

Article published August 26, 2002

Supplier drumming up sales where larger firms can't fill buyers' needs

Founders gained experience at O-I

By [MARY-BETH McLAUGHLIN](#)
BLADE BUSINESS WRITER

When they decided to start their own business nine years ago, Bob Huebner and Harley Cramer knew they weren't going to be able to produce as much as the giants in their industry.

But they also knew there were niches to be filled for customers needing large plastic drums for storage, and they figured their background in developing that business for Owens-Illinois, Inc., would help them identify and fill those special needs.

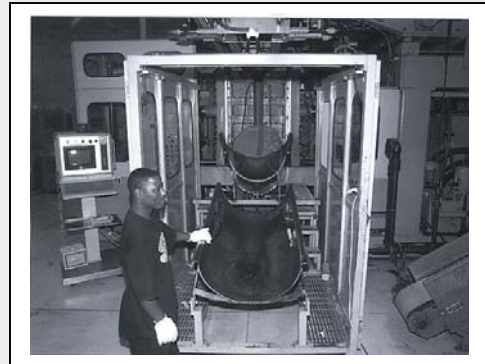
"We see our place as offering higher-end quality that appeals to companies that have special needs," said Mr. Huebner, president and chief executive officer of U.S. Coexcell, Inc., in Maumee.

Originally bankrolled by a Michigan firm called Walbro Corp. that was making fuel tanks similar to the way they planned to make drums, Mr. Huebner and Mr. Cramer have bought out the firm. They have 31 employees.

They expect to have \$8 million in revenues this year. They operate out of a 40,000-square-foot building in Maumee's Arrowhead Park that's stacked floor to ceiling with brightly colored storage drums that are sold to a variety of customers.

The partners came up with their company's name by combining the word excellent with co-extrusion, which is the process they use to press plastic into a mold that inflates the plastic into a drum.

U.S. Coexcell's niches include silk screening companies' names on the outside of barrels, offering any color a customer wants, and refining the process to offer a sterile drum for shipping of chemicals used in the electronic, biomedical, and pharmaceutical industries.



Don Brown keeps tab on part of the production process at the firm's building in Maumee's Arrowhead Park. (THE BLADE/DON SIMMONS)



SIMMONS)

"It's hard to find someone who wants to be doing these special things," said Mr. Huebner. "Most of our competitors say, 'Do you want blue or black?'"

Dorothy Clarke, purchasing manager for Betco Corp. in Toledo, said the family-owned business has been with Coexcell since its beginning, buying 30-gallon and 55-gallon drums for industrial and institutional cleaning products and having the name Betco silk-screened on.

"A lot of drum manufacturers don't do silk screening anymore," she said.

Betco originally went with U.S. Coexcell because it was offering a multi-layered drum with an inner layer that made it more recyclable and cheaper. "They have excellent delivery and service," Ms. Clarke said.

The company's partners are clear about division of labors, with Mr. Huebner handling finances, sales, and marketing and Mr. Cramer, a mechanical engineer and machinist, taking charge of the creation of new products and processes. He holds five patents for processes he has invented for the company.

They are particularly proud of their quality-control system, in which they take drums early in a run, during the middle, and at the end and fill them with a combination of water and antifreeze and then drop the drum three times from different angles onto a concrete floor.

They also have a "clean room" to test the size and quantity of airborne particles that may have gotten into a drum during manufacturing.

Mr. Cramer said the company's success grows from focusing on one item.

"This is our primary business. All the other companies in this field manufacture other

products," he said.

Small Business Profile is a weekly feature on local companies. To be considered, send information about your company to Small Business Profiles, Business News, The Blade, P.O. Box 921, Toledo, Ohio 43697-0921.