

by Rebecca D'Amico

Face-To-Face Strategy Works for Gorton Merrick

RD: What is the nature of your business?

GG: We are a contract builder of fiberglass parts. We partner with manufacturers to meet changing markets and regulatory demands in the FRP industry by providing options that include outsourcing FRP production, consulting on the use of vacuum resin infusion processes, and training to help transition new production methods. We use our clients' molds, as well as making our own molds for clients, to produce fiberglass parts using a variety of processes from traditional hand lay up open molding to vacuum infusion. One example of a project we are excited about is the Detling 71. We are working on the manufacture of a hull and deck for this 71-foot luxury power yacht, which is a big project for a young company.

RD: What is your company's background?

GG: We founded Gorton Merrick in June of 2004. We have had fairly rapid growth over this year. The type of work done has not changed much since our start. We started with the intention of being a contract builder and have continued on this path, but have grown with new clients and projects.

RD: How has it evolved from its beginnings?

GG: We started out working on projects for 29-foot boats. While we are still doing this type of work, we have branched out to variety of other projects and larger boats. We have been pleased with the growth in both the variety of projects and level of sophistication.

RD: How did you get started in the industry?

GG: I have a history as a business attorney, and have worked for manufacturing clients. Most recently I was general council and vice president of human resources for Indian Motorcycle Company. The co-owner, Michael Merrick, has a depth of experience in the marine industry as a production manager and general manager for various boat companies. Through this experience, he has made himself into an expert on fiberglass composite manufacturing. He even has a patent pending on a process that uses resin infusion to produce parts without conventional tooling.

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

GG: Our biggest obstacle is not regulatory or technical, but a struggle to find laborers. We

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have made ourselves familiar with regulation, investing in low-emission equipment from the beginning. All equipment is low styrene equipment. Because of this, regulatory issues have not really daunted us. Our biggest technical challenge is getting the materials needed due to shortages and rapidly rising prices in a variety of materials. This results in very long lead times for some of the materials we need.

RD: What are your marketing efforts?

GG: Our primary marketing strategy is one-on-one communication, actually going to visit our potential clients, meeting them face-to-face. We also have a website, giving us web presence. We didn't expect as many hits on our website as we have received, which we are pleased with. We are also starting to attend trade shows, attending ACMA's Open Molding Symposium in June. Overall, our best marketing efforts are through the one-on-one communication and customer referrals.

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

Co-Owner/COO Michael Merrick: Continued development in unconventional resins. I see resin as being a major element for continued growth in the industry. If we can take VOCs out of resin and make it more environmentally friendly, this will allow for continued growth. Also, with rising resin prices, our materials may be becoming less cost effective, which could allow other industries to have an advantage. If a new resin that is less expensive, yet still strong, was developed, it would help keep us competitive with other materials.

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

GG: We plan to build our own plant because right now we are renting a facility. We have an option on property in Denton Industrial Park. Once in our own facility, we see ourselves being capable of producing parts 100-feet in length, and increasing the number of employees to 20-30. We would like to grow into a variety of industries and applications, such as marine, automotive, aircraft, and marine accessories. **CM**

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