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TLX Technologies LLC

N735 Saratoga Dr., Waukesha

Industry: Solenoids and related electrical components

Employees: about 25

www.TLXtech.com

Waukesha-based TLX Technologies LLC's products are critical components in automobiles, motorcycles and off-road vehicles, as well as manufacturing systems that make products such as diapers and other consumer products that use large amounts of hot glue.

TLX makes electronic solenoids, which are mechanical devices that use electricity to move in a linear fashion. While there are thousands of solenoid manufacturers around the globe, TLX sets itself apart by making highly engineered units that can operate where other solenoids fail.

"The stuff we head towards is really high end and difficult to accomplish," said Neil Karolek, president and co-founder of the company. "We do one for Harley-Davidson, a compression release solenoid that is bolted to a cylinder head in a motorcycle. It runs at high temperature, near 600 degrees Fahrenheit. That's not something you want to go and get a Chinese supplier for."

TLX's solenoids are also used in the automotive market. The company sells to all of the U.S. Big Three auto makers, however its products are only now used by those companies for models produced for the European market, Karolek said.

"Again, these are higher tech components," he said. "One is used for the de-coupling of the water pump, on a clutch that disengages at highway speed when the natural air flow can take over."



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The company also sells its solenoids to the recreational off-road vehicle market.

TLX currently holds 10 patents on the systems it has designed. All of them have been custom designed for one customer's specific needs, Karolek said.

"One of our first customers needed a high speed solenoid, one that turns on and off 1,000 times per second," Karolek said. "It puts hot glue on packaging on a 30 mile per hour assembly line. This solenoid stops and starts the glue between applications."

Similar systems designed and built by TLX are used in a wide range of industries including packaging of consumer goods, exterior insulation materials for the residential market and disposable diapers. The one thing in common with all of the company's manufacturing systems is the high speed at which they operate, Karolek said.

"When these are used in diaper (assembly lines) they are taking the diapers down a high speed assembly line rolling at 30 or 40 miles per hour," Karolek said. "We have to put a little spot of glue on each one, thousands of times per hour as they go out the door."

TLX's solenoids are also used in commercial fire suppression systems.

"We make solenoids that open and close for FM222, the (fire protection) replacement for Halon (gas), which is used when you want to put out a fire without water," Karolek said. "It's used in a lot of places like businesses, chemical processing plants, and a lot of (commercial) kitchens have them."

Although it had about \$3.5 million in sales during 2009, the company had to lay off three employees. Karolek believes the company's sales will increase this year and hopes to add several new positions, but is not sure how many or when.

"It's all a cascading house of cards - the market, the economy," he said. "I'm very optimistic, though. I think that with just the programs we've already added, one in automotive and fire protection, we will hire some people this year. I just don't know how many."

Most of TLX's customers are Fortune 200 or Fortune 100-level companies. While many of them have cut back on employees and other costs, almost all of them have invested in technology, which has helped TLX, Karolek said.

"In the last four to five years we have seen some of the highest levels of development programs, and they've been across the board," he said. "The people that survive (the recession) will be rolling pretty good when this thing turns."

About Eric Decker

Eric Decker is a reporter with BizTimes Milwaukee, covering banking and finance, mergers and acquisitions, private equity investment, manufacturing and related fields. Eric is a 1998 graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Contact Eric by emailing him (contact information below). News can also be sent to Eric Decker, BizTimes Milwaukee, 126 N. Jefferson St., Ste. 403, Milwaukee WI 53202.

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