

ENTREPRENEUR

Shock Therapy



Knowledge is power for static-control leader

By Linda Goodspeed
Special to the Journal

Dave Long, 55, says he would not have started Staticworx four years ago if his wife had not pushed him to finally finish his college degree in his 40s. It was precisely that nudge that made him take stock of life as a whole.

"When you're older, you look at things more reflectively. You realize there's only a certain number of years you can work. I thought I should do what I'm good at, what I like."

And what Long was good at, what he liked, was educating people about the risk of electrostatic discharge (ESD), the sudden, momentary electrical current that flows between two objects on contact.

It's a growing threat to manufacturers and users of electronic devices. The problem of ESD has exacerbated in recent years as computer chips have become increasingly smaller and less able to withstand stray electrical charges.

"Static electricity discharges we never feel are sufficient to render a device useless – pacemakers, cell phones, missile-guided systems, chips in computers," Long said.

Ted Dangelmayer, CEO of Dangelmayer Associates in Gloucester, an ESD consultant, said awareness and concern about ESD is escalating.

"In the last couple of years, our understanding of ESD's contribution to failure rates has changed dramatically," he said. "Electrical overstress is now considered the No. 1 or

2 biggest factors in electronic failure. Device sensitivity is also getting worse."

Long first became interested in the problem of ESD while working at Julie Industries in North Reading, an early supplier of anti-static products. He soon zeroed in on flooring.

"Flooring is the root cause of most static electricity generation," he said. "If you can eliminate the problem at the root level, it makes everything else easier."

In 2006, Long combined his fascination with ESD and 30 years experience in the industry to open Staticworx, a manufacturer of anti-static flooring products.

"People were telling me for 10 years I should be doing this," he said. "The scariest part was being willing to take responsibility of not only supplying material, but giving enough information so that the material gets used properly."

Long says educating the market about what he admits is a confusing topic has been critical to Staticworx success.

"Because ESD is an invisible problem, there is a certain amount of skepticism," he said. "We decided to take a chance, put everything on our website, give away information."

Education, in fact, is how Staticworx markets its products. Long spends 80 percent of his time writing blogs about ESD, trade articles, answering e-mail questions and presenting at seminars. The education-as-marketing model has paid off.

"There's a lot of product out there. Everybody has choices," said Andreas Mueller, president of Nora USA in Lawrence, a manufacturer of commercial flooring, including a static-control product for Staticworx. "What sets Staticworx apart is Dave's knowledge and their customer service. In my opinion,



Staticworx founder Dave Long develops flooring products to reduce electrostatic discharge.

knowledge and service are the two key components of any company in any market."

Long's business model also took aim at what he considered another industry deficiency: a disconnected supply chain.

"Most construction materials are sold in old-school models – manufacturers to distributors to contractors to end-users," he said. "No one in the food chain understands all aspects of the product. No one is educating the marketplace."

Staticworx flattened that model by selling its five ESD floor products directly to contractors, eliminating the middleman and giving Staticworx a price advantage and improving communication and service.

Staticworx products include rubber, tile, carpet, epoxy, and adhesives.

People who know Long are not surprised at his success with Staticworx, only that it took so long. He's always had an entrepreneurial streak. In grade school in Worcester he started his own newspaper.

"We had 250 paying customers," he said.

College was a circuitous route, beginning in 1973 at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and ending in 1997 at Boston College with a bachelor's degree in psychology. His career path was equally

circuitous through a variety of jobs. But he seems to have found his niche at Staticworx. Since opening in 2006, Staticworx's revenue has grown 315 percent to \$3.74 million. Long predicts revenues should be "at or near \$4 million" this coming year.

He said finding the right people is the biggest challenge for any entrepreneur.

"No business can operate solely on the vision of someone in the field for a long time."

Long has solved the people problem through outsourcing. The company has just six full-time employees.

His advice to others? Don't wait.

"It took me longer to take the chance than it should have," he said. "It's easy to get caught up in things. You worry you won't do it right, you'll make mistakes. There's safety in working for others. If I started 10 years ago, this company would be enormous. The opportunity was right in front of me."

Growth chart

Company: Staticworx

Business: Flooring products to control electrostatic discharge

Based: Watertown

2009 Revenue: \$3.74 million

Principal: David Long

Website: www.staticworx.com