

Light, powerful and a hit

Harrison firm's cordless drill marketed to women

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Published in the Cincinnati Enquirer on December 6, 2005.

With music blaring, the 40 women gathered for a sales meeting suddenly started screaming and rushing the flatbed cart being wheeled to the center of the room.

The object of all this excitement? The first cordless 12-volt drills produced by Campbell Hausfeld of Harrison, the maker of air-powered tools and compressors.

"They just flew over the chairs and began yelling," said Jennifer Imel, president of Tomboy Tools, a 5-year-old Denver company that markets tools and home-improvement kits for women through home-tool parties.

"No one had seen it before, and they had waited so long for the drill."

Tomboy, which seeks lightweight and easier-to-use tools for women, introduced the new drill at the annual sales convention for its home-sales consultants in August.

"I've worked for this company a long time and never seen people react to our product that way," said Hilarie Meyer, Campbell's director of marketing, who was at the convention. "I had one woman come up and hug me with tears in her eyes."

Tomboy Tools, which has about 400 home-sales consultants in the United States, is starting to market the cordless drill, which the company says is about 20 percent lighter than competitors, and a laser level developed by Campbell.

The new line of drills have motors producing 50 percent more power than competing models, yet the drills themselves are lighter because of new lighter battery cells and redesigned chucks (which hold the drill bit) and gears that have taken weight out.

In addition, the drills come with two-finger ergonomic triggers and soft-grip handles.

The drills also feature a patented dashboard feature that includes a magnet tray for holding fasteners, levels for accuracy and charge indicators on top for greater visibility.

Campbell also has developed a patented packaging system where the drill handle also serves as the handle for the drill case and a series of kits that includes an array of fasteners for almost any home-improvement project.

Lightweight, powerful

The new family of lightweight but powerful cordless hand tools being introduced by Campbell Hausfeld is one of the largest product launches in the 169-year history of the company, which is owned by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc.

And it's the latest evidence of a three-year product development effort dubbed "cut the cord" by Gary Heeman, president. Campbell is a leading supplier of compressors and pneumatic tools, tied to electric motors or gas engines. But it wanted to diversify into cordless products.

Campbell doesn't break out its revenues, but Heeman says the company's goal is to become a \$1 billion sales company, and "we're never going to get there on compressors alone," he said.

So three years ago, the company began an extensive market research and product redesign effort to expand beyond its traditional sales channels, such as home centers and male-dominated contractors, to include homeowners and other do-it-yourselfers.

"The way the power-tool industry grew up is mainly with the contractor and professional (user)," said John Brown, director of Campbell Hausfeld's home and car-care solutions group. "We're coming at it from the consumer side, a completely different angle."

Brown says the total cordless and corded drill market is valued at \$4.5 billion in sales. But the cordless market, which represents about \$1.5 billion of those sales, is growing about three times as fast as the traditional corded-drill market.

With the help of LPK Inc., the Cincinnati industrial design firm, Campbell Hausfeld has developed about 30 new products, about half of them cordless drills and drivers, which it is now rolling into the market.

Although all the products were designed and developed in Harrison, Campbell is assembling the new tools at its plant in China.

Smaller, quality tools

Janet Rickstrew, who founded Tomboy Tools five years ago after attending a home party for kitchen utensils, said the Campbell drill is the kind of product her company wants to sell.

"We're not selling pink and plastic," she says. "We want to team up with companies that understand women need smaller, quality tools."

Campbell also is marketing its lighter-weight tools in Japan, where it has a joint venture. And it has begun marketing the tools on Amazon.com.

"The industry uses Amazon as a launch platform for power tools," Brown said. "The reason is they can put product up on the site quickly, and more importantly, they can glean feedback from consumers and put it up in advance of even being available."

The company doesn't yet have sales numbers, but Meyer says the early customer response has been positive. The handfuls of customer satisfaction surveys received from early sales have rated the drills nearly perfect on a 100-point scale.

"We're ecstatic," Meyer said. "I don't think we've ever seen that kind of response."