

ENTREPRENEUR

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C&B Corrugated Containers Inc. competes by refusing to stand still. Larry Cooper, the company president, puts great faith in the continued evolution of his products in a business that is markedly different today compared with a decade ago, and which is expected to change again within the next 10 years.



C&B
C&B Corrugated Containers Inc.
Creative Packaging Solutions

Anyone who thinks a box is a box should spend a couple of hours with Larry Cooper at C&B Corrugated Containers Inc., the Mississauga, Ont., company he founded with his then-brother-in-law Geordie Brown in 1982. Boxes and corrugated point-of-sale displays are not only Mr. Cooper's business, they are his passion. He turns them out in the tens of thousands. Any company in Ontario or Quebec that needs to package its products or neatly tuck them into easily managed containers for shipping is fair game for C&B's sales team.

Mr. Cooper's crew will research, design, artfully create and apply eye-catching graphics, produce and deliver the exact right size and right shape of corrugated box to not just to get the job done but to maximize its potential as a sales tool.

C&B can handle boxes as small as a six-inch cube or as large as 180 inches by 80 inches. It can and does create appealing point-of-sale displays for impulse purchases such as candy bars. Over the past 20 years, C&B has been part of a revolution in the corrugated container industry.

Along the way, Mr. Cooper has found out — to his advantage — that, when it comes to boxes, nothing stays the same for long. Not the customers, not the products that go into them, not the design, not the external graphics and certainly not the way they are made.

"This is a dynamic industry," he says. "It is an intensely complicated business. You have to be nimble. You have to be innovative."

Take costs as an example. World competition for paper products drives prices up regularly. The pressure to reduce waste and to create lighter yet equally effective packaging has become intense. Boxes have



Larry Cooper, C&B Corrugated Containers president: "You learn from your mistakes ... In the end, they all served to make us stronger."

BE INNOVATIVE

become a commodity, with prices rising and falling according to the demand at the moment.

"Thanks to automation and lean manufacturing, there is almost no waste in our factory," he says. "Waste is a commodity our customers are not will to pay for."

Those same new processes led C&B into its own form of just-in-time production and delivery to customers. The result?

"We have been able to close a 35,000-square-foot warehouse," he says. "We no longer need to carry considerable inventory. We can take an order, fill it and ship it within days."

A factor on the plus side is the company's half ownership of Independent Corrugator Inc., just minutes from C&B. That company produces the corrugated sheets C&B relies upon. The idea is, control the materials and you are better able to control the final product.

Equally important, C&B has focused on providing value-added packaging to its customers. Independent Corrugator even has its own in-house International Safe Transit testing laboratory, which also sells its services to third parties.

At C&B, there is a design team as well. It comes up with innovative packaging solutions to solve customer's problems. The team works hand in hand with customers, not only to create the best box for the job but to come up with graphic designs that turn a ho-hum container into an effective on-shelf sales tool.

"Go to any big box store and you can see how the industry has changed," Mr. Cooper says. "Five years ago, you would see a floor

model and then stacks and stacks of plain cardboard boxes holding the computer or television or microwave on display.

"Today, the boxes themselves become sales tools. They are designed and printed with driving sales in mind. That is where we come in."

Design can be crucial to customers, Mr. Cooper says. He cites the case of a client in Bracebridge, Ont., that makes seat adjusters for automobiles. In the past, the company had to reserve a large share of its production space to store and assemble boxes to ship its production.

"We came in, took a look and said, 'leave it all to us.' We came up with a new, smaller, lighter, more durable design that made insertion faster, easier and cheaper," he says. "We produce what they need every day in Mississauga and ship it to them in a form of just-in-time delivery. Their costs went down; productivity went up."

As the nature of manufacturing in Quebec and Ontario changes, so do the demands for boxes.

"Clients come and go. It is a dynamic business. Some head overseas but new opportunities always emerge to replace them."

That proliferation of new customers has

helped C&B realize an average 10% a year growth in sales since the beginning of this decade.

Mr. Cooper comes by his flare for boxes honestly. His father ran a company called Cooper Corrugated. Larry went to Lakehead University to study forestry and when he graduated in 1979, he joined the family business.

A year later, his father David sold the company. Undaunted, Mr. Cooper and his brother-in-law started C&B a year later. Today, C&B Corrugated Containers Inc. is owned by Mr. Cooper, his sister and his father.

In 1986, he and a partner started Independent Corrugator. Since then, he has had little time to look back, he says.

"You learn from your mistakes. I was 29 when I started this company, so Lord knows I made my fair share. But, in the end, they all served to make us stronger."

"What I can say is that this is a very different business than it was 10 years ago and I am certain it will be very different 10 years down the road. But that is one of those things that get you out of bed in the morning and get your blood flowing.

"Boxes are anything but dull."

C&B CORRUGATED CONTAINERS INC.

Head office Mississauga, Ont.
Business sector Corrugated cardboard containers and displays
Market Ontario and Quebec
Number of Employees 65
Web site www.corrugate.com
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