

DAWIRE: Defense & Aviation Wiring

Defense & Aviation Wiring Inc. (Davwire) is one of Canada's leading contract manufacturers in the electrical/electronic arena. The company specializes in wire harnesses, electrical panels and electrical assemblies used in aviation, defence, medical and rail industries.

Headquarters	1180 Wilton Grove Road, London, ON N6N 1C8
Year Established	2003
NAICS	335930 - Wiring device manufacturing, 335315 - Switchgear and switchboard, and relay and industrial control apparatus manufacturing, 335990 - All other electrical equipment and component manufacturing
Employees	50
Major Expansions	2008, 2019
Exports	US, Brazil
Parent Company	N/A
Other Locations	N/A

Every entrepreneur has that moment: an experience, an epiphany. Getting frustrated with working hard for others but not being able to affect the outcome quickly enough; it comes to a point where they are inspired to take a risk and start their own company. For Mark MacKenzie, the Founder and CEO of Defense & Aviation Wiring Inc (“DAWIRE”), that ‘moment’ arrived in June 2003. Since then, he has never looked back.

As a young, enthusiastic graduate of Canadore College, MacKenzie started his career supporting the Forest-fire Water Bombing aircraft but soon moved on to Eurocopter Canada and began to learn more about the complex aerospace industry. Moving from one company to another, MacKenzie gradually gained the broad technical knowledge and organizational skills that would one day help him start and grow DAWIRE. In 1997, seeking formal business education, MacKenzie pursued a Masters in Business Administration at the Ivey Business School while concurrently working for Diamond Aircraft Industries and then consulting to Bombardier Aerospace. It was during this time that MacKenzie realized that he would one day start his own business.

“It was for an assignment”, said MacKenzie. “For one of my last projects at Ivey, I had to develop a business plan. Back then, I would have never believed that this would have lead to the founding and growth of DAWIRE”. After working for Bombardier and Spar Aerospace, MacKenzie followed up on his true calling and founded DAWIRE in 2003. The company started out as a contractor for manufacturers in the electrical/electronics arena. The business eventually evolved into specializing in wire harnesses, electrical panels such as power distribution and controls and electro-mechanical assemblies that served the defence,

aerospace, medical and rail industries. Now, boasting a team of 50 dedicated employees and 5 major OEMs as customers, DAWIRE has become a well-respected and valuable brand in the Canadian defence and commercial aviation industry, serving the likes of General Dynamics, Textron, Caterpillar Inc, L-3 Communications and Bombardier Aerospace.

In the beginning, MacKenzie and DAWIRE experienced various challenges and difficulties. When signing contracts with customers in the aerospace sector, MacKenzie realized that they required \$250,000 of capital investments to finance equipment. Although it was an unfavourable and risky choice, MacKenzie and his wife took the leap of faith and took full responsibility. Eventually, they ran out of space, continued to expand, and even rented two additional facilities in an attempt to manage the capacity. Due to inefficiencies in managing the logistics, MacKenzie decided to make a large investment to buy a new facility in 2008, with 40,000 square ft of space.

The recession of 2008 was a devastating blow for DAWIRE. “In order to survive, we had to downsize to 12 people from 75”, said MacKenzie. “However, we managed through the tough years. We continued to work against the current, and we manage to find new programs and contracts in the medical industry. This allowed our business to ramp up again”.

Through the various ups and downs, MacKenzie and the DAWIRE team developed an effective strategy. “I believe that there is a need for contract manufacturing in the marketplace and there always will be business opportunities out there”, said MacKenzie. “However, for the sustainability of our company, we need to have our own products”. Realizing the risk, DAWIRE has started to build a consortium of OEMs and post-secondary institutions to take advantage of government programs such as Scientific Research and Experimental Development Tax Incentives (“SR&ED”), Industrial Research Assistance Program (“IRAP”), Industrial Technical Benefits (“ITB”) and Business Continuity Planning Program (“BCP”) to take the business to a new level.

Along with the new strategy, MacKenzie is focusing on ensuring that DAWIRE maintains its competitive status in the marketplace. DAWIRE has a number of years and experiences that other competitors just simply lack. As the company grows based on referrals and national reputation, MacKenzie intends to maintain the quality of work that has earned him the credibility. Locally in London, DAWIRE has one other competitor. This number increases to 6 nationally. Now, competitors are starting to emulate DAWIRE. “We have always been involved in three sectors – land, aerospace, and sea both commercially and in the defence segments. Now, more are doing exactly what we are doing”, said MacKenzie.

“But most importantly, none of the aforementioned matters if there are no talent”, said MacKenzie. Although they never had a problem finding people on the technical side, DAWIRE is starting to find it difficult to find the right engineering people with the type of background they are looking for. They are in close communication with both Fanshawe and Canadore College, are beginning discussions with Western and they will continue to utilize employment programs offered by the government to consistently find the right talent.

Reflecting on the chat with MacKenzie and reviewing the story of DAWIRE, it clearly highlights what is most important for a Canadian manufacturer to not only survive, but also thrive. Continuously building up on the reputation of the organization through the right talent will help leaders such as Mark MacKenzie develop and foster the Canadian manufacturing industry. Through fit, grit, and hard work, DAWIRE will continue to pave paths for Canadian innovation, and it is up to the next generation of leaders to follow up on the legacy.

