

SUCCESS STORY: HAHN PLASTICS

HAHN PLASTICS ABOUT HAHN PLASTICS

Since 1993, Hahn Plastics has diverted more than 44,000 metric tons of waste materials per year from landfills. That's not their only success: since 2000, the company has experienced year-over-year growth.

Founded in Germany more than 20 years ago, Hahn Plastics is Europe's leading producer of 100% recycled plastic lumber and outdoor products. Hahn's line of more than 2,000 products is used for a broad range of applications, from garden and park design, to complex industrial projects.

Hahn Plastics also has locations in the UK and France, with more than 300 employees worldwide.

In late 2016, with the support of Waterloo EDC and the Region of Waterloo, the company opened their first North American office in Waterloo. In 2017 Hahn Plastics expanded into their permanent Waterloo Region facility now located in St. Clements, Ontario.

DRIVEN BY ECOLOGICAL SHIFTS

Prior to moving to Waterloo, Hahn Plastics had already been trading with Canada (from the UK) for about three years.

As such, the company realized there was growing pressure in Canada for organizations to do more responsible recycling; and to create better environmental processes for dealing with waste destined for the landfill.

"We saw the Canadian market was about to go through the same ecological changes as Germany did in the late 1990s, and what the UK experienced four-to-five years ago—and it would be important to put down our roots here in Canada, in the early stages of that mental change," says Howard Waghorn, President of Hahn Plastics, North America.

In 2015, Hahn Plastics attended a trade show in Montreal to gauge the Canadian response about and public demand for recycled products made from local waste. "Everyone was very positive," recalls Howard. "The market conditions were definitely right for us to make moves. Our next decision was where in Canada do we go...and how do we set up?"



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A QUICK, EASY MOVE

Several factors played a key role in Hahn Plastic's decision to set up operations in Waterloo.

Ideally, Hahn Plastics needed a region with a larger population, which would create a larger amount of waste. Toronto was the first logical thought given its size; however, the costs associated with setting up there were significant.

That's when Waterloo came up as an option.

"Waterloo is so up-and-coming, we decided to have a look around," says Elizabeth Hueftlein, General Manager at Hahn Plastics and recently-returned Canadian citizen. The company sought information on all kinds of factors, including local suppliers for raw materials, as well as the distance from the airport for travel purpose.

It was when they connected with Waterloo EDC – in late 2015 – that all the pieces began to come together. "We visited in March 2016 and spent a couple of days with some Waterloo EDC partners," recalls Howard. "They gave us the information we were looking for, including potential properties, the cost of labour, labour laws, where to find lawyers and accountant firms. They showed us just how easy it would be to set up a business in Waterloo." Just seven months later, Hahn Plastics had settled in Waterloo.



DID YOU KNOW?

Waterloo is home of the blue box recycling system, which was first implemented in the region in 1983!

"Because the blue box started here in Waterloo, could we have found a place even more appropriate to start?"

– **Elizabeth Hueftlein**,
General Manager, Hahn Plastics

WONDERFUL WORDS ABOUT WATERLOO

[Welcoming](#). [Dynamic](#). [Helpful](#). [Friendly](#). [And Open-Minded](#). These are the five words that Howard and Elizabeth use to describe Waterloo.

Where "open-minded" is concerned, the term refers to the mentality of the region's business community.

"If we find a company on a website and they look interesting to us, and we want to show them our product, it can be very hard to get someone higher up in the business in Europe," says Howard. "There are lots of gatekeepers who won't allow us through. It's much easier here in Canada to get meetings, even if they're not familiar with the product."

"And we almost never get a 'no'," adds Elizabeth. "That company may not have use for our product, but almost always introduces us to other people or provide introductions." Recently, a Canadian company informed them about an upcoming trade show where Hahn Plastics could promote to conservation authorities—a target audience for Hahn. "They were kind enough to share that information with us; I don't think you get that so much in Europe."

Even the mayor of Waterloo has offered assistance, says Howard. "We got a visit from the mayor in March, and he's put us in touch with some people in the region and we're pushing that forward."

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NEXT STEPS

Currently, Hahn Plastics is focusing on increasing awareness in Canada through PR and communications efforts.

“That’s the most difficult thing to do—making people aware of our presence and products,” says Howard. “To be successful, we need to effectively introduce new products to a new market. The good news is that the market conditions are right for our products.”

“It’s tough for anyone to move away from a product that they’re used to,” adds Elizabeth. “For example, we’re up against concrete a lot; and with this climate, concrete is really not ideal, especially with paving stones and retaining walls because the salt erodes and breaks it down. Still, trying to get people to give our products a try is a challenge. But it’ll come. We just have to keep at it. So, our number-one priority is awareness, and then getting them to try it.”

Hahn Plastics has recently opened its own warehousing space and manufacturing has begun.

WATERLOO: NOT JUST FOR TECH

“It’s important for other businesses to know that Waterloo isn’t just a tech community. There’s manufacturing here, food processing plants...Just because you’re not a tech company, that doesn’t mean there isn’t room for you here in Waterloo.”

— **Elizabeth Hueftlein**,
General Manager, Hahn Plastics



MORE HELP FROM WATERLOO EDC

Howard and Elizabeth credit Waterloo EDC for helping Hahn Plastics set up so quickly.

“Waterloo EDC looked after us very well,” says Howard. “They made it a lot easier to set up appointments from overseas, when we didn’t know where to start. And once we made the decision to move to Waterloo, we moved quickly. The organization was enormously helpful and supportive in the process...the move certainly wouldn’t have been that quick without those shortcuts.”

Today, Waterloo EDC continues to play a role in Hahn Plastic’s settlement and growth.

“Even though we’re here now, we can still get in touch with Waterloo EDC to further develop connections,” says Elizabeth. “We have a point of contact, and we always get a response when we have questions or need information. We don’t have to go searching for contacts because Waterloo EDC helps us out.”

“Ultimately, the experience has been good, and we are exactly where we said we would be on our plan. The speed of growth is what we expected and we expect that to continue to increase,” says Howard.



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