Mission-critical technology made for battlefields

PacStar’s rugged networking equipment keeps lines of communication open.

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War time communications have been in a near constant state of evolution since the day when Paul Revere demonstrated that battles can be won on the heels of swift and certain military communications. Radio revolutionized battlefield communications during World War I, and the dawn of the digital age – with computers, cameras, encryption, satellites, global positioning, wireless, forward-looking radar and the like – continue to drive innovation.

This is the world in which PacStar has made its mark.

Founded in 2000, Portland-based PacStar manufactures small, lightweight, rugged, tactical networking equipment that provides reliable communications technology to military, first responders and commercial organizations that provide mission-critical and life saving operations in harsh environments. The company also makes products that serve railroad, and gas, oil and mining customers.

Its voice, data and video communications systems are used in fixed installations, but can also be customized to meet situational requirements.

PacStar’s reliability – its products have a less than 1 percent failure rate – and nimbleness have fueled impressive growth. In May, the company completed a massive expansion and it is projecting continued growth. PacStar expects up to $100 million in orders over the next five years.

“PacStar completed a three times expansion of its manufacturing facility in Portland and is gearing up for full-rate production that includes large increases in orders for our local and regional suppliers,” said CEO Peggy Miller.

That includes servicing a significant order from the U.S. Department of Defense, which earlier this year selected the patented PacStar 400-Series modular system to equip its largest small-teams communications program. In selecting the 400-Series system, the DoD cited the system’s small size, weight and power achievements, and its interchangeable/reconfigurable architecture. The contract is one of several multi-million dollar military deals PacStar has won over the past few years.

“We’re an organization that focuses on product quality, team work and customer service, but our success really starts with design,” said Miller.

PacStar designers are ruthless minimalists, packing a Mighty Mouse power supply and an energy-sipping motherboard into slim packages that are roughly the size of a standard modem, but so rugged those products can withstand the harshest conditions in land, sea and air.

PacStar completed its facility expansion in May. It improved flow by straightening out production lines, installed better lighting and enhanced communication by consolidating operations under one roof in anticipation of demand.

Even with the added space, Miller is already thinking about the need for more space. She said PacStar’s manufacturing space demand may double in five years.

“We intend to grow and believe we have the opportunity. Whether we can do it at our present location depends on our landlord,” said Miller.

PacStar’s need for production space may double in five years. Like many other technology manufacturers in a tight labor market, PacStar is constantly looking for qualified applicants.

“We pay good wages for good people. It’s just a matter of getting the word out,” said Miller.

In a deployment-critical and life-saving industry, motivating employees is never a problem.

“Everyone who works here is acutely aware of our mission. We have a rigorous, hard hiring process. Our people want to do the right thing, and want to do their best work.”