



TriStar Molding

Flexible, Focused and a New Future

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TriStar's story may sound similar to many manufacturers who have been affected by the recession, but there is nothing ordinary about this firm. Although TriStar had a diversified customer base (about 15% automotive), the recession of 2008 brought a 30% decline in sales almost overnight. TriStar had to reduce its employees from 31 to 19 to stem the losses. For an employer in the small town of Marcellus, with a population just over 1,000 people, this cutback had a painful impact. But today, just two years later, TriStar stands at 38 full-time employees and is stronger than ever.

TriStar has a great company culture that is based on hard work, resourcefulness and dedication. Nick DeKoning and his father started their custom plastics injection molding company in 1996, in a 1,500 square foot pole barn in Lawton with one \$5,000 piece of used equipment and introductions to several prospective customers. The business quickly took off and added three new machines. TriStar moved in early 2001 to the 33,000 square foot former Cree Coach building outside Marcellus, a move which allowed them to gradually add a variety of presses and ancillary equipment, including shuttle presses for over-molding on metal. Their growth was given impetus in 2005 when they added a 610 ton Toshiba press. This move necessitated the gradual addition of employees. The shuttle presses and the 610 press alone accounted for about six new employees. The company continued to grow until 2008, when the recession hit, and for the first time, they had to let go a third of their workforce. A well-established family owned business, valued by their clients, was faced with a significant loss in sales.

In 2009, the MI-SBTDC Growth Group team was referred to TriStar by the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). The Growth Group quickly assessed the situation and assembled a team to work with the company. Initial evaluation, which included a financial analysis, strategic planning and marketing assistance, revealed that some critical issues needed to be addressed.

The Growth Group found TriStar to be a great company that really wasn't telling their story as well as they could. Quality was a priority to them, but their marketing materials did not reflect this message. The Growth Group made recommendations to improve their marketing and sales tools to better reflect their image. They also worked on their pricing model and recommended they implement an MRP system.



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David McMorrow, a co-owner of the business with Nick and his father, stated, “The Growth Group team helped us focus our efforts and create an updated business plan, which our ISO certifying company found impressive. It has turned into a workable checklist. The group is helping us work on our quoting and pricing model, an area of difficulty for most plastics molders. In sum, the SBTDC Growth Group has been terrific, a great credit to their office. We look forward to completing our work with them.”

The secret to success for this company? It is hard to pick one thing. The family members who work in the company and who include Nick’s wife, two brothers and other family are crucial to the operations. David McMorrow notes that it is unusual to find, as we do in TriStar, family members who are each extremely competent in their areas of expertise. The integrity with which they run their business, based on their Christian values is also important. Attention to client needs and Nick’s ability and willingness to work with new customers through their technical challenges sets them apart.

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