

Armo-Tool

Armo Tool is a Tier 2 supplier and provider of “one-stop” precision tooling solutions, from small components to large machines that build Tier 1 parts. It has been family owned and operated since inception.

Headquarters	9827 Longwoods Rd. RR 32 London, ON N6P 1P2
Year Established	1969
NAICS	333519 - Other metalworking machinery manufacturing
Employees	215
Major Expansions	1976, 1982, 2013
Exports	US, Mexico, Brazil, Asia-Pacific, Africa, EU
Parent Company	N/A
Other Locations	N/A

Located in a one-story brown building on Longwoods Road, just southwest of London, Ontario, is Armo-Tool Ltd., a Canadian precision tooling manufacturer.

Soft-spoken yet charismatic, Armo-Tool’s president, Ben Whitney, has the advantage of being one of the select “shop floor-to-office” executives of the next generation: he has worked in the shop since he was 14. After obtaining an engineering degree from the University of Toronto, Ben continued at Armo-Tool as a die designer, project engineer, and PLC programmer. In 2008, equipped with a rich technical knowledge of Armo-Tool’s operations and a genuine understanding of his staff, he assumed leadership of the company.

If it seems like Whitney is well prepared for his role, it’s because his family has spent many years running Armo-Tool. In 1969, his grandfather, Ross Whitney, founded a small die shop on the edge of London. For the next 25 years, the business grew slowly but steadily. Ben’s father, George Whitney, revolutionized the company, nurturing leader-entrepreneurs and growing Armo-Tool to over 100 employees. Now, with Ben Whitney at the helm and Armo-Tool at over 160 employees strong, the Whitney trio still meet for a team lunch every Thursday.

People have always been Armo-Tool’s most valued asset. In 2016 alone, it has grown its workforce by 10 per cent. Roughly 95 per cent of employees are either college or university graduates. Most are professional tool-die makers or millwrights. As the largest employer of its type in the region, Armo-Tool prides itself on its high retention ratio. The wages are competitive, the work interesting, and the hours flexible enough to accommodate family life, leading to satisfied employees.

However, Armo-Tool does not rely solely on its reputation for its recruiting efforts: it actively builds partnerships with the educational community. Reaching out to students in college is too late, according to Ben Whitney—the key is to capture their interest in high school. Accordingly, Armo-Tool fosters relationships with the technology departments of local high schools, offering semester-long co-op placements that often evolve into paid summer internships. The company also contributes to educational programs that promote manufacturing, sometimes with unexpectedly positive results, as in the case of the robotics conference (sponsored by Armo-Tool) that led one “low-achieving” student to discover engineering and pursue a university degree in the subject.

Armo-Tool is a “one-stop” provider of precision tooling solutions. It designs and builds both small tools and, increasingly, the larger equipment required to build other manufacturing parts. Armo-Tool supplies tier one suppliers like Magna International Inc., Martinrea International Inc., and Cooper Standard Automotive. These companies, in turn, supply all major auto manufacturers, including General Motors, Ford Motor Company, Honda Motor Co., Ltd., and Mercedes-Benz. From its regional and North American customer base, Armo-Tool has expanded to Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Whitney reveals that the key to Armo-Tool's success is its business strategy: as he explains it, "Be amazing at what you do in your niche".

This means impressing customers with quality, reliable products, and possessing the technical expertise to take on their most difficult projects. It also means building strong relationships and trust. “In a pinch,” Whitney explains, “your clients won’t care about paying that extra couple of bucks if they’ve worked with you before and know you can deliver consistently and on time.”

Whitney believes that what’s true for Armo-Tool is no less true for the future of Canadian manufacturing. Of course, there is no question of competing with India or China on labour costs, but to drive down the cost differential, Canadian manufacturers increase efficiency through automation. Whitney believes that Canada’s true competitive advantage lies in taking on the most technically complex projects. The more difficult they are, the more customers are willing to pay. Canadian firms have the requisite technical expertise thanks to the strengths of the country’s skilled labour force: superior work ethic, training, and industry experience.

Bucking the post-recession trend for manufacturing in Southwestern Ontario, Armo-Tool invested record-breaking amounts in new machinery over the past three years. “Take this [custom automated production] machine, for example. We sell them for half a million dollars each. They ship to the U.S., Mexico, Europe—you name it!” Ben Whitney gestures proudly to a complex metal structure with a bewildering array of multicolored dials, wires and steel tubes.

Armo-Tool has created a powerful business strategy by leveraging the best that Canada has to offer: highly skilled workers, a sterling reputation for quality, and the experience to tackle the most challenging projects. Its uniquely Canadian edge speaks volumes—and the world is starting to listen.

Recent Developments: Armo-Tool acquired [Abuma Manufacturing](#) in September, 2017.

