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FASTEST GROWING COMPANIES

Success built around a can-do attitude

BY STEPHEN NELLIS
Staff Writer

One of the modern marvels of electronics factories is the relative ease with which an engineer can plug a design into a manufacturing line and pump out a million units. But if there's something wrong with the design, all you've got is a million mistakes.

Moorpark-based Laritech is in the business of making sure that doesn't happen. The firm specializes in electronics design and quick-turn manufacturing of prototypes and pilot runs.

It's having both engineering and manufacturing expertise under one roof that's powered the company's revenue growth of 63 percent between 2006 and 2008.

"We understand not only how to engineer things, but also how to engineer them correctly from a manufacturing perspective," said Bill Larrick, president and chief executive of the company. "Engineers can come up with all kinds of crazy stuff, but whether you can actually make it is a whole different story."

Laritech grew out of a side business that Larrick had run in his bedroom and garage. He'd design circuit boards, lay out components, build it and write software so the customer had a prototype to play with.

After his employer was bought out, Larrick found himself writing up a lot of reports and not having as much fun as he used to. He invested in a pick-and-place machine — a device that grabs tiny components such as resistors and capacitors and sticks them on a circuit board — and went into business for himself, starting out with five employees.

Laritech now has 34 employees in a headquarters it moved into earlier this year and seven employees in a new shop in San Luis Obispo.

On the engineering side of the business, Laritech provides services to firms who either don't have in-house engineering staffs or need to outsource a project. It has the expertise to play with the biggest of companies, such as Belkin, the consumer products powerhouse with a wide swath of the home router market.

"We're currently talking to Belkin. They want us to take all of the parts they use in all their products and find common

#20 Laritech

2008 Revenue: \$3.1 M
2006 Revenue: \$1.9 M

Increase: 62.6%

CEO: Bill Larrick
Location: Moorpark
Industry: Circuit board
design, assembly

www.laritech.com

parts and eliminate duplicates. They're a billion-dollar company. I'm sure they can afford to do that if they want, but they choose to outsource it."

On the manufacturing side, Laritech can handle just about any design a modern engineer comes up with, with machines capable of hairs-width accuracy.

"The idea was to fashion the shop with machines that are able to cover 99 percent of everything. We've only run into one customer that we were unable to do boards for because the boards were so large."

Oftentimes, Larrick said, companies who tap Laritech for design stick with the firm to produce prototypes and pilot runs.

"Ninety percent of the time, they choose to stay with us, so our engineering capabilities actually feed the manufacturing side," Larrick said. "This was by design, and it works out very well. As long as we don't give the customer a reason to go away, they have no desire to leave."

When it comes to the nitty-gritty of churning out the design, there'll be engineers there to oversee the manufacturing process and spot problems.

"When we get a design, this is the first time this has been made in the history of man, so there's always going to be something wrong with it," Larrick said. "We're able to overcome these obstacles specifically because we have in-house engineering. We provide that information back to the customer so that they can fix their design files so that on future builds



Bill Larrick built Laritech as a circuit board designer and assembler that can do just about any job, which encourages its customers to stick around.

those issues aren't there again."

That's led to some interesting product prototypes, such as the luxury steam bath Laritech worked on. The project included a CD player and mood lights along with a steam unit, all of which had to be controlled wirelessly. The engineering task was to make sure all the electrical current needed to generate steam didn't interfere with wireless signals and make six microprocessors work together in the modular system.

"This was by far our favorite design to field test," Laritech wrote in a case study

about the project.

Laritech also has just opened a repair shop in San Luis Obispo with seven employees. It has landed a contract to repair solar panels for REC Solar for the next year and a half, but Larrick sees possibilities for the shop after that.

"It's definitely an untapped area," Larrick said. "I'd think it'd be something in demand, but I don't know who's doing it up there. There's a local brain trust with Cal Poly, so I'm sure I could find some engineers who'd like to continue to work and live in San Luis."