

# AGNORA

AGNORA is a customer service company that manufactures architectural glass at its 280,000 square foot facility. The firm fabricates the largest architectural glass in North America (up to 130" X 300").

<b>Headquarters</b>	200 Mountain Road, Collingwood, Ontario, L9Y 4V5
<b>Year Established</b>	2011
<b>NAICS</b>	327214 - Glass manufacturing
<b>Employees</b>	70
<b>Major Expansions</b>	N/A
<b>Exports</b>	US
<b>Parent Company</b>	Kensington Capital Partners
<b>Other Locations</b>	N/A

## Organization

Most Ontarians know the town of Collingwood for being a four-seasons, world-class tourist destination. However, you might be surprised to discover that it is also home to one of the top architectural glass manufacturing companies in the world. The company, AGNORA, fabricates the largest architectural glass in North America at its 280,000 square foot facility right on Mountain Road in Collingwood.

Despite its advanced technological capabilities and expertise in the glass industry, the employees at AGNORA do not think of it as a glass company at all. Instead, CEO Richard Wilson notes that it is a customer-service company that just happens to fabricate glass. This attitude underpins the culture at AGNORA and is the reason why the company has grown to become such a dominant player in the industry.

[AGNORA's glass](#) can be found in some of the sleekest, most exciting, and cutting-edge projects in North America. Recent examples include air traffic control towers, the Cadillac Fairview Shops at Don Mills, an all-glass staircase at the Onassis Cultural Center in New York, and a 13-panel, digitally-printed glass mural depicting the history of basketball for Kansas University. It has also completed many projects for many high-end retailers on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in New York such as Microsoft, Chanel, Dolce & Gabbana, and H&M, and is a major supplier to Apple.

## History

AGNORA's story began in 2011 when Richard Wilson was presented with the opportunity to purchase the Collingwood manufacturing plant, formerly known as Barber Glass. Wilson had spent the previous 15 years in the construction industry, building homes and completing renovations for customers in Southern Ontario, and was one of Barber Glass' largest customers. Despite not knowing anything about fabricating glass, Wilson saw the deal before him as favourable and recognized its value because of his past relations with the company. He decided to take a leap of faith and purchased the plant, launching AGNORA.

Today, things look very different at the plant than they did in 2011. The company has grown from 6 employees to its current level of 70 workers. The offices are bright and modern with hardwood floors, floor to ceiling windows and ergonomic workstations. Wilson also knocked down the solid wall dividing the plant and office space and replaced it with clear glass, which generates the feeling that the plant and office employees are working side by side. Both the plant and office are impeccably clean and orderly, and if it weren't for the massive machines and rows of glass panes waiting for fabrication, one could not be faulted for forgetting they were in a manufacturing facility altogether.

## **Performance**

One might expect that having no experience in manufacturing would make things very challenging as Wilson looked to grow AGNORA into a successful business. However, Wilson believes this is his biggest blessing. His years of experience managing construction projects gave him a firm understanding of precisely what contractors and architects value. Namely, they need suppliers who can deliver high-quality products on time, and who have exceptional customer service. He also understood that the market was trending towards oversized glass, which at the time, was impossible to get in North America.

Spurring from this knowledge came AGNORA's strategy, which it continues to follow today. It differentiates itself by being able to produce the highest-quality and largest-sized architectural glass (up to 130" X 300") in North America while offering the best customer service in the industry.

AGNORA satisfies its commitment to customer service by taking a different approach to manufacturing than many traditional manufacturers. As Wilson explains, most manufacturing companies try to optimize production by running 24-hour shifts and getting the most profit out of their machines as possible. AGNORA, on the other hand, always has open capacity so that it can instantly service a customer if the need arises. For example, if a customer on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in New York has a glass-related problem, it might have to close its store until the issue is resolved. By having open capacity and a dedicated focus to customer service, AGNORA can quickly produce new glass and ship it to the customer, saving the customer thousands of dollars in lost profits.

The other way AGNORA excels in customer service is by fostering a company culture which is truly unique. From those working at the reception desk to the employees operating the tempering machine on the plant floor, everyone genuinely expresses that they love their jobs and are proud to work there.

One of the many ways in which employees have such a positive experience can be attributed to the company wellness program put in place by Wilson to ensure people are happy. AGNORA has its own masseuse, company doctor, a full-sized gym, personal trainer, lockers, shuffleboard game, wallyball court (a game that mixes squash with volleyball), and community garden, all available to employees free of

charge. Other fun initiatives include lunchtime euchre tournaments, company baseball games, and a prize wheel that employees get to spin on their birthday.

The result of all this is a jovial, family-type atmosphere that can only be truly understood after taking a walk through AGNORA's facility and speaking with its employees. Wilson notes that outsiders are often shocked when they hear about the amenities at AGNORA and are quick to criticize it for being excessively costly when in fact, it has been found to make the company money. Employees are more productive, rarely take sick days, they are excited to come to work every day. At its core, the program is about showing employees they are highly valued and management genuinely cares about their well-being.

When it comes to hiring new employees, AGNORA focuses on hiring for fit as opposed to hiring for skill. Wilson prioritizes mindset and character far above knowledge or skill set. As there is limited to no industry experience with oversized glass, AGNORA is full of competent individuals who can teach new hires the necessary skills for operating the machinery. Even more interesting is the fact that at the end of the day, it is the employees who decide whether a new hire is a right fit for the company. Three current employees mentor each prospective employee for three months, and at the end of that period, the mentors decide whether the employee should stay. This enables the employees at AGNORA to continue to surround themselves with motivated, enthusiastic, and passionate individuals.

## **Challenges**

AGNORA does not face many of the same challenges plaguing manufacturers today. It has no problem attracting talent because people are excited by the fascinating projects it undertakes and the incredible employee experience. Nor does it face significant competitive pressures, as it is unique in its capabilities in North America. Furthermore, AGNORA spends substantial time assisting competitors and disseminating its knowledge about glass fabrication throughout the industry by speaking at events and meeting with a variety of stakeholders.

The only significant challenge on the horizon for the company is determining how much and how quickly it wishes to grow. While Wilson recognizes that growth is usually a good thing and the company needs to remain innovative and competitive, he does not want the culture at AGNORA to change at all.

## **Prospects**

The future will see AGNORA continue to be an industry leader offering exceptional customer service and maintaining a first-class employee experience. It will continue to remain on top of market trends by having a close relationship with customers and leveraging its extensive knowledge of glass fabrication.

The company will also remain committed to the town of Collingwood and the province of Ontario as a whole. Wilson, along with the rest of the employees at AGNORA, loves living in the area and wants to give back wherever he can. AGNORA is especially dedicated to health- and wellness-related projects in the community such as the Collingwood hospital and the YMCA. By sticking to its values, AGNORA will continue to positively impact the culture of Ontario manufacturing and further contribute to the industry's reputation for success.

