

Integrated Composites/ACC Marine — where the aerospace and marine markets Meet



By Jennifer Sikorski,
CF Editor

CF: What is the nature of your company?

JJ: Actually we have two companies here under one roof. Integrated Composites, the parent company, designs and manufactures advanced composite structures for the aerospace and defense industry.

ACC Marine has a line of advanced composite rigging components and provides high-end steering systems to boat builders. Our list of customers in this industry is literally the who's who of boat builders in North America. We are very proud that they have placed a great deal of faith in us to supply them with critical components such as rudders and bearings.

As far as our specialty as a company, I suppose it would be our ability to deal with relatively large and very complex shapes, and to provide our customers with a completely integrated solution including design and analysis, prototype development, tooling and final manufacturing. I think that for a company of our size, this kind of capability is very unique.

CF: How many employees do you have?

JJ: 22.

CF: What is your company's background?

JJ: The company was founded in 1992 and was originally located in Santa Cruz, Calif. I started the company after leaving Lockheed Martin with the intent of keeping it small and focusing on engineering and development of advanced composite structures. The manufacturing capability we currently have was a byproduct of our design and development efforts. From the beginning, we were really more engineering focused rather than manufacturing focused.

CF: How has it evolved from its beginnings?

JJ: Well, I think that more than anything else our manufacturing capability has evolved considerably. We currently derive most of our revenues from recurring manufacturing activities, which is somewhat surprising to me considering our original intent. But companies tend to take on their own person-

alities after a while, and management is well served by understanding that and going with the flow. We have been relatively successful in the transition from pure design and development to manufacturing, but still try and remain close to our roots by taking on as many development projects as we can.

CF: How did you get started in the industry?

JJ: I started as a product designer in the electric motor industry in 1974. My first exposure to advanced composites was at Garrett in 1977, and I was immediately fascinated with the materials. By chance, I took a contract position with Hercules right after my stint with Garrett and found myself in the thick of composite materials and people who were very familiar with their use. Hercules



Joe Johnson
CEO & President
Integrated
Composites/
ACC Marine
Marina, Calif.

provided me with an invaluable opportunity to be exposed to both the materials and a prototype development atmosphere where we were allowed to apply the materials to a variety of applications. From there I went to Lockheed Martin, and the rest is history.

CF: What obstacles does your company face today in the regulatory or technical arenas?

JJ: I think that from a regulatory sense, since we use primarily prepreg materials, we aren't bothered too much by the regulating agencies. I also think that Californians in general are a little more accepting of environmental regulation, so I've never considered it a problem. Certainly, the tax, workers' compensation, and health care issues are big concerns to us, and we would love to see some relief in these areas.

From a technical standpoint, I am actually in awe of how many obstacles have been removed over the last 10 years. It's amazing to me that we now have the capability to receive

surfacing data from a customer via e-mail, manipulate it on our 3D software, transfer it to our 5-axis machining software, and end up with a part, and all of the communication is via computer! This is fantastic technology compared to what it was even 10 years ago. I'm very excited about what's next.

CF: What are your marketing efforts?

JJ: The industries we work in are so small, after 12 years either they know you or you're out of business. Seriously, our marketing budgets are relatively small and we tend to go the traditional route of a few trade shows, magazine ads and Web sites. However, I have found that the best bang for my buck is to hop on a plane and meet the prospective client face-to-face. This approach seems to work best for us.

CF: What development or research would you like to see happen to improve the industry?

JJ: Well, I certainly think that a dramatic increase in the supply capacity of the carbon fiber producers would help immensely. One of the primary barriers of entry for our products is the cost of materials. As soon as there is any kind of economic upswing or military buildup, the price goes up and the supply gets scarce. It's very hard to build an industry around such unpredictable price and availability of a raw material.

CF: Where do you see your business in five years?

JJ: Our current plan is to increase our market share in the marine segment to approximately five times 2003 revenues. We'll do this by continuing to build our OEM accounts and by introducing new products for both sailing and motor craft.

In the aerospace and defense segment, we have and will continue pursuing strategic partnerships with larger companies. I think that even more consolidation is likely and teaming arrangements will be the only way to survive in the future. But, like I stated earlier, companies tend to go off in directions no one ever anticipates, so we'll just hang on and have fun! **CF**

Jennifer Sikorski is an Editor of CF Magazine. She can be reached at 703.525.0511 or jsikorski@acmanet.org.