

# Standing tall

by Laura Staples

### Accentra facts

**HQ:** Newtown (PA), USA

**European HQ:** Munich, Germany

**Founded:** 2003

**Employees:** 20

**Coverage:** Distributed and sold across 108 countries

**Todd Moses:** "While there is much lip service paid to the need for innovative products, there is also a lot of resistance to change"

A revolutionary product from a small, privately-held company is something of an anomaly in today's corporate world. Accentra's Todd Moses reveals all

**I**t's hard to believe that it was only four years ago when Accentra burst onto the OP scene and single-handedly revolutionised the stapling market with its PaperPro staplers. With their spring-powered, staple-gun style internal mechanism, these innovative staplers have carved out a niche in what has long been a staid and lifeless category.

In the intervening years Accentra has produced a full line of PaperPro staplers with capacities ranging from 15 to 100 sheets – each with the company's patented spring-powered technology. In addition, it has created new two-hole and three-hole punches, also with its trademark reduced-force ergonomics. And this summer, the juggernaut continues with the release of the new PaperPro Nano, a "miniature powerhouse" of a stapler featuring the firm's next generation of spring-powered technology.

Todd Moses, founder and CEO of Accentra, famously launched the company from an ad hoc office in the basement bathroom of his parent's home. Now with four years under his belt and millions of staplers sold, **OPI** spoke to him in his Newtown, Pennsylvania offices to get an update on the state of play at the company and in the OP industry in general.

**OPI: Your PaperPro staplers have revolutionised stapling by creating a completely new category – the**



**spring-powered/reduced-force stapler – how difficult has the innovation process been?**

**Todd Moses:** There are enormous obstacles for anyone introducing a new product into a market that is as established and entrenched as ours. While there is much lip service paid to the need for innovative products, there is also a lot of resistance to change in the industry. So it's been an uphill climb.

**OPI: But in the case of PaperPro staplers, you have had much success getting your product listed with both retailers and commercial distributors.**

**TM:** Yes, we have. But it is still difficult to convince some buyers to accept our vision of where the market is heading.

**OPI: And where would that be?**

**TM:** Well, we have always maintained that the spring-powered stapler will ultimately dominate the stapling market, and that once people experience the ease of use our staplers offer, they will never want to use a regular stapler again.

**OPI: When you say "dominate the market", what exactly do you mean?**

**TM:** I mean that within five years spring-powered staplers will account for 50 to 70 percent of all staplers sold domestically.

**OPI: Since we last spoke, Swingline has introduced its own version of the reduced-force stapler, the Optima PowerEase. How has the appearance of competition in your category impacted your business?**

**TM:** It might surprise you to hear this, but we were ecstatic to have Swingline come out with a competing spring-powered stapler. Why? From our perspective, the launch of the PowerEase affirms the inherent validity and ultimate power of our product category. If anyone ever had any questions as to whether the world needed spring-powered staplers, those doubts vanished when Swingline entered the fray.



**OPI: But aren't you concerned that the PowerEase will take sales away from your PaperPro line?**

**TM:** Sure, there's always some danger of that – but it is also true that the PowerEase's launch has acted to expand the category by giving it more credibility among buyers and more exposure to consumers. And don't forget, as the originators of spring-powered stapling, we have patents that effectively block other firms from developing staplers that are nearly as efficient as ours.

PaperPro staplers contain just 17 parts in total, for example. The PowerEase, while a formidable machine, contains over 80. It's more expensive to produce, it's not as easy to use and it can't operate as a tackler. So we're pretty comfortable with our competitive position versus Swingline's model.

**OPI: Could you explain what your Nano technology is? Is this something really new, or is it just a play on words?**

**TM:** It's both. Our new Nano is the first stapler to contain the next generation of our spring-powered technology. It's a high-start mechanism, which means that the striker starts out in a raised position – rather than starting low and having to be raised first and then released.

This mechanism is even more efficient than our first generation stapler, it requires even less parts – only 15 – and it's remarkably scaleable. The Nano is only three inches in length and yet it has a remarkable 12-sheet stapling capacity and push-button ease.

**OPI: And it's equally patent-protected?**

**TM:** Absolutely. And I'll say this: Having seen the complex, serpentine mechanism our competitors needed to try and circumvent our existing patents, I'm quite sure it will take them a long, long time to develop a mechanism anywhere near as small and powerful as the Nano.

**OPI: Is the Nano aimed directly at Swingline's Tot?**

**TM:** We think that the Nano has potential well beyond that. Existing micro-sized staplers like the Tot have always offered notoriously poor performance. They are clumsy, they're prone to jamming and they're just not very satisfying to use. But the Nano has true 12-sheet push-button performance. I have had one on my desk for the past few months and it has actually become my primary stapler because it's so handy and so easy to use.

**OPI: And what is your target market?**

**TM:** The Nano's size and ease-of-use will certainly be attractive to the home market and among children, but because of its power, it is also a tremendous tool for today's road warriors. It has cross-over appeal. We feel that the Nano might be the product that finally makes PaperPro a household name.



**OPI: Does that mean you won't be offering the Nano in private label, as you have done with your desktop and high capacity models at Staples?**

**TM:** Our private label agreement with Staples expires at the end of this year. We have had some disagreements with Staples regarding how it has chosen to market our technology. We believe that it is critical to differentiate our staplers from ordinary staplers. Private label – particularly as it is typically executed – tends to genericise a product, and that works against our model.

**OPI: So are you now against private label as a marketing vehicle?**

**TM:** Not at all. But we feel that our technology offers an opportunity to expand the stapler market by introducing a premium alternative to what has long been a commodity category. We're convinced that offering premium, branded products alongside private label is the best way to give consumers the chance to either trade up or trade down – whichever their inclination might be – given that consumer choice leads to greater total category sales and provides more high-margin sales on the premium side, too.

**OPI: Aside from the Nano, are there any other developments we should know about?**

**TM:** Sure, we're involved in an ongoing programme of updating and revising our product line.

We've introduced new, brightly coloured translucent staplers that are really taking off, especially in the back-to-school venues. And these new painted translucent staplers are also gaining traction in the commercial

The new Nano stapler is capable of driving staples through up to 12 sheets of paper with push-button ease

Eye-catching displays at the point of sale will "help generate interest and drive impulse purchasing"



arena. In addition, we are upgrading the finish and paint on our Prodigy line.  
**OPI: Are there any other new products in the pipeline?**

**TM:** Yes, of course. We'll kick off the new year with the release of our new Quantum model. This is our newest executive model. It's an all metal, 25-sheet stapler, but with sleek contemporary lines and cool colour themes that we are very excited about. And after that we will hopefully be releasing our new paper cutters. We have devised a new mechanism which is like no other cutter you've ever seen, very precise, and obviously featuring our typical ease-of-use and advanced ergonomics.

**OPI: PaperPro staplers have greatly accelerated the process of evolution in traditional office staplers. But it can't continue indefinitely. Do you have**

**plans to diversify in the long run?**

**TM:** Your question reminds me of a buyer who once told us that our stapler had reached the "mature" phase of its lifecycle – that was almost two years ago!

We may not be able to continue our heady pace of innovation "indefinitely" as you say, but each innovation we

develop seems to lead to others, if not on the technological side, then on the design or aesthetics side. So we seem to have a self-perpetuating pipeline stretching out – if not indefinitely, then at least quite a distance into the future.

As for any plans to diversify, the answer is "absolutely"! Our core strategy has always been to redefine five major office tool categories – and we are on track in implementing that strategy. But there have been some very interesting additional line extensions that have popped up that we intend to insert into the pipeline as well.

The Quantum all metal, 25-sheet desktop model will be launched early next year



PaperPro's Prodigy desktop stapler's finish has been upgraded with a metallic paint and new colour options



PaperPro's newest high capacity stapler, the StackMaster, is nine inches long and can staple through 100 sheets

**OPI: Care to give us a preview?**

**TM:** Not just yet, but I will say that we have looked at a number of innovative ideas – both internally and externally – that are in line with our plan to revolutionise the desktop tools and accessories that we all use every day.

**OPI: Does that mean your company considers products developed outside of your own organisation?**

**TM:** Absolutely. The PaperPro brand offers a tremendous platform for other ergonomic, labour-saving product extensions – and we're always on the lookout for bright ideas.

**OPI: As a company which has to constantly innovate to stay ahead, does the process ever get old for you?**

**TM:** No, it doesn't. Seeing products go from rough concept through to production – and then getting to witness consumers actually embracing them – is an exciting, even exhilarating process. I highly recommend it.

**OPI: Accentra is unique in the corporate marketplace, a privately-held manufacturer in a market dominated by highly diversified conglomerates. Why are there not more firms like yours and how do you like your position as a David standing alone in the land of the giants?**

**TM:** I believe this industry – and probably every industry – needs small, independent companies like Accentra. If you look at the information industry, it embraces small start-up firms, with founders barely out of their teens, because it values and relies on new ideas and new ways of looking at the world.

Only small, independent firms can do that. We're not answerable to Wall Street or the dictates of quarterly reports. We're not constrained by any institutional correctness.

We are able – in fact we are required – to think outside the box, to take a longer view, and to dream bigger dreams. And as long as we do that, I like our chances very much. ■