

## KW Countertop

Postform is the manufacturing arm of KW Countertop, producing high quality and environmentally friendly countertops from various materials.

<b>Headquarters</b>	149 Manitou Drive, Kitchener, Ontario, N2C 1L4
<b>Year Established</b>	1997
<b>NAICS</b>	327990 - All other non-metallic mineral product manufacturing
<b>Employees</b>	20
<b>Major Expansions</b>	2015
<b>Exports</b>	N/A
<b>Parent Company</b>	KW Countertop
<b>Other Locations</b>	N/A

The word “green” is rarely associated with Canadian manufacturing. Typically, politicians and media outlets choose to emphasize firms’ shortcomings in this respect, rather than their accomplishments. In reality, there are a number of Canadian firms working towards implementing environmentally friendly practices, often going above and beyond what is required. With an overarching goal of sustainability and 100 per cent green practices, KW Countertop proves that manufacturers can be “green” and profitable simultaneously.

KW Countertop’s current president, Jim Young, founded the company in 1997. Establishing KW Countertop enabled Young to escape working under the harsh conditions (including Canadian winters) that he had faced as a renovator. Initially, KW Countertop cut and installed countertops for wholesale and retail customers throughout Southwestern Ontario; however, in 2015, the firm established its manufacturing arm, Postform Ltd.—Canada’s first “green” countertop manufacturer. With a new vertical integration strategy, KW Countertop now offers its own line of exclusive laminates, and projects that sales will grow 20 to 25 per cent annually.

Using new, state-of-the-art machinery, Postform manufactures quartz, granite, and laminate countertops low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Beyond its 100 per cent green manufacturing process, Postform differentiates itself from regional competitors through its exclusive product lines, strong reputation, and KW Countertop’s complete installation crew.

Given the capital-intensive nature of its business, Postform is always looking to cut costs and eliminate waste, demonstrating lean manufacturing at its finest. Specifically, Postform strives to reduce expenses

associated with its stone products in order to improve product margins. Relative to laminate, stone countertops maintain lower margins, despite their increasing popularity. In 2015, KW Countertop and Postform generated \$6 million in revenues, growing by \$1 million from the year prior. Currently, the two linked companies do not export to the United States or overseas; instead the majority of their sales come from Southwestern Ontario (Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, and Guelph areas).

With 31 employees spread between both firms, management tends to hire individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Yet the number one attribute that management looks for in potential employees is always the same: “Believe it or not, we are looking for people with common sense” notes Young. This trait is much harder to find than most people expect. In the past, Postform has hired construction co-op students from Conestoga College, but there is no formal apprenticeship program in place.

When reflecting on company priorities, Young emphasizes that management values its employees above all else: “The people are everything,” he explains. In such a labour-intensive business, it is important that employees feel respected and are in good health. Accordingly, KW Countertop and Postform supplies nutritious snacks and lunches for all 31 of its employees.

Just as KW Countertop remains devoted to its employees’ health and well-being, it also looks to give back to the community. For the past 15 years, Postform has partnered with Habitat for Humanity in Waterloo, donating every countertop that the non-profit organization required.

Going forward, what does the future hold for KW Countertop and Postform? “We would really like to expand from our 40,000-square-foot facility and continue to offer our customers rapid turnaround times, from the moment the order is placed to when our customers receive the finished product,” states Young. For the countertop manufacturing industry as a whole, Young believes the next trend is clear: “Porcelain. The next big thing in this business is porcelain countertops.” Whether or not this particular prediction comes true, the future looks bright for KW Countertop and Postform.