



→ Custom injection-molding company Team 1 Plastics focuses on being a global leader in providing high-quality plastic components to the automotive industry. Owners Gary Grigowski (left) and Craig Carrel (right) help create a team mentality with a steadfast watch on that goal.

A Clear Vision

The Team 1 Plastics team members have their eyes on one goal: becoming a strong global leader in supplying high-quality, cost-effective, plastic automotive components.

by KECIA BAL

As a custom plastic injection-molding company, Team 1 Plastics specializes in precision plastic components, helping to fuel the automotive market across the country and around the globe.

The growing company is based in Michigan but selling around the world, with a focus on the automotive industry.

Craig Carrel, one of three plastic engineers who launched the company in 1987, says that global reach has always been part of the company's aim.

"Our initial target market was the Japanese automotive supply base," he says. "We saw that as an opportunity. We've always had a global perspective since the company inception."

Now, more than 25 percent of the company's parts – manufactured for automotive suppli-

ers – go to other countries, particularly Mexico, one of the fastest-growing automotive markets in North America for production.

The company's fully automated manufacturing facility operates 24/7 and offers high-quality, consistent products delivered on time at a globally competitive price. Each production team member is trained to operate all of Team 1's plastic injection machines and has a deep understanding of the overall process for making any of the company's products.

Setup for Success

Team 1 has over 10 years of experience developing automated molding cells, and it incorporates the latest in plastic injection molding automation equipment. This automation allows up to 40 percent or more in savings compared to manual operations.

Team 1 Plastics

It also dramatically reduces handling damage to parts as well as errors associated with manual labor.

The company is poised to achieve more than \$10 million in sales this year, providing jobs for over 75 people.

Part of that success has been setting in place a clear vision for the company.

“We are maturing to the next level of business where we’re beginning to delegate more responsibility to our supervisors and managers,” Carrel says. “We are trying to make sure that we, as an organization, set down our core values and

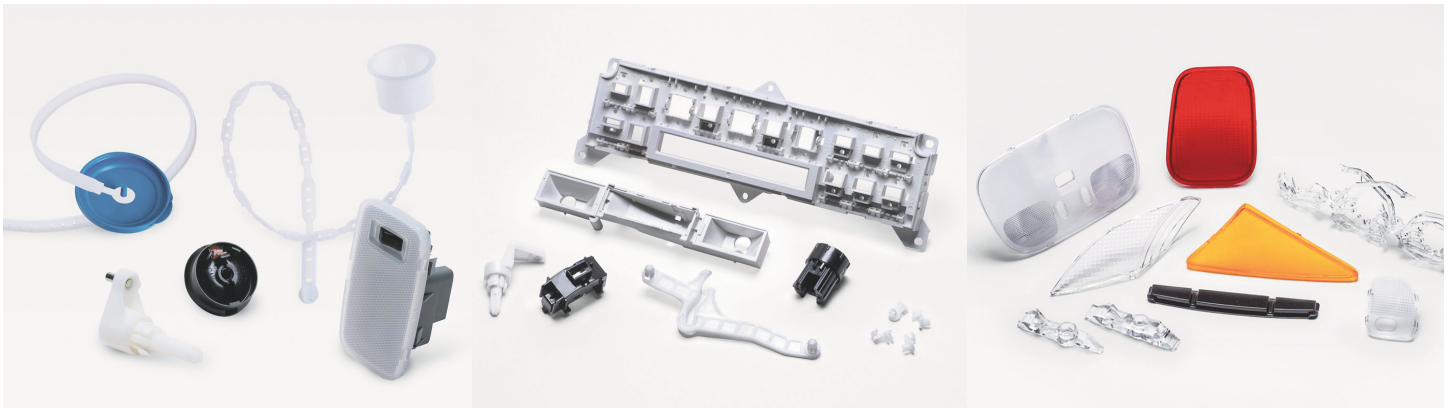
It also includes a laser-sharp focus on customer service, team member success, positive community impact and an adherence to free-market ideals.

“We’ve continued to grow,” Carrel says. “We’re entering the next phase. I and my business partner, Gary Grigowski, the original founders of the business, are deciding what we want to do down the road. As we move away, it’s even more important that we have something like the Championship Dream that guides the company even when we’re not around day to day.”

Next Steps

One of the company's recent focus areas is making sure that it can smoothly launch new products.

“We’ve really spent a lot of time and effort to improve that part of our process,” he says. “So when we do get that order and are in the process of building it, the development and preparation for production is a key focus area. If we do that well, then the production is easy. We want to be able to launch product in a way that makes it easier for our customers and differentiates Team 1 from our competition.”



➔ At Team 1 Plastics, there is a culture of teamwork built on ideals of helping individuals achieve success, starting with a safe environment. Employees also are encouraged to try new ideas, spurring the company's product lines and processes even further.

principals.

“When you’re building a company, you’re trying to build a cohesive team,” Carrel adds. “It allows you to set out what the company believes in, and it’s a good way for people to get up to speed. It also helps to eliminate people that don’t fit the culture.”

Team 1's leaders did that in 1999 with the "Championship Dream" – a collaborative vision that has guided the group and its growth over the past decade and a half.

The vision includes a dedication to becoming a recognized leader in the plastics industry utilizing continuous improvement, from processes to product.

Customer Service Priority

To help Team 1 maintain its high customer service standards, the company performs an annual Customer Satisfaction survey as well as smaller, more targeted, surveys throughout the year. They are kept simple to make it easy and not a burden for the customers to complete and provide valuable feedback.

“You’ve got to ask and constantly be looking for customer feedback” Carrel says. “We’ve always had high levels of customer satisfaction but when survey data shows that there are areas that we need to improve, it’s allowed us to identify exactly where problems exist and make changes quickly.”

Of course, the right team – team members who want to offer their best and provide the best customer service – is the key to executing all the different processes to execute flawlessly and deliver quality parts on time at a competitive price, he says.

“It starts with having the right kind of people in place,” Carrel says. “It’s being able to trust in your team and to be able to know that they’re going to make the right decisions taking care of customers and making sure the customer is given the best service possible. I think opportunities for great customer service happen every day in every type of customer interactions and transactions, and how each team member approaches them is critical to achieving customer service excellence.”

The company's leaders also make it a two-way street. Team members feel valued because the

Team 1 Plastics



“WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE AUTOMOTIVE MARKET AND SUPPORTING OUR CUSTOMERS AS THEY EXPAND THEIR BUSINESS.”

CRAIG CARREL, *co-owner*

company has a focus on individual success, starting with ensuring a safe work environment; they have over 5,500 days without a lost-time accident, and encouraging new ideas.

The result of team members empowered to do their best work with an eye on customer service is that they gain key expertise that benefits them, the company and the clients.

“In our business, once you start developing a relationship with certain customers, there are areas where you become experts,” Carrel says.

Global Challenges

In addition to training the next generation of innovators, the company’s global position is an ad-

vantage and a challenge.

“What we’re seeing is that there are constant pressures in terms of being a global business,” Carrel says. “You have to be competitive – not just in the U.S. or North America but globally.”

Carrel says he also sees an encouraging trend: more automakers are looking to keep business local.

“One of the things we like about automotive is that over the last 10 years, they’re trying to make the products where they make the cars,” he says.

The continent, including Mexico’s booming automotive market, is positioned for continued growth as former fierce competitors, such as China, experience increasing costs.

“Our automotive customers are less likely to

import parts unless there’s a huge cost advantage,” Carrel says. “There is a huge infrastructure in North America to supply most of the parts that end up in automobiles.

“With China and other places, their costs continue to rise,” Carrel adds. “That’s the reason Mexico is more attractive.”

As for the next few years, Carrel says the company will remain goal-oriented; a focus that sets them apart in the first place.

“We have done a lot of planning over the last five years,” he says.

“We are committed to the automotive market and expanding with our customers,” Carrel adds. “We really feel like we have a core group of exceptional customers that we can execute our plans with and grow along with them while making both companies more successful.”

→ Team members at Team 1 Plastics are empowered to do their best work and always maintain a focus on strong customer service, which promotes individual success and continues the company’s growth as a whole. The company is well-positioned to take advantage of a more advantageous automotive market for U.S. manufacturers.