

SuperBrush, a Springfield manufacturer, expands by expanding market



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SPRINGFIELD -- **SuperBrush** started off 50 years ago manufacturing for the cosmetics industry, making tiny swabs used to apply blush to the cheeks.

But starting in the 1980s the consumer products giants that dominate the cosmetics industry started shifting their orders to China.

So SuperBrush adapted, and today the customers who buy SuperBrush swabs are more likely to use them on medical equipment, on a commercial printing press or on a dog's teeth. Or, with one of the company's newer product lines, down the barrel of a gun.

SuperBrush has 95 employees today, up from 60 five years ago. The company opened a 10,000-square-foot, \$3 million expansion in September and has plans to expand again by adding a second floor inside one of its high-ceiling wings, said General Manager Misty McGinnes.

SPRINGFIELD BUSINESS

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From Union Station to MGM Springfield and other projects in neighborhoods throughout the city, Springfield has seen \$3.307 billion in public and private investment in the last five years.

The company, which had a display at the "Springfield: Rising to New Heights" presentation last month, recorded 18 percent sales growth in 2016.

That's a far cry from where it was when the cosmetics business was leaving to go overseas.

"Proctor & Gamble was one of the last cosmetic accounts," McGinnes said. "They were a bridge to get us to medical. If we didn't have them to keep us going, we would have been in trouble."

SuperBrush moved from a mill building in Chicopee to 800 Worcester St. in the Indian Orchard section of Springfield in 2009. The building was once a research and development center for Solutia.

The exacting nature and flexibility required to serve health care providers and manufacturers of medical devices suits SuperBrush and its factory.

"It has to be high quality and the business doesn't go to China," McGinnes said.

SuperBrush foam swabs are used to do clean equipment like catheters and endoscopes and to test those products for cleanliness.

"We have all heard about scopes not being clean," she said. "They can put a substance on that swab that reacts in the presence of proteins" to detect contamination.

SuperBrush also makes applicators that spread disinfectant on a patients' skin before surgery. About 95 percent of the company's business is medical, McGinnes said.

The company has an e-commerce site where it sells foam swabs online, mostly to industry -- particularly printers that need to clean ink from delicate machinery.

Three years ago SuperBrush branched off into swabs for firearms, including tiny swabs called Gun-tips and Bore-tips meant to clean intricate parts. The reusable foam swabs fit on a cleaning rod and go down barrels, replacing the need for disposable cleaning patches.

SuperBrush's Bore-whips products combine the Bore-tips with a flexible fluorescent tube that feeds all the way down the barrel and through the chamber. The fluorescent tube serves as visible proof to a shooting range instructor that a firearm or air rifle is unloaded. It's a safety precaution at youth shooting events, McGinnes said.

McGinnes sends company representatives to the major gun and sporting goods trade shows, like the SHOT Show in Las Vegas each winter. The goal is to get the Bore-tips, Gun-tips and related products on the counter by the registers of sporting goods and gun shops.

And Superbrush also sells overseas.

"We can and do sell in Europe. We are in the medical market in Europe and we are hoping to break into the European gun market," McGinnes said. "We have to get that trade deficit down."

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