

It's a knockout

by Heike Dieckmann

Accentra facts:

Founded: 2003
HQ: Newtown, USA
European office:
Munich, Germany
Founder/CEO:
Todd Moses
Sales coverage:
Over 100 countries

With its PaperPro staplers still going strong, Accentra is warming up for another round and a punch that, says company founder Todd Moses, will leave the OP sector reeling once more...

Just three years ago, hardly anybody had heard of Accentra, PaperPro or indeed the company's and product's founder Todd Moses. Even Moses himself – then just 29 years old and jobless – couldn't have predicted the meteoric rise of his company in the OP world.

Frustrated as he then was with his stapler while preparing for an important meeting with venture capitalists, the former Black & Decker employee used all his experience and entrepreneurial spirit to reinvent the stapler category. The outcome has been staggering.

Today, Moses is one of the OP industry's hottest properties, his company has grown from a one-man band to 20 employees, and his PaperPro range of staplers is winning

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accolade after accolade. Most importantly perhaps, revenues are booming and are currently well into the eight-digit figures. And the US company with the global outlook is not resting on its laurels, but preparing for another onslaught...

OPI: It's been just over two years since Accentra burst onto the scene with its revolutionary PaperPro staplers... Did you ever imagine back then that your stapler would become such a success?

Todd Moses (TM): Honestly, yes. When it was first conceived, the idea of a staple gun powered desktop stapler was exciting to me because I believed that if we could make the technology work we had a chance to create something really special. Then, once we had our first working prototype, I knew we had a hit.

OPI: What was it about your stapler that made you so confident?

TM: There's just something very satisfying about using a PaperPro stapler. I still get a kick out of watching people try it for the first time. They always approach the stapler with a bit of scepticism – like, what could be so great about a stapler – but the moment they press on the handle, the moment they hear and feel it fire that staple through the paper, they get it. And inevitably, a big smile comes over their face.

OPI: Did you expect more difficulties in bringing it to market?

TM: We were really fortunate to come along at a time when the market was desperately in need of new ideas.

Retailers saw in our product a chance to breathe life into a stagnant category – they took a chance with our product and they weren't disappointed.

OPI: So how has the market changed since then?

TM: I think that the introduction of the PaperPro has in many ways awoken the office products industry to the need for real product development and innovation.

For decades beforehand, the sector was relatively calm and predictable. Then we came into the picture and began pushing the envelope, not just in terms of technological development, but in product design and marketing as well.

So now, the bar has been raised and I think that everyone has in some sense been forced to pick up their game.

“Historically, the creator of a new category has the advantage in terms of maintaining market share – our job will be to maintain and press that advantage”

OPI: You’ve had tremendous success with the PaperPro staplers, winning the US Office Product of the Year award for 2005 as well as being recognised as Europe’s Most Innovative Company of the Year. And now you are launching a completely new product, the ProPunch 3-hole punch. What prompted you to branch out into this category?

TM: First, I’d like to say how gratifying it has been for us to be recognised by the industry and to receive the awards you mentioned. Our goal from the outset has been to revolutionise the office products industry and frankly, the response we have received both from the industry as well as consumers has been phenomenal.

As for our foray into the punch category, the fact is that we have had designs on the 3-hole and 2-hole punch categories from the very beginning. It is a natural extension to the PaperPro family and a product that can really benefit from our brand of blue sky innovation.

OPI: Do you see the same potential in punches as you did in staplers?

TM: From a technological standpoint, yes. Like staplers, punches have been overdue for retooling for a very long time. Even the most recent attempts at innovation have been little more than a clumsy lever bolted onto the same old mechanism.

Our ProPunch, like the PaperPro staplers before it, is a completely re-imagined, re-engineered approach to punching technology. We have put together a mechanism that uses a combination of cams and levers to reduce by half the force necessary to punch holes in paper. For consumers it means that with the ProPunch, they will be able to punch up to 12 sheets of paper with the pressure of a single finger.



OPI: That concept sounds quite familiar - so this time it’s one-finger punching power, rather than stapling?

TM: Exactly, but that’s not all. We have improved the ergonomics of punching, too. We have reconfigured the mechanism with the ProPunch so that the paper loads vertically - which means first of all that it requires much less desktop space on which to use it. But it also means that we can take advantage of the force of gravity to line up each sheet of paper, which ensures consistent uniform hole placement.

In addition, we have linked the actuating lever to the actual punches and that has the effect of making the punch jam-free. Even if a user were to try and punch more sheets than intended, the punching elements will never jam – they can always be cleared by simply lifting the main lever.

OPI: And you refer to it as your next knockout punch?

TM: Well, that’s marketing and we always like to have some fun with that, but believe me, we are very serious when it comes to our product and our technology. The fact is that everywhere we go people are asking us: “When are you coming out with a 3-hole punch?”

Now I’m proud to say that we have done it and that it’s worthy of the PaperPro name. The ProPunch features one-finger operation; it takes up less desktop space and it’s more convenient to use; and it allows a person to punch holes from a seated position rather than having to stand up to use it – which is so often the case with traditional punches. Once people try this new technology, they will never want to use an old-fashioned 3-hole punch again.

OPI: What type of distribution do you have for the ProPunch?

TM: We have endcap placement in two of the top



three office products retailers starting in September in the US and we also have placements in most major catalogues.

OPI: As far as geographical distribution is concerned, is the ProPunch going to be available for the European market?

TM: Absolutely, and we are very excited about that. We are developing a 2-hole, European version of the ProPunch - with the same performance values as our 3-hole punch - which will be available for distribution in the spring of 2007.

Though we are still a young company, we have always pursued a global strategy. Today, our staplers are sold throughout Europe and in 100 countries around the world. With PaperPro staplers we project that global sales will meet and ultimately surpass domestic sales in the not too distant future - and we have the same expectations for the ProPunch.

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OPI: Do you intend to offer a private label version of the ProPunch? The PaperPro stapler was available at Staples under the superstore’s One Touch store brand and this was a phenomenal success.

TM: Right now we are considering a couple of different co-branding options.

OPI: Going back to staplers, there have been reports that Acco will be introducing a new spring-powered stapler to compete with your PaperPro range... care to comment?

TM: Sure. We know that Swingline is working hard to develop its own version of our spring-powered technology and clearly it’s the right move for the company strategically. We’ve said right from the start that the PaperPro stapler is a category killer and that sooner or later all conventional staplers will be rendered obsolete. That’s quite a strong statement, I realise, but from that standpoint Acco would be crazy not to try to develop its own model.

Having said that, we also know what it is up against - Acco has to engineer a similar technology that doesn’t infringe on our patents, which is no small feat in itself. Then it has to make sure that its version

performs up to the standards we’ve set. This is no simple task.

OPI: So you are not particularly concerned about the competition?

TM: I wouldn’t say that. Acco is a formidable company with a world-class brand, so its entry into this specific category that up until now we have had to ourselves has certainly got our attention. But we are confident that our patented technology is an efficient and effective approach to the spring-powered stapling function and we’re very comfortable with our technological advantage.

We’re also flattered. And we believe that Swingline’s entry into spring-powered stapling gives the category itself much greater credibility. Over time, we feel that it will help expand the market for all spring-powered staplers dramatically.

OPI: With PaperPro staplers presumably as the leader as far as you’re concerned?

TM: Well sure, I hope so. Historically, the creator of a new category has the advantage in terms of maintaining market share - our job will be to maintain and press that advantage.

OPI: What about further new stapling products - are there any on the horizon?

TM: It’s safe to say that over the next year or so there will be a PaperPro stapler for every conceivable need. We have a couple of new, high capacity models coming out as well as a long-reach version. But our most exciting new product - aside from the ProPunch - might just be a tiny stapler that we are developing for launch in Q1 of next year.

Traditionally, small staplers don’t deliver much in terms of performance, but this miniature stapler uses the next generation of our spring-powered technology to deliver 12-sheet stapling power with push-button ease. It is so small that it fits within the palm of your hand, but it will also fit quite nicely into cluttered kitchen drawers, briefcases, and children’s backpacks. We think it’s going to be a huge hit for us.

OPI: So for the time being, Accentra has two new products on the drawing board?

TM: Actually, they’re off the drawing boards, in the factories and coming soon to a reseller near you! ■

