

Arctic Compressor: small business, big success

Steven Potter, President of family-owned Arctic Compressor, has seen many changes in his small business roles over the years. Originally, he worked with Northshore Compressor which is a regionally-based business owned by his parents Peggi and Chuck Potter. Their business provides retail sale and service of compressors.

THE GROWTH

In 2008, Northshore Compressor began to manufacture and distribute their own products as well. This portion of the business grew quickly and in 2013, the owners purchased property in Superior, Wisconsin, in order to expand. In 2018, the manufacturing and distribution portion of the company separated into its own entity and Arctic Compressor officially began.

Many changes have occurred in the last two years for the booming business. They nearly tripled their number of employees and expanded their product line. In the beginning, Steven and his company manufactured a single compressor and containment fill stations designed to support the work of fire departments. Now, they produce several models of compressors. They have also added more options and upgrades to their compressors over the years to meet industry standards and enhance safety.

THE PRODUCTS

Their unique compressors are not like the simple air compressors traditionally found in a residential garage. They are high pressure compressed air breathing systems used by firefighters. This niche market has advantages and drawbacks. On the positive side, the business does not have many competitors; however, the downside is that there are also a limited number of consumers for the products since the majority of their market is fire departments.

THE RESOURCES

“Andy was extremely helpful in budget analysis. His suggestions led us to many funding opportunities and his knowledge of local professionals helped us find other resources.”

- Steven Potter

The Potter family found lots of resources to help them with this market challenge and other small business challenges. First, they worked with SCORE, an organization that offers mentorship to entrepreneurs. Their partnership with SCORE eventually led them to the Wisconsin Small Business Development

Centers (SBDC). Steven decided to meet with Andy Donahue at the UW-Superior SBDC to discuss cash flow analysis and strategies for operating and expanding the business.

“Andy was extremely helpful in budget analysis. His suggestions led us to many funding opportunities and his knowledge of local professionals helped us find other resources like an attorney and an accountant,” Steven said. Andy also worked with Arctic Compressor on employee hierarchy analysis and strategies to gain market share.

THE PATH FORWARD

Building brand awareness was one challenge that was key to the company's growth. Another challenge hit in 2020, when the COVID pandemic struck the nation. “We obviously could not have on-site visits during this time, so we quickly pivoted to video calls and found other ways to operate remotely,” Steven said. They saw a slight decrease in orders in April and May, and the supply chain was inconsistent for a while; however, the company's affiliation with fire departments deemed them essential so they did not have to close entirely.

Steven and his company have proven they are good at adapting to circumstances as needed. “The diligent planning from Arctic Compressor and Northshore Compressor shows that a small town manufacturer can have just as much success as larger organizations. The leadership that Steven and his team have put forth characterizes the strategic aspect of growing at the right pace, but also putting together a strong team that can set things up for a promising future,” Andy Donahue of the SBDC said.

The future looks promising indeed. The company expects to hire additional employees this year and hopes to continue growing their market share. They seek to expand their distribution nationally and even internationally eventually. Keep an eye on this quickly growing business to see their continued success!



Success stories from



Wisconsin Small Business
Development Center
wisconsinsbdc.org