies

Chop wood to make a fire

Another of EMIT's mottoes is "chop wood". "Obviously we don't actually make anything out of wood, but the idea behind it is to embrace simplicity. Fire and water are the keys to survival. But if you don't chop wood, you don't have a fire," Osborn says. That's the attitude he expects from EMIT employees on both a personal and professional level. But he admits hiring people isn't always easy, because it can be tough to fuel their enthusiasm to move to the prairie. "What matters is finding people who enjoy what our community has to offer and appreciate this kind of lifestyle."

EMIT takes responsibility

Osborn is referring not only to the rural setting and the mountains but also to the local people. His parents, who founded EMIT 20 years ago, now devote all their time to the company's foundation, which provides support for early childhood education, seniors and environmental projects in Sheridan and the surrounding area. Osborn sees this as one of EMIT's key responsibilities as a community member: "There's a difference between just being an employer, and being a successful employer that is firmly embedded in the local community."

Production and administration under one roof

The ability to work as a team is another key survival skill – in the community, in the economy at large, and within a company. "Nothing works unless you have good relationships between sales, development, manufacturing and the supply chain," Osborn says. He explains how the new building has brought administration and production under one roof for the first time. It was designed with a single entrance, because Osborn didn't want people saying "that way to the shop floor, this way to the offices". As he puts it, "Nothing was allowed into the design of this build- ing that didn't clearly help production, the supply chain, sales and, ultimately, the customer."

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A partner who goes the extra mile

EMIT's collaboration with TRUMPF has been a genuine success story, which Osborn believes comes down to a combination of

community spirit, commitment and courage. “I think we’ve already built a strong partnership.” He argues that TRUMPF has remained a family business at its core, so it still has the attitude of wanting to give something back to society. The two companies also have the same inherent understanding of high quality standards. “It’s great to have a partner who you know will never let you down.” That steadfast support was particularly in evidence when EMIT was planning its transition into connected manufacturing, says Osborn. “We never had any trouble communicating and develop- ing the groundwork we needed to meet our goals. I’ve always appreciated that aspect of our partnership.”

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