

Client Profile

Learn how real businesses achieved success in their industries through innovative strategies such as expansion into new markets, new and differentiated product and service offerings, enhancing operations and cash flow management.

Woodburning tool manufacturer uses customer feedback for product innovation

The best way to build products that customers want is to listen closely to them about what their needs are. It's a process made easier if you are the biggest user of your own products.

That's the case for Cam Merkle, the owner and president of Razertip Industries Inc., a Saskatchewan-based manufacturer of wood-burning tools. Merkle is a bit of a wood carver himself. Okay, that's an understatement. He is a serious wood carver and carving birds is his speciality. He is so good at it that he is an internationally-known artist that is one of only three carvers with the designation of Wildfowl Master Artist in all of western Canada.

"The tools that I design, I primarily design for my own use," he said. "If I appreciate the features and the quality of the tool, the customers will appreciate that as well."

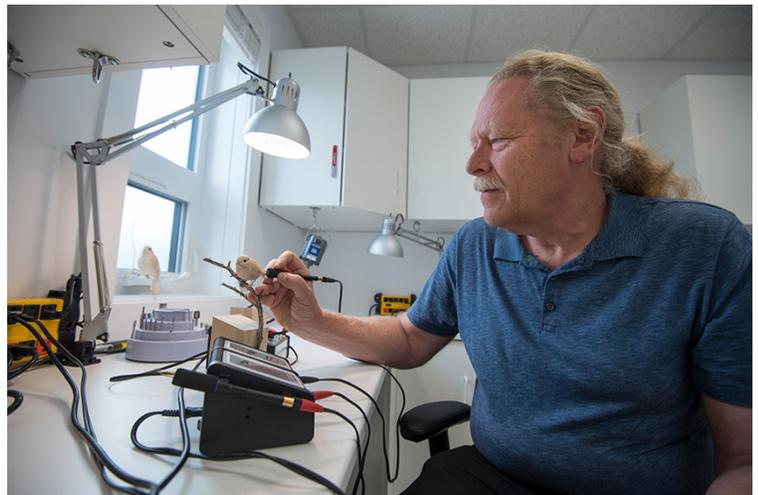
Razertip has customers all over the world, from the North Pole, Alaska to McMurdo Station at the South Pole in Antarctica. Merkle says customers are always coming up with new ways to use their products and Razertip incorporates a lot of that feedback to innovate new designs.

"We work very closely with customers for potential new uses to come up with tips or products that will meet the needs of that particular market. As a result, we're now manufacturing well over 1,100 different SKUs, including all tip shapes and pen types," he said. "It's grown from this little one-man shop in my basement so I can burn feathers on my bird carvings to something that I'm actually kind of proud of."

Merkle is constantly amazed at how many new uses his customers come up with for Razertip products.

He says that artists use the tools to burn designs on wood, leather, paper, fabric and all sorts of other surfaces. Woodturners use them to embellish and sign their work. In the fabric industry, they are used for precisely cutting synthetic fabrics. Dental labs use Razertip tools to trim mouth guards. Modellers use them to detail plastic and they are even used in the world of art restoration.

"People are discovering, almost monthly, a new use for our tools and that's kind of exciting," he said.



Cam Merkle at pyrography and wood carving tools store Razertip.
Liam Richards PostMedia.



Razertip employs 16 people in its newly-enlarged 14,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Martensville, a bedroom community outside of Saskatoon. All of their products are manufactured there and they take great pains to locally source as much of their supply chain as possible with very few parts coming from outside Canada.

If Merkle hadn't have taken a bird-carving class back in 1983, Razertip would probably have never existed. He started carving seriously after that and when he bought a woodburning tool that he didn't find satisfactory, he built his own. While displaying his work at a local gallery a year later, people asked him to teach a class and he started supplying his home-made woodburning tools to students.

From the beginning, Merkle would tell buyers of his tools that if anything went wrong with them, he would fix it and that remains Razertips' driving philosophy in customer support.

"Right from the beginning, I said if you buy a pen from me and anything goes wrong, I'll just fix it. The warranty is unconditional," he said.

Merkle believes in making quality products that last because he doesn't believe in planned obsolescence.

"Many companies, from what I can see, want to provide an artificially short lifespan for their products so they can drive more sales and we are the complete opposite. If you bought the first power supply I ever made and sold to one of my students back in 1984 and something went wrong, I'd still fix it for you."

Even though Razertip continues to grow and be successful, Merkle still finds time to practice his art and travels extensively to judge carving competitions.

"My passion for carving birds has grown, not diminished," he said. "The more excited I get about carving, the more excited I stay about the tools we're making here and I'm always thinking about how I can do this better or make that better. One reinforces the other."

CIBC Tips – Happy Customers Lead to Successful Businesses

Build a Relationship: Customers are the most valuable part of a business and if you focus on putting them first, they will ensure your success. Building relationships with your clients will help you better understand their needs and expectations helping you stay ahead of the competition.

Listen to Their Needs: When a customer feels valued, they will be more open to interact with you and share insights about them and their business. Listen to them, ask them what their needs are and what challenges they are facing. This can give you the information and answers you need to help you evolve your existing product / service, innovate and create new products or services and grow your business.

Stand by Your Product: To be successful, it is important that you stand by your product and give your customers exactly what you committed to deliver. Service and support come from everyone within your organization, from the receptionist to the sales representative. If you stand behind your product, clients will not only stand behind you and your business, they will tell everyone they know.

For more business tips from CIBC, visit cibc.com/businessadvice

As seen in the Financial Post

Published Oct 10, 2017 in English. This story was produced by Postmedia's Content Works commercial division in collaboration with CIBC to promote awareness of this topic for commercial purposes. Postmedia editorial had no involvement in the creation of this content.

