



FOUR WAYS TO PROSPER

Boxmaker's customer service and technical excellence keep it on solid growth path



Gerrity Corrugated Paper Products founder and chief executive officer Tom Gerrity proudly poses with the brand new, state-of-the-art EXPERTFOLD 230 A-4 folder-gluer, manufactured by BOBST, recently installed at the company's boxmaking facility in Concord, Ont.

**BY NICK GRIFFIN
PHOTOS BY COLE GARSIDE**

Behind every successful company lies a set of core principles that have helped guide that company to its current market prominence and renown—whatever the industry.

For **Gerrity Corrugated Paper Products, Ltd.** of Concord, Ont., those basic tenets can be boiled down to four core competencies: remarkably quick turnaround times; innovative software management of every aspect of their business; continual reinvestment in the latest finishing equipment; and, above all else, hard work.

Along with his sons Blaine and Scott, company founder and chief executive officer Thomas Gerrity operates a classic, single-location 'medium-to large-sized sheet plant' to serve a customer base he deftly describes as, "Broad to the point of doing everything for everybody."

"If it is made of corrugated, we can do it," says Gerrity, a high-energy 82-year-old who still personally oversees the entire plant floor operation with the youthful drive and enthusiasm of someone half his age.

Upon first arriving to Canada more than 60 years

ago, Gerrity initially took a job operating an overhead crane at a corrugated box plant, "Because I needed a job, any job," he explains.

"Very quickly I learned how to operate their corrugator," Gerrity recalls, "so that when their existing corrugator supervisor was about to go on holidays, the company asked me if I could operate it during his absence and I said, 'Sure, nothing to it.'"

"It was a brand new, 96-inch Langston, a beautiful machine, and I was put in charge of the nine people it took to operate it," he recounts.

"While I was running it I doubled the supervisor's production output and cut down on scrap, so when the regular supervisor came back the boss told him that he didn't know what to do with him because of the improvements made in his absence.

"They allowed him to work under me as second operator," Gerrity relates, "and he was grateful for that and worked for me for the next four years."

Gerrity then took on a job as a corrugated foreman with another company where he would spend the next 16 years, during which he rose to become a vice-president and general manager.

"When I left there I approached a large integrated company with a plant that has now become known as a sheet feeder," he recounts. "They were

intrigued, but due to other commitments at the time, they had to wait to put the plan in action.

"So they offered me a position as a troubleshooter—going between their plants and coming up with solutions for the various issues they were facing.

"Unfortunately, I found myself spending most of my time sitting around waiting for the phone to ring so I could go somewhere to solve a problem," Gerrity continues. "After three weeks I went back to my new employers and, even though they had



Head operator Danny Buttigieg monitors EXPERTFOLD's performance at the machine's touchscreen control panel.



increased the pay, I told them that it simply wasn't working out.

"I couldn't stand doing nothing: I hated it, I needed to work."

Having just celebrated his 45th birthday, Gerrity decided to take the big plunge and start up his own business.

As he recalls, "With nothing more than a slitter and a band-saw I got from my brother, I leased a vacant 9,000-square-foot building, we got sheets into the place, and with my wife sitting at a desk in the office and me in the plant, we soon started getting our first orders.

"As I would feed the sheets through the slitter my wife would catch them on the other end, after which I would strap them up, load up the truck and deliver the job.

"That's how we started—making just pads, dividers, and in some cases using the band-saw to cut off the corners for cutout wraps," says Gerrity, relating that the fledgling startup managed to turn a profit in only its third month of operation.

After finishing school about six months later, the couple's older son Blaine happily joined the growing family business.

"We had him get a haircut and a new suit and sent him out selling," he recalls. "He quickly built up a good deal of business: Within a few months he was selling \$50,000 worth of pads.

"Everybody at the time said we were stupid and couldn't possibly do what we said we could—buying full sheets from a corrugator in different cutoff lengths and different grades of board.

"Then we'd get calls from area sheet plants asking for orders as small as 50 pieces of one grade of board. They'd ask, 'When can we get them?', and we'd answer, 'When do you want them? Send your truck over and they'll be cut and ready.'"

After about two years Gerrity concluded that despite the volumes increasing month after month, the family business had to try something different.

"We couldn't get enough business



In addition to high throughput rates, the EXPERTFOLD folder-gluer is capable of gluing a six-corner box, ensuring optimal flexibility and performance in short and mid-sized runs of complex box shapes.

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The STREAMPACK batch collector installed at the end of EXPERTFOLD line.



The newly-installed EXPERTFOLD folder-gluer from BOBST has enabled the Gerrity plant to run a broader range of complicated and narrow box designs at very robust throughput speeds of up to 6,000 boxes per hour.

this way to keep growing in a meaningful way, so we added a simple die-cutter so we could make cartons, while adding more people both in the office and the plant,” he relates. “The former plant manager from my early employer came to work for

us and when Scott, our younger son, left school, he also came on full-time.”

As Scott Gerrity recalls, “Even when I was in school I was working in the plant 35 to 40 hours a week, which frequently included weekends.

“One weekend when we needed extra help I persuaded some friends to come in and help out in exchange for a case of beer,” he chuckles, revealing solid people skills and work ethic that spans generations.

According to Tom Gerrity, the first major new piece of equipment to arrive to the plant was an **S&S** partition slotter, soon joined by a die press.

“One day Blaine came in with an order for 30,000 taped boxes and we knew we couldn’t do that by hand, so we made our own taper,” he recounts.

“Those days we got away with a lot of things that would be unimaginable today,” he chuckles. “So much of our work is based on the premise of immediate turn-around, that we would do whatever it took to achieve it.”

Adds plant manager Scott Gerrity: “Even today, we take orders for our slitter jobs that we have out the door the very same day.

“We really pride ourselves on our turn-around, whereby 50 to

60 per cent of all our business is booked today and shipped tomorrow.”

This consistent ability to complete even the most demanding jobs within a day or two of receiving them has clearly payed off for the family business in a big way—enabling it to take on many last-minute projects that few other plants have the capabilities to execute.

On some of the simpler orders, according to Tom Gerrity, jobs are completed in less than two hours from receiving the order.

Nowadays this core competence is greatly enhanced with the ever-growing array of state-of-the-art production machinery assembled at the Concord facility over the years.

“We have everything and then some,” Gerrity enthuses. “We duplicate our processes because it’s our business to always be on time.

“For example, we have eight similar machines in a row so that machines are always waiting for the work—not the other way around,” he explains.

“We even have complete redundancy with our baler system, so that if one baler breaks down, we simply hit the switch and the parallel baler comes online.”

Scott Gerrity says the extremely fluid day-to-day nature of the business makes this flexibility a priceless core competency for the company.

“It is second nature for us to switch quickly from one type of product to another,” he states. “One day the folder-gluer are running every minute of our two shifts, while most of the die-cutters and flexos sit idle.

“The next day it can be the exact opposite.”

Today the Gerrity plant also boasts specialized expertise in inline specialty folding and gluing, which is especially beneficial when dealing with the smaller, very narrow and hard-to-handle boxes, as well as those with multiple gluing points.

This has been enabled in large part by the recent purchase of a state-of-the-art **EXPERTFOLD 230 A-4** folder-gluer with a **STREAMPACK** semi-automatic batch collector from global converting machinery manufacturer **BOBST**.

“Since we purchased the EXPERTFOLD, the difference that it has made for our plant has been extraordinary.

“It has brought a lot of business our way,” states Tom Gerrity, saying the new equipment has attracted a lot of work bypassed by other boxmakers who either can’t or don’t want to get involved in small-run production.

“They want the really big orders, but because they don’t want to turn anything down from a customer, they send those orders through us,” he explains, adding that installing major new pieces of equipment is a regular occurrence at the plant.

“Every year we add to or upgrade one major machine, and this year it was upgrading from an older BOBST Domino folder-gluer to their EXPERTFOLD 230 A-4 with a batch collector,” he says, adding the **Domino** machine is now used primarily to run the larger, less complicated boxes.

“The other folder-gluer doesn’t have the finesse of the EXPERTFOLD, which can glue six points at one time,” Gerrity states. “There’s also a big difference in speed.

“Instead of 2,000 boxes per hour on our older machine, running that same box on the EXPERTFOLD makes 6,000 boxes per hour a reasonable target.

“That’s triple the production, sometimes even more,” Gerrity enthuses, while lavishing praise on the quality, reliability and high performance capabilities of BOBST machinery.



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“My youngest son Scott went around and looked at everything out there and determined that this EXPERTFOLD folder-gluer was exactly the machine that we wanted,” he relates.

“Moreover, the semi-automatic STREAMPACK batch collector at the end of the line adds a high degree of flexibility with its ability to be adjusted to collect all the types of boxes that the line can produce.

“The EXPERTFOLD costs a little more than the other machines we looked at, but its capabilities far exceeded the others,” says Gerrity, adding any difference in the machines was quickly offset by its productivity levels and the quality of final product.

“In addition, BOBST had a guy in here for more than two weeks, showing our lead operator all of the things that the machine can do that we never even knew about,” Gerrity states. “They’ve also been coming back and showing us more ways the machine can be configured to make any number of products.”

To complement its manufacturing prowess, the company has also developed solid in-house expertise in the development of software used to operate its box plant, with many advanced features and functions not available on vendor-offered software.

According to Blaine Gerrity, “We started by getting a real computer whiz-kid named Darren Ramsay to program and develop the software.

“The original computer system started with a single module, but today our system is fully mature with everything from purchasing, docket control, pricing/estimating, scheduling, order tracking, shipping and invoicing, as well as account management.

“In recent years we’ve extended the system, giving our customers online pricing and ordering, job tracking and other features.

“Customers can know down to the minute when a job has been shipped,” he states, noting that Gerrity’s software has also been sold to many of the company’s locally competing plants.

This software proficiency helps the Concord plant to maintain a large inventory of stock sheets of virtually every type and quality of corrugated, as well as all full corrugator widths by various cutoff lengths—including specialty sheets like two-sided oyster and E-flute.

“Tell me who else you can ask for a thousand boxes by tomorrow morning and have them delivered,” Tom Gerrity points out. “The customer can order 20,000 boxes, and because we already have the stock on the floor, we can run them right away.

“We also keep track of all the cutoff leftovers from a job in a computer program, utilizing them for small orders.

“This way we don’t waste any material,” he states, pointing out that the plant often has well over 100 different cutoff sizes in stock at any one time.

In conclusion, Gerrity sums up the business as not just highly cus-




An inline MOSCA strapping machine (left) makes the compressed bundles of corrugated boxes coming off the STREAMPACK batch collector ready for shipment.

tomercentric, but also well-planned and expertly managed.

“We get orders today and some of them are to be shipped this afternoon,” he says. “Most are for

tomorrow, and very few will be for the day after, but the point is that people like to order from us because they know we can ship it to them in timely fashion.

“That’s the biggest single growing trend I see in the modern corrugated business—the JIT (just-in-time) inventory and Kanban scheduling systems. They enable us to hold finished products for customers so they’re available immediately and in the quantities they want.

“That’s our forté: That’s what we do best, and do it better than anyone else.” 

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