



STI International - Georgetown

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Written by Patrick Brendel Friday, 10 October 2008

Each of the 45,000 handguns STI International produces annually is nearly perfect. The approximately 70 workers at the Georgetown manufacturing plant have a vested interest in doing so — literally. This is because STI is a 100 percent employee-owned company.

President and CEO Dave Skinner said the transition to employee ownership in 2005 dramatically improved the company he purchased in 1994.

“We were the best 10 years ago, and we’re broadening the gap,” he said.

Salesman Rabbit Boyett concurred, saying it was a matter of personal liability.

“Used to be, when someone wasn’t doing what they were supposed to, who cares, it’s Dave’s company,” he said. “If you’re slacking off now, you’re costing me money.”

Skinner and his wife, Pauletta, STI’s exports and sales manager, were competitive shooters when they bought Austin-based Tripp Research Inc. in 1994.

They immediately moved the company to Georgetown because Skinner already owned the building.



Pauletta Skinner, exports and sales manager, and Rabbit Boyett, salesman

When the Skinners bought the company, they had eight employees. The company produced about 600 guns annually, machine operator Richard Ringwood said. Skinner said he normally projects an 11 percent annual growth rate for the company, but sometimes exceeds that by 10 to 30 points.

The company became STI in 2004 and now occupies 25,000 sq. ft. of space east of the Georgetown Municipal Airport. It offers 29 models of handguns that retail from \$650 to more than \$3,000 each. The company does not sell directly to individuals, but markets to regional distributors throughout the United States and about 30 foreign countries in Europe, Asia, South America and Australia.


Revenues from domestic and foreign sales are about equal, Skinner said. STI is in the top five for foreign sales among U.S. companies. For example, the Indonesian military, Danish special forces, some Thai police units, Polish police officers and United Kingdom cops carry STI sidearms, Pauletta said.

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Of the people who buy STI guns, Skinner estimated that 15 percent are competitive shooters; 15 percent are in the military or law enforcement; and 70 percent are collectors or “people who believe in the Constitution.”

STI and another company share a patent for the 2011 pistol, which is similar to the 1911 pistol, except that the unique design of the magazine allows it to hold twice as much ammunition. STI sells about as many 1911 pistols per year as the 2011 model.

Roughly two-thirds of STI’s revenues are derived from the sale of guns, with the rest coming from the sale of gun parts to other manufacturers. If a person handles a 1911 pistol, “the odds are very good” that STI made at least one of its parts, Skinner said.

The patent for the design of the 2011 pistol, issued in 1994, expires in 2012. That opens the door for much larger manufacturers to build the 2011 pistol. But Skinner and his employees welcome the competition and believe the personal touch they give each gun will keep

them head-and-shoulders above the pack.

Skinner's business philosophy is simple: "Build guns. Make money. Go home on time."

STI gun sizes

"Caliber is the size of the bullet the gun shoots," said David Cupp, assistant manager of quality control in STI's warranty department.

Caliber refers to the diameter of the bullet and the diameter of the inside of the gun barrel.

Cupp said STI's guns are made in three basic sizes:

- **.355 inches** — .357 SIG, 9 mm and .38 special ammunition
- **.400 inches** — .40 S&W ammunition
- **.450 inches** — .45 ACP ammunition

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Community Impact Newspaper