



The Natural Choice

Wood-Mizer offers a new spin on the bandsaw market. Dan Laskowski and his team explained the company's working philosophy to Colin Browning.

Wood-Mizer, the leading name in the manufacture of portable sawmills and the creator of the bandsaw mill, created the market it now masters. Not only has it expanded to satisfy a worldwide, diverse consumer demand, Wood-Mizer maintains an edge with a unique company philosophy.

"We are a Christian-based company," said Dan Laskowski, Wood-Mizer president. "Over the years, we have become involved with missions based around the world, helping them by providing sawmills. As a company, we have cultivated a benevolent attitude, and the expression we use is 'helping people to help themselves make their dreams come true.'" But this approach can only be put into action if the company itself has firm financial foundations. Fortunately for those less fortunate, it does. The bedrock of the business is the demand for its innovative product range.

"Our products are focused on the entry-level portion of the sawmill market," explained Jerry

Moll, Wood-Mizer production manager. "We sell directly to the end user who might be either individuals or private industries. These buyers then use the sawmills to add value to the trees they are cutting."

Dan's father, Don, and his wife Phyllis founded Wood-Mizer in 1978. The Laskowski family, along with partner Dan Tekulve, had been involved in producing aerial lifters, but the decision was made to sell that aspect of the business. The profit of the business was invested in a new bandsaw mill concept, which Don Laskowski referred to as a sink or swim decision. As a result, both the idea and company became a great success.

"What you have to remember is that we invented this market," Laskowski said. "Prior to our introducing the band mill, the only option for the small operator was a circular mill." The Wood-Mizer bandsaw has several advantages over the circular alternative.

A circular saw needs a blade much bigger than the wood it is cutting. Not only does it need a ▶

Above
The LT70 can be operated with a moveable remote pedestal. That allows the operator to control cutting from anywhere around the mill.



Left
The Wood-Mizer Molder provides the proper tool to make trim and moldings for the home

large diameter, it also must be thick, to prevent the blade from failing. This leads to two problems. First, big blades take a large engine to drive them, making them inefficient in terms of fuel consumption. The second problem is that thick blades waste up to 30% more wood than the thinner band offered by Wood-Mizer.

Considering that Wood-Mizer is targeted at the small-scale user, this figure is significant.

“With a band, you get much more wood and far less sawdust,” said Laskowski. “With our products, you can get more wood out of each tree.” The portability of the bandsaw means that the user takes the mill to the trees, not the trees to the mill. This is environmentally friendly as it allows for selective harvesting, instead of cutting down everything in sight.

Having developed the market, Wood-Mizer has run up against some diverse economic forces. But with the changing demands of the customer, the nature of the production process has changed.

“In the early days, we had long runs of just a few models,” said Moll. “Now that customers are demanding ever more variations on the basic design, we have to do short runs of all the different versions we offer. At the moment, the

customer has up to 30 different bandsaws to choose from. To cope with the new way of working, we have had to adopt several styles of lean manufacturing.”

Wood-Mizer also caters to a diverse demand pool. Customers in North America and Europe, where the typical bandsaw usage is around 40 hours a month, want all the added extras they can get. In the developing countries, where the products are running up to 100 hours a week, simpler designs are sought after.

That gap will be bridged by the Wood-Mizer facility being built in China. The heart of the company remains in Indianapolis, and it already has a plant in Poland; the Chinese plant is being designed and built to meet the requirements of both the industrialized and developing worlds.

Nikki Nichols, media relations director for Wood-Mizer, explains the necessity of the plant in China. Our presence in China involves cost effective production that will increase our global product offerings, she said.

If one combines its new sales figures with repeat purchases, Wood-Mizer is bigger than all its rivals combined. This position would not have been achieved without a well-respected product. ●