



Sharing a secret

Marlin Steel Wire's acquisition of a TRUMPF TruPunch 2020 was possible because of Bonus Depreciation, a tax incentive from the federal government.

Entrepreneurial spirits keep Marlin Steel Wire strong

Drew Greenblatt borrowed enough money from his father to buy a lawn mower, and he hung out a shingle when he was only 11 years old.

"I cut 15 to 20 lawns," he recalled. "I was pretty industrious for a kid."

That he was. And still is.

Today, Drew Greenblatt has three sons of his own and a manufacturing company that exports to 30 countries that include China, Taiwan, Australia, Singapore, Ireland, Israel, Belgium, and the U.K. His Baltimore-based business, Marlin Steel Wire Products, is a 42-year-old enterprise that manufactures wire baskets, wire forms and precision sheet metal fabricated parts. Baskets from Marlin Steel Wire are everywhere, from biotech companies like Baxter and Roche to manufacturers like Boeing and Toyota, all the way to retailers like Macy's. TRUMPF uses baskets from Marlin at its Farmington, Conn. headquarters.

The company was purchased by Drew in 1998. As president and majority shareholder, he has more than sextupled sales, even in the face of formidable obstacles—such as a recession and a move out of Brooklyn, where space was tight and electricity was uncertain.

Marlin Steel Wire's "secret" is the company's investment in technology that enables the firm to dramatically tighten tolerances and quickly meet delivery requirements—wherever in the world a customer is located.

Drew attributes such swift delivery to his company's five wire-bending robots and a TRUMPF TruPunch 2020 with automation. The acquisition of this equipment was made possible by Bonus Depreciation, a tax incentive from the federal government that allows a business to recover the cost of capital expenditures faster than an ordinary depreciation schedule would allow.

All of this new equipment, purchased during the past four years, has paved the way for new business.

In fact, Marlin Steel Wire is seeing projects come through its doors that used to go offshore. A company that had been buying wire baskets and wire hooks from China for more than a decade contacted Marlin because of problems they were having with a sheet metal vendor's quality and delays. "That opportunity pushed us to get the TRUMPF machine," he said. "Last week we ran 57 sheets for this customer and unloaded 16,000

Drew Greenblatt successfully navigates his company through rough economic waters.

parts from the TRUMPF machine and then shipped to Chicago. Those were parts that used to be fabricated in China and are now made in Baltimore.”

Business sense and cents

For Drew Greenblatt, the secret to success is well-organized business practices and solutions.

One example of efficiency in action starts at the desk of each of the company’s 28 employees. “Every employee has an email address,” explained Drew. And everyone also has two, 30-inch computer monitors. After all, as he pointed out, the 15-17-inch screens offer limited viewing.

While employees are reading something, such as a customer order, on one monitor, they can check their email on the second one. With just a single computer screen you would spend four to five seconds toggling screens back and forth.

“This is where my value added is found,” he said, referring to the time savings—which can multiply seconds into hours.

And when it comes to developing the best solutions for customers, Drew explained that an impressive 20 percent of Marlin’s employees are engineers. “This enables us to develop elegant ideas on the front end. We come up with innovative designs for our customers so they have tools that move product faster and with less damage from internal handling, and of course less scrap. All of this keeps their total cost of acquisition down.”

A manufacturer’s manufacturer

Before Marlin Steel Wire Products there was Lifewatch, which specialized in commercial and residential security systems. Drew sold that company back in 1995—for five-and-a-half times its purchase price.

If you’re noticing a pattern, you’ve picked up on the obvious. Drew Greenblatt is not just a manufacturer; he is a manufacturer who has the soul of an entrepreneur. And he has the entire matter of U.S. manufacturing—and entrepreneurship in this country—at the top of his mind.

Drew is on the board of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), the Chairman of the Board of the Regional Manufacturing Institute and is a past-president and current board member of the Wire Fabricators Association.

Poised atop such a perch, the president of Marlin Steel Wire has a bird’s eye view of industry going on. And what he sees are small business owners besieged by the taxman at the same time they are wrapped up in the day-to-day operations of their company.

Their life is consumed with meeting payroll and other obligations that define the role of an entrepreneur, which doesn’t leave much time for advocacy work.



Still, “Not enough of us told them what was going on before,” Drew said. “We have to tell them how incensed we are now. If we all carve out a little time to talk to the legislators and administrators, then it’s not so burdensome.”

A call to action

Opening just one new factory has a ripple effect that involves truck drivers, restaurant owners, paper suppliers, and a myriad of other service providers, he emphasized. “This country should focus like a laser beam on creating a culture of manufacturing. The best jobs out there for most people are manufacturing jobs,” he explained, citing benefits in the form of good pay and health care.

Marlin’s president encourages his fellow small business owners to phone and e-mail legislators, and to get them to visit their factories.

“I think the American economy is going to come back and be strong,” he predicted. After all, he said, “In the 80s, everyone was dejected because Japan ruled the world; they bought Rockefeller Center.” In the 90s, he recalled, it was Mexico and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) causing manufacturers to give pause. “The last 10 years, it’s been China.”

In other words, it’s always something.

But like anything worth saving, the process of reinventing the U.S. manufacturing industry will require much effort. In the words of Marlin Steel Wire’s captain: “It’s not pretty, and it’s not going to be easy.”

Because the U.S. is competing with China and Mexico, “We have to be the most productive people in the world.”

Drew, who became a soccer coach when his middle son showed an interest in the sport, encourages manufacturers to take a page from his business playbook. “Spend more money on the innovative side of your business. Invest heavily in state-of-the-art technology so you can be competitive.”

Most important, he advised, is to “invest in smart people who come up with creative ideas. This is the linchpin for turning things around.” □

Marlin Steel Wire

Who: Marlin Steel Wire, Baltimore, MD, Established in 1998.
www.marlinwire.com

What: Designs, fixtures, welds and bends wire baskets and hooks.

How: TruPunch 2020 with SheetMaster Compact

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