

New space expands the company's frontiers

Webster-based Classic Automation ships to clients in 80 countries

By NATE DOUGHERTY

The sprawling 41,000-square-foot facility where Classic Automation LLC makes its home is a long way from where it started.

Fritz Ruebeck started the company in 2003 inside his Webster home, selling replacement parts and offering repair services for installed control systems and drives. The new and vastly larger

Classic Automation LLC

Provider of parts, products and services to users of installed control systems and drives
Year founded: 2003
2015 ranking: 88
Top executive: Fritz Ruebeck, president
Current employment: 38
Headquarters: Webster
Website: classicautomation.com

capacity is an important reason for the company's success, Ruebeck said.

"Because of the needs of our clients, we really have to be in the exact part number business," he said. "When they have a part go out, we need to have that exact part and have it available so we can deliver it to them on an emergency basis. A lot of companies don't want to hold inventory, so we have to hold all these parts so we can be responsive when they need a part."

For many clients, Classic Automation becomes a problem-solver for issues others are unable to solve, said David Smith, vice president of technical operations.

"I had a guy who made children's books in California call because they needed a part," Smith noted. "He said, 'We talked to the machine builder and they couldn't help and talked to the manufacturer and they couldn't help, but you were able to solve the problem.' That's a good feeling."

Because there is often uncertainty among clients as to what part may be in need of repair, Classic Automation also has to be responsive, Ruebeck said.

"If a customer has a problem and something isn't working, they may ask for a part but aren't sure if that will solve the problem," he said. "Then we have to provide them support to make sure we find the right fit. That makes our custom-



The company outgrew its 12,000-square-foot space on Monroe Avenue and moved to a former Xerox Corp. facility on Salt Road in Webster. It has grown its workforce from 18 employees when the company moved in 2013 to 38.

Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

er service department so important, as well as our test and repair department."

That level of responsiveness also can make for a very full warehouse, Ruebeck added.

"We probably have a quarter-million circuit boards at the ready," he noted.

The company's reach is global, Ruebeck said, with nearly all clients outside New York and close to 50 percent of them out of the United States. The company ships to some 80 different countries.

"It's a nice business to be in, but there

are a lot of competitors out there, both in the United States and around the world," he said. "We have to compete on viability, on price and also on reputation, so we need to be credible and be able to test these parts."

Though the field may be crowded, the company's model is strong given the tendency for manufacturers to keep what they have rather than make larger investments in new and more expensive technologies, Smith said.

"The users out there want to keep their old stuff running," he said. "It's a great model and helps people save money, and from our side it's very interesting. In the engineering field there's a tendency to always want the latest and greatest, but this is something challenging in itself. We get to work on older technology, but especially for our repair department they're using newer techniques to do it."

The company has grown its workforce steadily since Ruebeck moved the offices out of his home in 2006 and into a building on Monroe Avenue. Within seven years the company outgrew the 12,000-square-foot space and moved to a former Xerox Corp. facility on Salt Road in Webster. It has grown its work-

force from 18 employees when the company moved in 2013 to 38.

The new setting gave Classic Automation more room to expand, physically and in terms of sales. Ruebeck noted in 2013 the company saw 5 percent growth, but in the first two full years after the move its growth jumped to double digits—21 percent in 2014 and 14 percent in 2015.

The company is also looking into new areas for expansion, Ruebeck said.

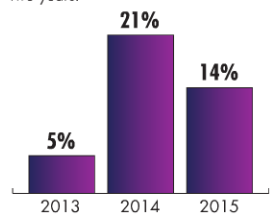
"It's a great business, and because it's so international and so diverse by industry we're not constrained by the downturns in any one area," he said. "We've been able to be steady and grow because we're spread out in so many industries, so areas like oil and gas where no one is buying anything right now don't affect you too much."

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By the numbers

The firm logged double-digit percentage revenue growth each of the past two years.



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