Q&A

Dan Agius
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Tell us about how Nordex got to where it is today and the role it plays in this industry.

Nordex was incorporated in Connecticut in 1960. Back then, they built pick and place equipment for the printed circuit board industry. In the mid-1970s, my father, Jerry Agius, bought the company with some other investors and continued down that path, heavily involved with the semi-conductor industry, which can be a real rollercoaster. Toward the late 70s, Nordex got out of the pick and place business. We do still cater to the semiconductor industry, but our product line shifted to power transmission, miniature precision, and power drive components such as gears, pulleys ball bearings, that sort of thing.

My dad was a minority stockholder in the early 70s, and then he bought it outright in 1989, I started buying stock in the company then. My dad also had some machines in his basement. Before I was 18, I started learning how to grind my own tools, setup and run a Southbend lathe, a milling machine and a surface grinder in the basement of my family's house. I have been involved with the business from a very young age in the 70s straight through. I became general manager around 1985, vice president in 1987, and president as well as the majority stockholder since about 2000.

In the late 70s and early 80s, Nordex made standard components that are used in analytical and industrial equipment. Around the mid-80s, we started doing more custom work for our customers. So, we went from doing about 100 percent standard equipment and products to only about 28 percent. The rest is custom-made to the customers' needs. Today, on the other hand, we consider ourselves a product integrator where we don't just build or manufacture gears and shafting and that sort of thing. Now, we build multi-axis robots, for that matter, something the size of a 17-inch CRT.

That shift came about when I became more involved with the company. The standard parts business is a good, lucrative business, but I did not find it to be personally rewarding. I found that it was a lot more fun designing new products and doing custom work for our customers to better fit their specific needs and helping our customers with a product they're trying to come out with. We also got further away from the semiconductor business and more toward medical technology and a lot of those diagnostic-type products.

Let's talk more about the products and services Nordex has to offer. Could you tell us more about that?

I mentioned before that 28 percent of our business is still standard off-the-shelf product according to our catalog of standard components, which is a 700-page book. That book represents what our niche is—the types of tolerances and size of products we can make day-in and day-out. Where we go from there is helping the customer integrate it into a higher-level assembly. We're able to help the customer with the design and testing it, and we can provide our own testing services so that the customer can get a product from us that is ready to go as soon as they unpack it.

Say that I was a customer using the website or calling about a specific problem or detailed part I need to have manufactured in a timely manner. How would Nordex handle my situation and make what I've imagined a reality?

First, if you have a solid model, either in Pro/Engineer or SolidWorks — we have current seats in both of those platforms — or if you have something else, we can take a step file, we would prefer that you bring the model to our company so that we can open it and make suggestions or help you tweak it into something that's more manufacturable.

Another big service that we offer is that, yes, we're manufacturers, but we're engineers, too. I personally have spent a lot of time in front of machines trying to successfully program those machines. We have a hands-on experience in the manufacturing world. A lot of engineers today don't have that experience. You can get a CAD model that looks fantastic — and, often times, what engineers bring to us to help them build are quite elegant — but we can also offer practical experience and say that it would be more effective to make it this way and change your design such that it will cost substantially less. So, we can help drive the customers' costs down right at the design stage long before prototypes are made.

If you've ever been in a hospital, it's difficult to pass by anything that's beeping and not find a Nordex part in it. We're also heavily involved in robotics, typically small, land-based robots. It's an enjoyable field to work in and to help our country be successful.

What sets Nordex apart from other companies in this market?

First and foremost, we have a very large engineering department compared to other companies our size. Secondly, when you call Nordex, you get a live person on the phone. It's very easy to find our website and find what you're looking for online, but when it comes to the point where the customer says that they need to talk with somebody, they pick up the phone and they ring right into our sales department. From there, it's very easy to get into our engineering group.

We've had customers come to us when their chips were down. If something's got to get done on time, Nordex is the place to get it done absolutely whenever and wherever the customer needs it. That includes traveling to your site wherever you are in the country and working nights and weekends to get the job done. Our goal is to make our customers and those companies successful. That's where our reward is.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact Nordex, Inc., at (203) 775-4877 or visit the company's website at www.nordex.com.