

The Del-Ton Dream

Tony Autry had a dream. Was there any profit in selling firearms-related goods on the Internet? "I always enjoyed playing around with guns, and I especially liked the modularity and simplicity of the modern sporting rifle platform," he says. So, in 2000, he began selling various items on eBay—spare parts, mainly. He experienced some success, but still kept his day job in telecommunications. But both he and his wife, Cassandra, wanted to strike out on their own.



In a few short years, Del-Ton has evolved from a firearms enthusiast's spare-parts business on eBay to a busy manufacturing and distribution company.

Though neither had any training in web-site design, they decided it was time to see if the dream could be realized. "We bought a book," says Cassandra. Obviously they read it, because they managed to launch Del-Ton.com (Del, for Delmar, Tony's father, who had joined the venture, and Ton, for Tony) and quickly found they were on to something. That same year they began buying upper assemblies, which Tony and Delmar built in their shop.

"I have no idea how many I built," says Tony. "Over time, probably several hundred. I have always been mechanically inclined and detail minded, and I got pretty good at it."

The following year, growing pains forced the Autrys to build a 1,000-square-foot steel building to accommodate the expanding business. Two years later, Tony's mother, Betty, came on board to answer the phones.

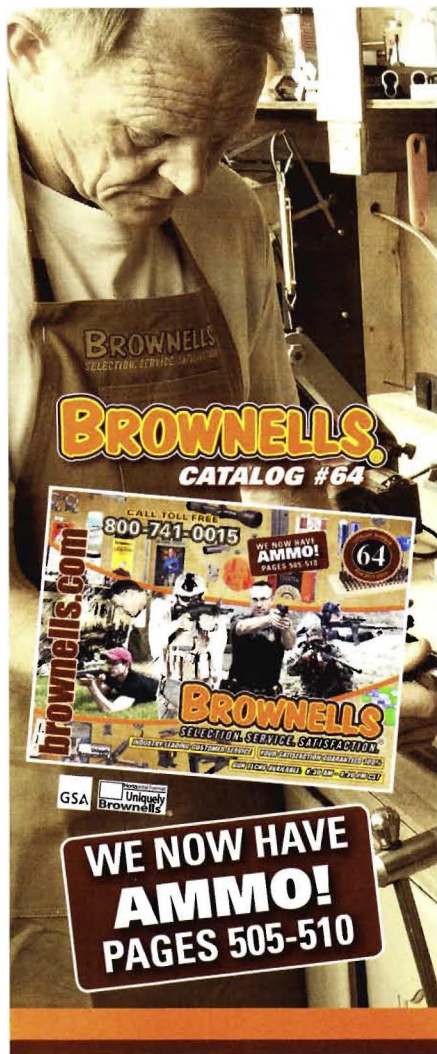
"We saw a real increase in the business when Betty began answering the phones full-time," says Cassandra. "It's amazing how such a simple thing like this helped our business grow so much."

That growth helped cement the importance of being customer-centric and making certain the customer is happy. "By being more available by phone, and thus, more responsive, we got the best feedback you can get from customers—increased sales," says Tony.

In 2007, Del-Ton moved into a 4,500-square-foot building in an industrial park in Elizabethtown, N.C. Del-Ton quickly outgrew that building, so in 2009, the Autrys moved the business into a 10,800-square-foot building in the same industrial park. And Del-Ton is leasing the 4,500-square-foot structure back again as a stopgap measure until an additional building can be constructed some time this year.

The Del-Ton website now carries more than 1,600 products—a number, according to Tony, that is sure to expand.

"Our goals for 2012 are to increase sales to law enforcement, build our dealer network, and continue to improve our products and service to our customers," he says. Sounds like a dream come true. (910-645-2172; del-ton.com)



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