

## De Boer Tools exploits untapped market niche

by Jerry Cook

Discovering an untapped market niche has led Gary De Boer, president of De Boer Tool, Mississauga, ON on an unlikely path that started from modest beginnings 10 years ago with the launch of his company out of his garage in Orangeville, ON to recently opening a sales office in China.

"We are working on the market in China right now. In fact, we opened up a sales office in China three months ago.

"Along with the new office in China, we are developing a complete new series of metric tools. Developing this new line of metric tools has been our focus for the past six months," De Boer says.

However, China is only one new market that De Boer has his eye on for new business. "We're working on the United States market right now as well. Our focus is changing down into the U.S. We are concentrating on selling lines of tools that we are particularly good at making and we have the quantities to do. We are starting to push into that market," notes De Boer.

Previously, De Boer's experience was in the tool and die industry. However, when his father passed away, De Boer took over his father's business which was involved in high-speed lapping. "I later sold that part of the business and got into tool and cutter grinding in 1996-1997.

"At the time, I saw a niche in the marketplace. What I found was that a lot of the local grinding shops either couldn't make good quality tools or they didn't have the sophisticated equipment that you needed to do this (complex) work," he states.

Shortly after, De Boer installed a Deckel S11 tool grinder. "I paid quite a bit of money for it and I subsequently discovered that my machine was only one of three such machines in all of Ontario. It was a (sophisticated) machine at the time and I ended up making tools that most other companies couldn't make as well as regrinding. From the beginning, quality was a major focus of what I was doing," says De Boer.

At the time, De Boer Tool focused on manufacturing small- to medium- sized custom tools made from high speed steel as well as some carbide.

"I became so busy that I was working night and day and I decided to buy my first Helitronic five-axis CNC tool grinding machine," he notes.

However, it wasn't only a matter of adding capacity that prompted De Boer to invest in that first Helitronic CNC tool grinder.

"We needed the capacity but we also needed the consistent accuracy that the machine could provide. I wanted to rely less on the skill level of the operators," he explains.

At the time, a major part of the firm's business involved regrinding of tools and making some special tools. However, De Boer had bigger things in mind. "We also wanted to increase the complexity of our tools (that we did) and the five-axis Helitronic grinder lent itself well to that. We wanted to broaden the range of work that we could do.

"Eventually, we got to the point where we realized we could actually make these tools. By 1999, we were well into the manufacturing of tools," De Boer states. That initial investment has paid off handsomely for De Boer Tool. Today, the company has 15 employees at its 8,000 sq. ft. facility in Mississauga. De Boer Tool specializes in precision manufacturing of carbide rotary tools.

At present, the company has seven Helitronic CNC tool grinders including four Helitronic Mini Power Production machines, one Helitronic Power R machine, and two Helitronic Power Production machines. Of these seven grinders, five have pick and place loaders giving them the ability to run lights out production on a routine basis. The firm also has two Helitronic inspection machines-the Helicheck and MicoCheck units. The firm also has two Helitronic inspection machines-the ToolCheck and MiniCheck units.

All of the Helitronic machines were supplied by Walter Grinders Inc., Fredericksburg, VA.

When De Boer began manufacturing tools, the company initially focused on end mills.

"The bulk of what we do today is still end mills but it no longer just standard tools. Now, we have a much larger variety of tools including different grades, different coatings, and different geometries for many different applications."

The tools that the firm manufactures fall into four broad categories: standard tools;encompassing a large selection throughout all the categories. High velocity tools, for milling hardened steels including ball nose, radius and flat bottoms in regular length long reach and tapered shank configurations); diamond coated tools (long reach, XLong reach); and aluminum cutting tools. The company supplies tools to the tool and die sector, aerospace, medical, military, telecommunications, and more.

Approximately 95% of De Boer Tool's sales are in the domestic market, but that will likely change once the sales office in China becomes fully operational. "Working through a friend of mine who is living in China, we just found office space recently which we are sharing with a company from the United States. We have hired sales people there and we have already started to develop some very interesting contacts," says De Boer.

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