



Machining

Machining Companies in Focus: Dynamic Machining

Don Sears | Oct 08, 2019

What does it take to go out on your own and start a metalworking business? For Dynamic Machining, it's all about knowing the fundamentals of making things and having experienced business partners you can trust.

Starting a CNC machine shop is a risky endeavor. But with the right attitude, confidence and part-making experience, *Dynamic Machining* is proving that starting out small and earning trust from customers pays dividends.

In our profile of this Salt Lake City-based machine shop, we get to know its two founders and their drive to be their own bosses.

Dynamic Machining was selected by Better MRO after it participated in a 'Show Off Your Shop' sweepstakes on social media this past summer. The veteran-owned company is another strong example of a small job shop that has only been in business over the past few years.

The Birth of Dynamic Machining: From the Garage to the Industrial Park

Jason Smithson and Ryan Robinson have a passion for making things. They met on the job back at Triumph Gear Systems, a precision metalworking shop and military contractor in Park City, Utah, where they made aerospace parts. They became fast friends.

Smithson, who is the president of Dynamic Machining, spent six years at Triumph learning machining. They started Dynamic together in 2016.

"That was actually my very first machining job," says Smithson. "I'm a veteran. I was in the Marine Corps as a light-armored vehicle mechanic. And I went to a veterans job fair, and they [Triumph] said, 'We'll train you to be a machinist and got hired.'"

Smithson, who is 30 years old, says he started out on the lathe—and worked his way up the machining ladder like many machinists have done over the years. It's there where he found a passion for working with metal and making parts.

Robinson, who is the vice president at Dynamic Machining, worked in an entirely different department from Smithson and has a bit more experience. He's 41.

“My father owns an automotive machine shop, so as a young kid, I was always around machinists and learning how to use different manual machines,” says Robinson. “In 2008, I was able to get a position at Triumph Gear Systems working in their manufacturing division for close-tolerance gears for military, commercial and industrial OEMs.”

About three years ago they found a perfectly good 1993 Okuma Lb 15 CNC lathe being sold by a local University at a huge discount. They pooled their money together to buy it and had it set up inside their garage and started the business.



Source: *Dynamic Machining, Inc.*

“We went at it part time to see what we could do, and it just has kind of blown up from there,” says Robinson. Today, Dynamic is up and running in an industrial facility in South Salt Lake City. But it has been mostly run on a shoestring budget.

They’ve been very smart about their machine and materials purchases—and in networking with local companies. Working out of the garage had its limitations with power, temperature and space, but they made do.

They had a propane heater in the winter and a swamp cooler in summer. It was very cold and really hot in the respective seasons.

“Through our small network of other machinists and shops in the Salt Lake Valley, small jobs started coming in, and being a startup shop enabled us to guarantee fast turnaround times that other shops could not accommodate,” says Robinson. “That coupled with our experience working in shops that meet the highest quality control standards, our aim was to provide every customer with the same level of service and finished product.”

Before they knew it, Dynamic was very busy with jobs coming in. So Smithson took the gamble, and quit his job so he could work full time at Dynamic and “shortly after we moved from the garage to a medium-sized industrial space that would allow us some room to grow,” explains Robinson.

Just starting out and want to learn more? Read “How to Start a CNC Shop: Everything You Need to Know.”

Top Tip for New Machining Companies: Focus on Paying Off Equipment Purchases Fast

Dynamic Machining did things a little differently than other small shops we've interviewed. They now have 15 customers who order regularly. Dynamic makes everything from record player parts to food processing components to aluminum and stainless parts.

The companies next purchase was an Okuma lathe, a brand that they both had come to know and trust during their Triumph days. And with the acquisition of four more machines since moving out of the garage, Dynamic now provides precision grinding, CNC turning and CNC milling of aluminum, alloyed steels and nonferrous metals in low to high quantities for a wide range of industries and applications.

And customers came back for additional orders—and knowledge of Dynamic's work spread word-of-mouth and is expanding. Growth over the past three years has been dramatic.

They saved up, started small and kept their costs as manageable as possible. They bought everything with cash or put a few thousand dollars on credit cards that they could pay off quickly. They took no small business loans or investment from other partners or family members. While Robinson can only work part time at Dynamic Machining right now, they are heading toward having him be full time once the financials allow him to match his family's needs.

"Being out of the garage, we didn't have rent to pay. We didn't have all this overhead that we had to instantly start paying," says Smithson. "Where if you get a business loan for \$500,000, it's like, OK, if you don't have work tomorrow, how are you making that payment? So we did a lot of things with a different approach to it. ... We played it more safe and just took our time."

One of the ways they've been able to keep their capital costs down is by focusing on finding good deals on older machines—and machines with tooling. Local community colleges and technical schools tend to want to train their students on newer machines as much as possible, so it's been an excellent resource for Smithson and Robinson.



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What kind of challenges did they face?

"The biggest struggle while starting in a garage was getting customers to think you are a serious business," says Smithson.

Other challenges had a lot to do with managing the costs of eventually moving into a climate-controlled space. Machines are heavy and very costly to move. And there's the issue of power. Luckily, they found a facility that had three-phased power.



Source: *Dynamic Machining, Inc.*

Finding Good Deals on Used Machines with Tooling

And with their knowledge of the controls and their experience, they are very familiar with using top-notch brands such as *Haas* and *Okuma*—and they've found great deals.

"We just bought a used CNC machine that usually costs \$70,000 for \$20,000," says Smithson. "We've gotten pretty lucky because pretty much every machine we bought came with a whole bunch of tooling. When you buy a machine brand-new, you have to calculate about 30 percent in tooling costs. So if the machine is \$100,000, you got to figure you need 30 grand for tooling."

But there's more to it.

Even if they wanted to get a business loan to acquire high-end precision CNCs, they'd need to be in business for at least five years to be considered for one, says Robinson. By focusing on using older machines, they have been able to build up the company and build their reputation for on-time delivery.

It's working.

"With Ryan and I coming together to form a company and buying our first machine, we were like, 'Hey, you know what, we both have passion, we both have drive, why don't we make it happen? Why don't we work for ourselves and make it happen.' We share the same skills and values. ... Ryan and I love what we do."

That passion for the work is translating into a desire to bring on a new intern or apprentice in the next year or so—and in seeing the business continue to grow with more parts and production and possibly four or five employees. And being able to teach those with a passion for the industry.

"We learn something new every day," says Smithson. "We love it so much, just the whole process of building the company and making parts."

They've still got big goals on the horizon too.

"We've always focused on quality and felt like obtaining ISO 9001 certification would be necessary to remain competitive in this market at some point in the future," says Smithson. "However, we've already reached a point in which a bigger portion of our growing customer base is requiring their suppliers to be ISO-certified, so our next goal is to establish a plan to earn the certification as soon as possible."

Do you have a small shop? How did you start out? Talk about it in the metalworking forum.

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