

# 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.

## Putting pedal to the metal

### Flourishing Port Perry welding company started with just a man and his truck

Growing up in a lower-end neighbourhood in Sault Ste. Marie during the 1970s wasn't always easy. For Bob Briere, it was particularly tough.

Kicked out of his house at age 15, Briere lived on his own while he finished high school and started an apprenticeship in “the only thing that I could do well” – working with metal. In 1987, at age 26, Briere founded BM Welding Inc. ([bmwelding.com](http://bmwelding.com)) in Port Perry “with \$1,000 and a beat-up half-ton truck.”

“I always thought I was going to have a business of some kind,” he says today. But to get there, he had to put in time as an apprentice: first at Soo Foundry and Machine for \$3.75 an hour, then at Algoma Steel until 1980, when 6,000 employees, including Briere, were laid off. He moved to southern Ontario, where he trained to be an underwater welder, but bad Eustachian tubes ended that career before it started. Briere ended up buying \$5,000 worth of welding equipment, paying back a three-month loan in two, and never looked back.

Over the years, Briere has picked up customers by word of mouth, but he's stood out from the competition thanks to both his willingness and ability to do any job. “How I stayed in business this long is that we do everything,” he says, “from big salter plows and hydraulic equipment down to stainless steel countertops and everything in between.” And he's amassed some noteworthy clients, including Durham Region and Air Canada Jazz, as well as the cities of Pickering, Oshawa, Whitby, Uxbridge and Scucog.

Briere picked up one of his biggest contracts with Air Canada after a new law came into effect stating that aircraft tires could not be stored on concrete. Air Canada had a sliding track on the ground and another higher up, which didn't comply. Briere proposed that he build the prototype of a new storage rack. “The boss looked at it and looked at me and said, ‘Out of the park, Bob,’” Briere recalls.

BM Welding's innovations for Air Canada include developing the standard kitting for the 2017 line maintenance vehicles. Briere's company has also built fittings for the interior of the response vans for Air Canada's 787 Dreamliner planes. As an extra touch, Briere cut out the company's logo in aluminum and put it inside the van above the desk – small things, he says, that make a big difference.



Robert Briere (right), founder of BM Welding Inc., plans to expand his shop and the family-run business with help from his sons Daniel (left) and Ryan (centre). Jon Nicholls Photography



Perhaps the most unusual job BM Welding has been hired to do is a life-sized moose capable of holding 2,000 pounds of soil for the City of Oshawa Parks Department. The eight-foot-tall sculpture currently resides in a parkette on King Street. Next year, it will move to its permanent home outside Oshawa's City Hall.

Over the years, BM Welding has grown from a man and his truck to 6,400 square feet and four employees. Briere's wife is in charge of the books, and their two sons, ages 21 and 24, both work for the family business.

"My oldest found academic subjects challenging but had technical aptitude," Briere says. "He served his apprenticeship under me, went to Durham College for three years and graduated with honours." His younger son doesn't want an apprenticeship — "he just wants my job next week," Briere laughs. "It's hard on me sometimes, but it's worth it."

He's planning to build an addition to the shop to house an expanded business. Briere says he'll put his sons in charge one day, but, he adds, "I'm still going to be the old guy yelling at them."

## CIBC Tips – Building a Business from the Ground Up

**Set Goals:** A business needs a road map to success. Set clear, measurable short and long-term goals based on your company's vision, and ensure your business has the structure and resources to support your goal. Monitor and track your progress, and adjust as required.

**Know Your Audience:** Customers are the forefront of a business's success. What are your customers' needs and is your company's vision aligned with them? Look at your products and your delivery and distribution channels. Identify reasons why your customers choose your business over your competitors. Having an in-depth understanding of your customers and the marketplace can help you meet their needs and establish a long-term relationship with your audience.

**Lean on Experts:** As you work on making your idea into a reality, consider getting advice from professionals such as a lawyer, accountant, financial advisor and a business coach. By surrounding yourself with a circle of advisors early on, and being open to what they suggest, you can benefit from their guidance to get you up and running with confidence.

For more business tips from CIBC, visit [cibc.com/businessadvice](http://cibc.com/businessadvice)

Published Oct 3, 2017

Content created by Star Metro Media

