



- Home
- Log Out
- Search
- Article Archive
- Subscribe Now
- Editorial Topics
- Key Data
- Change Ups
- Book Of Lists
- Reprints
- Commercial Quarterly
- Media Kit
- Send News
- Gemini Publications
- Contact Us
- Future Focus Topics 2005
- Business Directory
- Syndicate Us

GRAND RAPIDS BUSINESS JOURNAL *EXPRESS*

BECAUSE BUSINESS CAN'T WAIT



BUSINESS JOURNAL PHOTO/MICHAEL BUCK

President and COO Richard Perreault said Gill Industries had already been doing global business; now it has an official presence in Europe.



Gill Enters European Market

By Anne Bond Emrich
Published: January 16, 2006

GRAND RAPIDS — Gill Industries established a presence in Europe with the Jan. 2 opening of a sales and engineering office in the Netherlands.

President and COO Richard Perreault said the move marks Gill Industries' first step toward becoming a global supplier of precision assemblies and stamped metal products. The company specializes in mechanism design and development for the automotive, office furniture and utility vehicle industries.

The European market is about the same size as Gill's North American market, Perreault said. The company has had some pre-established customer relationships in Europe for a few years among several large multi-billion dollar global companies, Perreault noted.

"Gill is a large manufacturing company, and in order to compete we have to have a global presence," he said "Our current customers, both automotive and non-automotive, have been asking us to establish a presence worldwide, and this move has

been very well received among our customer base already.”

Doing business in Europe is different from doing business in North America in that there’s greater focus on building and maintaining long-term customer relationships, he said, so Gill Industries needed people on the ground to service its European customer base. The intent now is to grow the business abroad.

“We have quite a few customers, like BMW and Mercedes, that are sourcing our products in Europe to be manufactured in the States and shipped to the States,” he explained. “All the sourcing decisions are made over there, and we just have not been present there in the past. This should help us maintain and grow our current business.”

The Gill Industries European office is located in the city of Hellendoorn. It has a staff of three — a program manager and two account managers — all of whom are natives of the Netherlands.

“We hired local people to avoid language barriers and cultural differences, and, certainly, so customers will understand that they’re dealing with local people rather than North American people,” Perreault said.

He said the company chose to start a sales and marketing office in the Netherlands as opposed to another country in Europe because it is politically neutral. People there tend to speak several languages, and they’re more diverse when it comes to cultural issues, he pointed out. Even with all the wars in Europe through the years, the Netherlands has always maintained a neutral position, he said.

“There’s an unwritten rule that it’s difficult doing business between the large countries in Europe — like between Germany, France and Italy — because there’s always that history that stays behind. So the Netherlands being neutral, that helps us.”

For the time being, European customer orders will be manufactured at the company’s 135,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in Grand Rapids and its 75,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in Trenton, Ga.

Gill Industries has enough manufacturing capacity to handle current production requirements, but when European sales top \$40 million to \$60 million, Perreault said the company will look at the possibility of building a manufacturing plant in Europe, possibly somewhere in Eastern Europe. No specific location has been selected as yet, however.

Company officials had been talking about developing a global strategy for about three years and started putting together a plan last year, he said.

In North America, Gill Industries supplies stamped products and welded assemblies to customers such as Johnson Controls, General Motors, Herman Miller, Continental Teves, Steelcase, Magna and Bosch. The company employs about 720 people across its two U.S. manufacturing facilities. It posted sales of \$123 million in 2005. Perreault said European sales accounted for less than 2 percent of total sales last year. **BJX**

GRAND RAPIDS BUSINESS JOURNAL EXPRESS

549 Ottawa Ave. NW Suite 201

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-1444