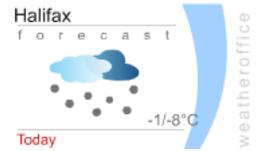




Section 10:
Industry & Technology



Polymer proves electric for Enerscan

By Catherine Roberts
Sat. Jan 31 - 7:48 AM



In the early '90s, Dale Robertson's ideas garnered little more than smirks and shrugs from electric utility aficionados doing the trade show circuit.

"Plastic in this business?" they'd say. "You've got to be kidding!"

In fact, plastic hardware for utility companies wasn't something Robertson had thought of a lot. His

passion was, and is still today, energy conservation and management.

But then his brother-in-law, a lineman, cornered him and asked, "why don't you come up with a better gizmo to do this job?"

He was frustrated by the bits and pieces of his trade that were less than optimally functional.

It took a few years, but finally Robertson agreed to take on the project. After all, out of seven siblings, he was the only engineer in the family. Who better to ask?

A few prototypes later, he went to a local utility company, made his own inquiry: "does this make sense to you?"

It did. A few more changes and Nova Scotia Power is more than impressed. They're buying them up. Similar responses were noted in Vancouver and eventually across the continent. Robertson's mid-span bracket became a great product advancement in the market and his company, Enerscan Engineering Inc., became the world's largest supplier.

"It's a clever design," says Robertson. "We came up with something that worked. In that case it's something that worked out really well for us."

More successes followed and eventually Enerscan Engineering was celebrated for its innovative use of polymer-based hardware for electrical distribution. The standard materials of metal and porcelain were indeed replaceable.

Robertson says the biggest boon to business came 10 year ago when Steve Gordon, Gene Timmerberg and Dave Eppinger came knocking on his door in Halifax. They represented Hubbell Inc., with 120 years experience, the biggest manufacturer of pole line hardware in North America.

They liked Enerscan's innovative products and wanted to do business. Robertson was ecstatic.

"It was like getting a call from General Motors saying we'd like to include your product in every car we make," says Robertson. "It was pretty good."

Today, Hubbell Inc. represents about 30 per cent of Enerscan's business. Other customers, a few hundred more, are distributors that sell to as many as a dozen end users. Robertson says they sell either directly or indirectly to a quarter of the estimated 3,000 different electric utilities on the continent. They also have sales in New Zealand, South America, Latin America and the UK.

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Robertson and his company have won a few awards over the years, most recently coming in second place in the Entrepreneur of the Year Award for 2008. The award he most cherishes, however, came in 2006 when Nova Scotia's Lt. Governor presented him with the Award for Excellence in Engineering.

"To be recognized by your peers is the ultimate reward," says Robertson. "That's pretty meaningful to me."

No doubt, there'll be more to come. As Enerscan's president, he says he still has about 20 concepts in his head that he'd like to develop. In fact, he often bounces ideas along to his son and daughter to get fresh insights.

"They're really smart," says Robertson of his 20- and 21-year-old son and daughter. And he's not kidding. But that's okay.

No one's laughing at him now.

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