

THE NAME SAYS IT ALL:

QuickTrophy

BY LORI LOVELY



Terry Dehring, owner of QuickTrophy.com in Marquette, Michigan.

Shop Profile Snapshot

Company name: QuickTrophy.com

Location: Marquette, Michigan

Owner: Terry Dehring

Years in business: 8

Primary clients: Online sales of trophies, plaques, name plates, medals, awards and assorted other engraved items

No. of employees: 12 (plus part-time and temporary during seasonal peak)

In-house Equipment: 3 PLS series & 1 M360 Universal Laser Systems laser engravers; Purex air filter with air scrubber.

Trophy shopping isn't what it used to be—or at least, it doesn't have to be. In today's fast-paced, on-the-go, Internet-savvy world, trophies can be ordered online from the comfort of your home and received in record time. No showroom. No cash register. No salesman. This is not your average trophy shop.

Terry Dehring, owner of QuickTrophy in Marquette, Michigan, since 2000, says he and his two partners never considered a storefront. "Sometimes necessity is the mother of invention," he says of the pure-play Internet operation. It all started when one of the partners was forced to drive half an hour to a trophy shop to buy trophies for his son's soccer team. The busy soccer coach searched for a more convenient alternative.

He asked around; no one knew of an online trophy store, although another soccer dad thought it was a good idea. "He saw an opportunity," Dehring explains. "There were no trophy shops online then (around 1998)." It was also an opportunity





As the company has grown, desk nameplates like these, along with many other items, have been added to the inventory.



QuickTrophy employees operating the company's laser engravers.

for Dehring, who had recently relocated to Marquette and was looking for a job. With a background in computer programming, marketing and analysis, he was the perfect choice to steer the new online company.

The trio drafted a business model based on the simple premise of making it easy for customers to pick out, buy and receive trophies. They also believe that the public wanted a quick turnaround for orders and fast delivery. QuickTrophy boasts that it's within three days' delivery of 70 percent of the U.S.—and Dehring says that's with ground shipping; many orders are overnighted.

The secret is QuickTrophy limits its inventory to items it can produce quickly. That doesn't necessarily mean their inventory is limited, however. Dehring estimates they stock \$100,000 in inventory, with 4,000 SKUs so customers have a lot of different options as they "build" their own trophy.

QuickTrophy's website integrates with the packing list and engraving machine so customers can select options and type in text to create individual trophies. "Every trophy is made from scratch in our state-of-the-art manufacturing facility as the order comes in," Dehring emphasizes. "We have a nice selection, and we stock all parts. From the time an order comes in the door to the time it's packaged for shipping takes about one hour. Many orders are shipped out the same day they're received."

BUSINESS MODEL CREATES MODEL BUSINESS

"The main difference between us and a retail store," Dehring explains, "is the level of customer service." At a traditional brick-and-mortar trophy store, he says customers can expect a high level of service and customization. "You can order anything. You can work with a person on specifications and design a trophy from



QuickTrophy keeps a lot of stock available, and 99 percent of items are shipped out the next day.

scratch. It's like fast food versus a full-service sit-down restaurant." The faster you get it, the less service comes with it. "It's a different business model, a different way of running a business. Customization slows us down."

That doesn't mean everything is stock. QuickTrophy offers semi-custom en masse. Trophy building begins with the streamlined selection of a style and includes personalized engraving in Times or Arial font. Dehring says they're even able to print Hebrew and Spanish if the customer supplies text in a pdf. Although the automated engraving system precludes interpretation errors, he says that staff will contact the customer with questions if inconsistencies or conflicts in information are detected.

QuickTrophy stocks "a lot," as Dehring puts it, so 99 percent of the items are shipped out by the next day, but if they can't fill an order, they sometimes turn to a traditional trophy shop. "When a customer wants to design something, it doesn't fit with our business plan."

He believes there's room for both the traditional shop and his Internet business because he doesn't handle the custom orders, and the traditional shops don't stock enough parts to do the quick turnarounds he's famous for. In fact, he sometimes does wholesale work for the traditional shops. "We do participation trophies for retail shops. They can buy the finished product from us at about the same price and in about the same amount of time it would take to get the parts for them to build." That's why he says there's a place for both business models. "There's no conflict. We serve totally different markets. We're not a threat to traditional trophy shops. We can co-exist because there's a need for both."

Assembling and shipping an average of 600 trophies a day, QuickTrophy has found its niche and is filling it successfully. The company started with three employees. Today, it employs up to 21 during the peak of business in the spring, many of whom are students at Northern Michigan University.

The company started out making trophies and medals, adding plaques and awards to the inventory. Dehring regularly attends trade shows to see what's new in the industry, selecting what he thinks will sell to his online market. "It has to be something people can buy with their

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eyes." Willing to "try out a new product with a couple of cases to see if it sells," he adds to their line. Some popular new additions include dog tags and picture plaques. Spinners have also been very successful, he says.

But it's the sports-related trophies that remain the most popular, with the range covering 80 different sports, including obscure sports such as curling—although Dehring says he's learned what he needs more of, and curling is not on the list. Soccer and baseball are two of the biggest sports, keeping his spring busy, which is why during May and June his full-time staff of 12-13 is supplemented with part-time and temporary help.

Although sports is big business, "corporate stuff" such as plaques and office signs represents an increasingly significant portion of the business—making up a quarter to a third of their sales. In fact, Dehring has started additional websites catering to office signs, name plates and name tags. He's also working on a graphics and logos division for semi-custom work.

GROWING TOWARD THE FUTURE

In addition to expanding QuickTrophy's product line, Dehring continues to improve the website. Originally designed and tested by coaches and team managers to ensure easy online ordering, Dehring continues to hone it to suit their growing market and range of products.

There may not have been any online trophy companies when QuickTrophy began in 2000, but there are several now. Nevertheless, business has increased about 40 percent annually, Dehring calculates, despite the appearance of a few online competitors. "We're still in growth mode."

To continue growing, the million-dollar business in Michigan's Upper Peninsula relies on word-of-mouth advertising by emailing their existing customer base about new products. Dehring also places online ads through various search engines and works on prominent placement of their website with search engines. That, he says, is a full-time job all by itself. "Having a website isn't enough. You have to be placed so you can be seen. Ten years ago, it wasn't a big deal, but now it's harder to get closer to the front door. You don't want to get lost on the back pages of a search result."

Growth has limits. Dehring intends to keep QuickTrophy a national company because international shipping is simply too expensive. "Our products are heavy. With our marble bases, we're basically shipping boxes of rocks. It isn't cost-effective to ship overseas, except for military APO addresses."

It's as important to get items shipped quickly as economically. Dehring estimates that one-third of the orders are 'rush.' "People come to us because they're time-pressed. That's why it's important to maintain a good relationship with carriers such as UPS, FedEx and the U.S. post office. We schedule one to two pick-ups a day."

Just as the postman doesn't let the weather interfere with deliveries, QuickTrophy, located on the south shore of Lake Superior, doesn't let an average 200-inch annual snowfall slow them down. "We're in the snowbelt," Dehring says. "We're used to it. Schools may close, but our employees show up. We've never had a day when UPS didn't pick up—even during the winter when we had 320 inches of snow." If that much snow can't slow down QuickTrophy, nothing can.



Focus on Building Your Business, not building trophies.

Partner with QuickTrophy – an industry leader that specializes in quick turnaround of trophies and awards. Open a wholesale account with QuickTrophy and

- Make your job easier.
- Order completed trophies and awards instead of parts.
- Let us do the engraving.
- Free up time to deliver a higher level of service to your customers.
- Free up time to do more marketing activities and making business contacts and sales.
- Spend more time working on the higher value, higher margin products.
- Spend time designing and making more creative awards – the ones you enjoy making.
- Reduce your inventory. Don't worry about ordering "a couple extra parts just to make sure".
- Work with a trusted vendor who has been doing this exact same thing since 2001.
- If you want, we can drop ship orders. Minimum order is 1 trophy.
- Make more money.

In only 2 to 3 business days, you can have completed, fully engraved trophies, awards, and plaques, not just boxes of parts! Work smarter, not harder, and enjoy your business more.

For more information:
www.QuickTrophy.com/wholesale.php

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