



QUALITY

Datum Technologies: Small company wields big sword

‘Every action has to be best practice’

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SANTAROSA—Datum Technologies has spent close to half a million dollars forging a mighty sword. Now the 15-employee precision machining and manufacturing company is going after big game: giant aerospace companies and their suppliers.

Three years of meticulous documentation and employee training to win both the ISO and the highly coveted AS9100C (aerospace) certifications, followed by the purchase of new machinery and physical expansion has readied Datum Tech for a surge of high tech orders. Will the gamble pay off?

Analisa and Richard Hunt say the five new customers they’ve picked up in the year since becoming certified have already helped to offset their costs, which were considerable.

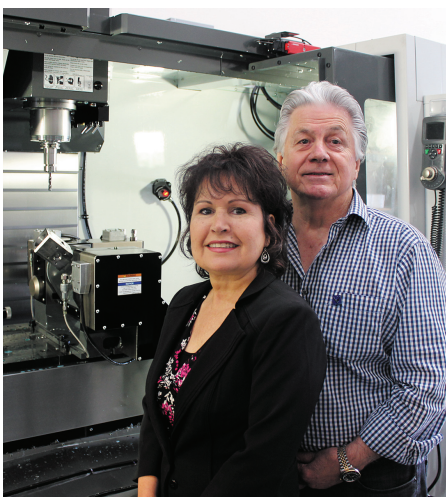
“We spent approximately \$50,000 towards the certifications, counting the cost of each, consulting fees and man-hours,” said Analisa Hunt, CEO. She brought on new staff to help with documenting every process, from initial requests for proposal through purchase orders, supply procurement, production, outsourcing, quality control and product shipping.

“Everything has to be traceable, every action has to be best practice. It’s ongoing,” she said, adding that the company just passed its first yearly AS9100/ISO 9001:2008 surveillance audit with flying colors.

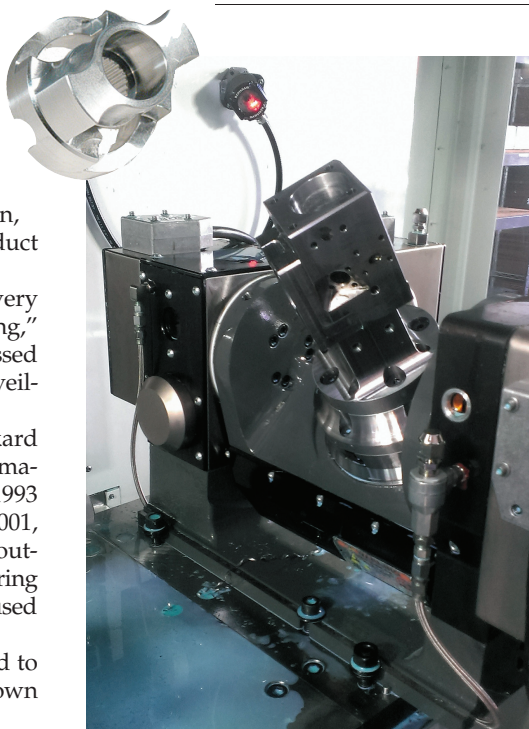
The couple, former Hewlett Packard employees, started their own precision machining/manufacturing company in 1993 and had to close it down after Sept. 11, 2001, the meltdown of the economy and the outsourcing overseas of Agilent’s manufacturing operations. This time around, they’re focused on customer diversification.

“We knew we didn’t want to be tied to one customer or one industry, to go down with it if it sank,” said Mrs. Hunt.

With the semiconductor, oil and energy, automotive and medical systems industries in mind, they pursued ISO certification but found doors in the aerospace sector were still



Analisa and Richard Hunt have spent three years certifying Datum Technologies. Since expanding into another 3,000 square feet, Datum Technologies is now the largest tenant of 327 O’Hair Ct. in Santa Rosa.



A newly installed 5 axis mill machines a product from all sides Datum Technologies makes highly precise metal components for manufacturers

closed to them.

“ISO is the industrial default,” said Tim Landerville, owner of ISOcert Solutions in Santa Rosa, a compliance software and consulting firm. “ASO allows you to play with the big boys—Boeing, Northrop Grumman. They won’t look at you unless you have it.”

The Hunts didn’t stop at certification; they’ve expanded their facility on O’Hair Court in Santa Rosa to 7,000 square feet – up from Datum’s original 2,000 – and added a quality-control lab and the software to run it. Mr. Hunt purchased and installed a five-axis milling machine as well as other high technology equipment, putting well over \$250,000 into new machinery.

“Instead of doing multiple setups when milling a product we can just do one operation. It gets machined from all sides,” said Mr. Hunt.

His staff is currently using the machine for two complex projects, both high-end automotive components, for customers Datum picked up from mentioning the five-axis mill on the company website.

Datum (707-738-3914, datumtech-cnc.com) also added a second shift, bumping up production capacity by 35 percent. Revenues are projected to be up 30 percent over last year, said Mr. Hunt.

Of the five new customers won during the past year, one is automotive, one semiconductor, one medical, one electronic instrumentation and one aerospace, said Mr. Hunt. Citing competitive concerns, he declined to name them. The company is in talks with two high-profile North Bay aerospace suppliers; otherwise, its customers are in Napa, Mendocino and Sacramento counties and the South Bay.

“Despite our size we’re well-positioned for growth,” said Mrs. Hunt. A Hispanic woman-owned business with ASO certification is relatively rare among precision machining companies, but she feels the real value of Datum lies in the quality of its work.

“We’ve had one customer, a semiconductor company, for over 20 years,” she said. “They were so reluctant to replace us that when we shut our doors they persuaded us to open again. That kind of customer loyalty doesn’t come from how big we are, or who owns the company; it’s a result of what we produce.”