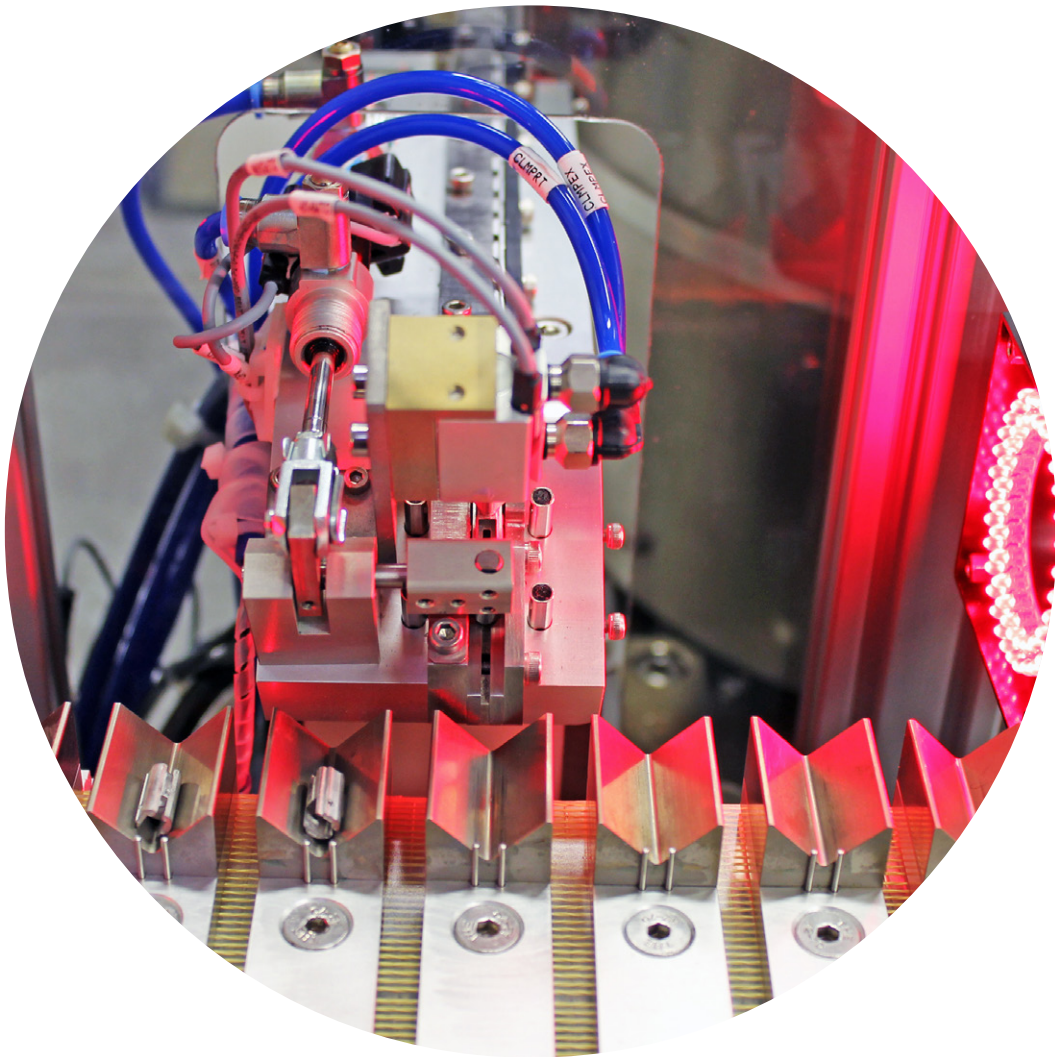# SIGMADESIGN
PRODUCT DESIGN + ENGINEERING SERVICES

EXCEEDING

SIGMADESIGN
PRODUCT **DESIGN** + **ENGINEERING** SERVICES

Sigma Design is a product development, engineering, and manufacturing company headquartered in Camas, Washington. Its team of experts is committed to evolving customer concepts at any stage of development and taking them through production.

Written by Ryan Cartner

Sigma Design was founded in 1994 by John and Sue Barker and was initially a small operation run from their family home. In 1997, an engineer at Hewlett Packard named Bill Huseby recognized the potential of this startup and left his job of sixteen years to work at Sigma Design. Within two years, the company expanded. It first moved into a 750-square-foot facility and then into a 4,500-square-foot facility in Vancouver, Washington. For more than a decade, the company operated with a skeleton crew of twelve essential people in a highly-competitive industry where growth was an overwhelming challenge. In 2006, the company's leadership began work on a plan; the growth of Sigma Design began to rise substantially, and that trend has continued ever since.

The company has since grown significantly. Today, Sigma Design employs roughly three hundred people encompassing engineers, designers, technicians, material handlers, operators and support staff. It operates out of three facilities: its headquarters in Camas, Washington; a Vancouver location with forty employees and a site in Singapore with fifteen people. It also has engineers in Seattle, Corvallis, the San Francisco Bay Area and Michigan, as it has extended its reach into these territories.

In 2017, the company grew by 49 percent, and it is planning for more growth going forward. Bill Huseby, the ex-Hewlett Packard engineer who recognized the potential of Sigma Design in its infancy, is now the president and owner.

EXPECTATIONS

Sigma Design has also grown by adding areas of expertise. The company brought in mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, firmware and software experts, industrial designers and many more specialists in every area necessary to the work it does.

"I personally believe that we really only have one asset," says Bill Huseby, CEO of Sigma Design. "If you came here, you'd see lots of equipment, lots of machinery, tools, computer programs, and manufacturing equipment. Those are all important assets, but the only one that really matters is the people."

One of the key ways that Sigma Design is different from competing product development firms is its level of in-house expertise. Sigma Design has a very deliberate focus on the 'Concept Through Production' model, and this makes it necessary to have the resources that best support every phase of a product's lifecycle.

In 2006, Sigma Design employees set about clarifying the set of core values that represent the culture within the company. These values are: Integrity; Help clients & each other; Take time to laugh; Adaptable; Respect for each other; and Exceed customer's expectations. Today, these values are posted on walls throughout the facilities so that they can be seen from anywhere that work is being done as a continual reminder of what the company stands for and aims to be. The philosophy of exceeding the expectations of customers is the natural result of having a work environment that encourages these principles.

To maintain this culture, new employees are carefully vetted for both the level of expertise they bring to the team and whether or not their personal values align with those of the company. Prospective employees meet at least four people throughout the interview process, and in this way, management can assess whether or not the candidate is a good fit.

"We want to make sure people have those core values," says Huseby. "They're not just words we put up on the wall. They're non-negotiable. They're really the foundation of the company."
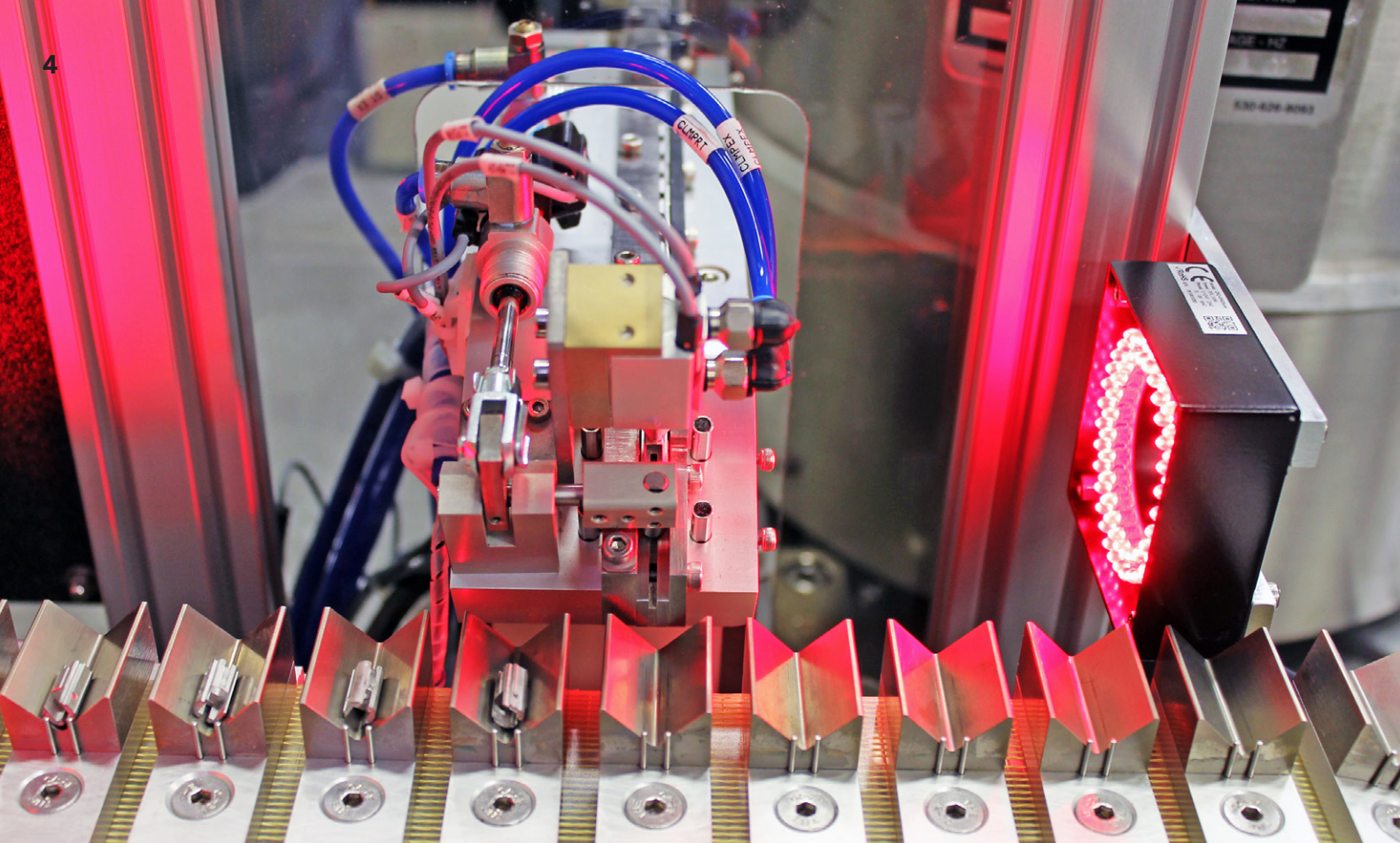
> **"Sigma Design hires only the best, provides them endless opportunities to develop their expertise and sincerely recognizes their value to the company."**

As a result of this stringent hiring process, Sigma Design has built a skilled team of experts with a capability for collaboration that is unparalleled in the industry. Product development requires such a wide range of skill-sets that contracting out pieces of a project is commonplace among the company's competitors, but Sigma Design has always focused on bringing ▸▸

"What sets Sigma Design apart is that it does everything under one roof. In that sense, there are very few true competitors."

talent in-house and building an environment that pushes that talent toward success. Sigma Design hires only the best, provides opportunities to develop their expertise and strives to recognize their value to the company.

Acknowledgment goes beyond fair pay and good benefits. The company offers profit sharing, bonuses and has implemented a reward system that enables any employee to present any other with a Sigma Design Card Of Recognition, or 'SCOR' card.

The company has a unique approach to dealing with intellectual property. When a client comes to Sigma Design with a concept and the company's engineers design and develop a solution, the intellectual property belongs to the client. Sigma Design does not own any of it. Over the years, the company has been instrumental in the development of many patented technologies, but the assignee listed on those patents is always the customer. By approaching intellectual property in this way, customers maintain ownership over their ideas, and that is an important aspect of Sigma Design's model.

Providing peace of mind to customers in this way is crucial to the value that Sigma Design brings to a project. It also makes customers comfortable through its commitment to confidentiality. The company's website has a considerable portfolio of

innovative projects, but what is listed is a fraction of the interesting projects of which it has been a part.

"Customers trust us because confidentiality is taken so seriously, especially when it comes to our larger Fortune 50 and 500 customers," says Huseby. "We don't list all of the companies we work with." For Sigma Design, protecting the client's interests comes first.

There are, however, many customers who have worked with Sigma Design on less restricted projects. Sigma Design worked with Lightspeed Aviation to design one of the world's first premium wireless aviation headsets: the Tango Wireless Aviation Headset. It has a proprietary wireless communication system called Lightspeed Link that offers reliability beyond Wi-Fi or Bluetooth and integrates seamlessly with an aircraft's existing audio system. It combined high-quality noise cancellation with comfort and was recognized with a Red Dot Design Award and an International Design Excellence Award Finalist in 2016.

Another example of its engineering expertise is the Printrayce system. This was a project that Sigma Design worked on with a company called Superior Tape & Label. Sigma Design was hired to develop a system that could automate the process of labeling fruit on an assembly line for one of the largest apple

Bill Huseby
President/CEO of Sigma Design

"One of the key ways that Sigma Design is different from competing product development firms is its level of in-house expertise."

packing facilities in the world. The company designed the equipment, put it through thorough testing and now produces the machines.

The 'Concept Through Production' approach is the real value that Sigma Design offers. Engineering firms, firmware and software development firms, test facilities, prototyping operations and industrial design firms all compete with Sigma Design on individual components of its operation. What sets Sigma Design apart is that it does everything under one roof. In that sense, there are very few true competitors.

"Because we have departments that cover every aspect of the product development cycle, our people are able to collaborate much more effectively than sub-consultants trying to work together," says Andrea Cameron, marketing manager at Sigma Design. Team members working across many different disciplines but with close access to each other is a vital component to the achievements of Sigma Design.

Sigma Design has found a great deal of success in its unique approach to product development. Developing its capacity to carry a project from a simple idea in the mind of a client through to a real-world product has enabled the company to build a widely recognized reputation for engineering excellence.

"About ten years ago I had an epiphany," says Huseby. "I realized that the client is the person who hired us. Not the big company they work for, but the person. They have a name. Establishing that personal relationship not only solidifies our desire to come up with solutions for their problem, but it makes the work more enjoyable." ■

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