



STRAIT-FLEX



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# STRAIT-FLEX®

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## DRYWALL INNOVATORS

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The old adage goes that necessity is the mother of invention. Seeing the problems facing the drywall phase of home building, Strait-Flex international came to the rescue. Defined by innovative leadership, the company offers a wide array of products that directly impact and resolve the problems faced by customers, contractors, and homeowners alike – in a more efficient and cleaner way.

A custom home builder for 21 years, John Conboy, founder of Strait-Flex International, could never get his vaulted ceilings straight. Soon after, he set out to design a product that would resolve the problems of edge cracking, perfecting straight alignment and maintaining the strength and flexibility needed to get job done.

“I got up there because I knew how to finish concrete, and drywall work is similar,” he said. “I tried to do the off-angle and I realized how hard it was, so I started to figure out how to make that easier to do.”

“I knew it had to be plastic, but I didn't know how to get the compound to stick to plas-

tic,” Conboy continued. “I was in my shop building cabinets, and I had glue on my arm which ripped out all the hairs and I said 'if I just could get fibers to stick to the plastic'. So I took a cotton rag, ground it up, put some poly urethane on the plastic that I had and mixed the cotton into the urethane.”

That eureka moment would lead to a patent for the development of Strait-Flex Drywall Tape in 1995. Following the initial run of the product in St. Louis, Conboy began showcasing the product at national conventions, displaying and demonstrating it to professionals within the field. What began in a small sector of the United States has now gone worldwide.



“I stuck with it for a year and a half, and I finally got it to work,” Conboy said. “After about two years I was running seven days a week, 24 hours a day and I was eight weeks backlogged. So I had to build a bigger machine.”

“Now, I have 30 products and we sell in 12 countries,” he continued. “I’m an inventor and a builder, even though I never went to school for engineering. I just see what has to be done and I figure out how to do it one step at a time.”

Based out of O’Fallon, Missouri, Strait Flex’s warehouse space totals 75,000 square feet. From tapes and patches to trims, tools and other accessories, the company continues to improve their warehouse systems to increase efficiency that enables them to hold cost down for their active customer base.

“The main line that I have is 180 feet long and two stories tall, and it’s a continuous process,” Conboy said. “I put rolls of PVC material on a line, we put glue and discreet fibers on it and we make the PVC look and

feel like paper. The main line converts PVC into the composite material we call Strait-Flex.”

Made up of 20 to 22 employees, Conboy places particular attention and importance towards training the sales force and nurturing relationships.

“I try to tell everyone in the plant to treat everyone like they're your child,” he said. “You want to teach them, you want the best for them, but you have to discipline them also. I want everyone here to get smarter and make more money, and I try to instill that.”

“We're in a global market, we're competing with everyone, and in order to have great products and provide great value to our customers, we have to be extremely efficient at what we do,” he continued. “I want them to come in and own that machine and try to operate it at 100% efficiency. I respect everyone and try to utilize their skills the best I can.”

## TRADITIONAL TALK TIME

As Strait Flex's market is continuing to grow, so, too, are their marketing efforts. The new version of the website, for example, is going to be extremely user friendly. But while

the digital platform is being refurbished and upgraded to meet current industry trends, Conboy still believes in the power and persuasiveness of traditional customer service.

“I'm never going to have a computer answer the phones here, I always have someone answer the phones because I respect the customers' time,” he said.

Even from a sales perspective, Conboy remains ardent in his approach towards a customer-facing, handshake-type strategy.

“Like most companies, I go to the best dry-



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wall contractor and demo all of my products to them,” he said. “Because they have the most guys, the highest skill levels, and they do the most work. So if it works for them, they will bring it into the dealers.”

Not to be outdone, however, Conboy also understands the power wielded by online influencers, and how they can help to harness the exposure of Strait-Flex’s products.

“I’m going to everyone that does drywall repairs and how-to’s on YouTube, I’m sending them our product so they can test it out and use it in their videos,” he said. “I have a

full-time college kid trying to work on that, and what I do is I bring the guys who do the videos here, so that I can teach them every aspect of my product.”

“It’s no different than Tiger Woods hitting a specific golf ball, or Roger Federer switching from Wilson to another racket; it’s going to increase the sales,” he continued. “In the drywall industry, we go to the biggest contractors in every city and try to get them to see the benefits of our product. We send out tons of samples, we send out probably about \$100k worth of samples a year to contractors.”

## WORD IS BOND

Equipped with the latest in data entry technology, the team at Strait-Flex is continually in contact with contractors and dealers in the industry. Driven to provide their customers the most in performance and value, the company prides itself on providing comparable product suggestions and technical information instantaneously. Whether it's by entering orders, checking stock, or tracing each order to its destination, online capabilities are a welcomed ally.

Having gone worldwide, Strait-Flex – and even Conboy himself – has worked with numerous suppliers since the product's inception. The admiration and affection demonstrated through these relationships exemplifies a strong bond.

“I work with everybody like they were a brother or a family member,” he said. “I treat them with respect, I try to make the best products possible, and I think everybody loves working with us. My word is my contract and people can trust this company.”

## A BETTER, FASTER FUTURE

Having seen his design vision come to frui-

tion – and grow exponentially at the same time – Conboy's plans for the future are as lofty as the invention that has now turned into a full-time, life changing opportunity and outcome.

“I would like to see it grow to \$50 million,” he said. “I think it's very achievable, we're going to bring in more highly-skilled team members. We have plenty of capacity in our 73,000 sq ft facility. I would like to get these products out there because they really help speed up the application time, they save money and they produce a higher quality finished job. Anytime you can improve a process, you'd like to get it out to as many people as you can.”

No stranger to hard work, Conboy's unremitting willingness to improve puts Strait-Flex into a prosperous and profitable future. “I always try to improve anything that's done,” he said. “I love creating anything better, faster and more efficient. Really, that's why I get up in the morning; just to improve anything I can. Who can I help? What can I improve? It's all about constant improvement.”

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