

MW Canada Weaving Their Way to the Future

Like so many success stories, MW Canada's story starts as an immigrant story. The Berger family started the business in 1963 as Montreal Woolens, although Bob Berger is quick to point out that they are no longer in Montreal, and they no longer make woolens. After coming to Canada from Hungary, Bob Berger's father Charles spent some time working on the docks in Vancouver loading grain; he then proceeded to take a correspondence course in textile engineering from the University of Leeds in England. Then he worked at West Coast Woolen Mills in Vancouver. Within a year they needed a salesperson for Quebec, and he made the move to Montreal. Eventually Charles and his father Eugene started their own knitting mill and then a weaving mill, Montreal Woolens—the beginning of the company that we know today as MW Canada.



The company grew quickly, diversifying first from apparel to drapery fabrics, then to upholstery fabrics, and later vertical blind fabrics, and other novelties. The company stayed relevant by ever evolving, changing, diversifying, and adapting to the times. In 1972, Montreal Woolens acquired

Fromm Brothers, a textile mill in Cambridge, Ontario that was winding down business. This is what brought them to their current location. For a period both plants ran simultaneously, but as time went on the bulk of the manufacturing moved to Cambridge and the Montreal plant was shut down.

MW Canada has maintained their edge by keeping an eye on the competition and judging what they are good at and what they are not good at. They focus on their strengths, and the niches in the marketplace that are not adequately serviced. Bob Berger does not take sole credit for the company's success; he gives a lot of the credit to the very talented and hard-working people that are working with him. With a care for his employees that you don't see often, he has established a Learning Centre, "The ER", as it is known. "The Education Room" is where every employee's skills are assessed and upgraded. The skills that we need employees to have are not being taught in schools, so they need to constantly train. Many employees have worked toward their high school equivalency through this program.



For a few hours every month, employees can participate in online learning programs to further develop their skill set, whether it be mechanical courses, electrical courses or online business courses. Employees are financially rewarded for their training and for the new skills that they develop.



Each year Bob will sit down for breakfast, lunch, or dinner with every employee in small groups. “Lunch with Bobby” provides an opportunity to get to know each employee personally. Additionally, it gives every employee a chance to understand the past, present, and future direction of the business. It serves as a reminder that every job held in the operation is essential to the final product and success of the business. MW Canada truly shows a concern for their employees’ future that is not often seen elsewhere today.

“There is no secret to success, or everyone would be successful,” Bob Berger tells me. He attributes some of his success to his father and the wisdom that he passed down to him. Staying humble, knowing when to admit you are wrong, not financially overextending yourself, saying thank you, and treating others with respect are all wise words to live by. He also attributes his success to always staying ahead of the market. He says that MW Canada is a design business. “We don’t copy, we create. If you create, you then have a better chance of better margin. If you copy, then you will always be compared to those who offer similar items for less money.” Unique products with perceived value allow their customers to keep coming back for more; this strategy is obviously working for MW Canada.

“It’s essential that if there’s an issue, you stand behind your product, you do whatever it takes to make the customer happy.”

“There’s no upside in being the cheapest. Being the cheapest is a road to the bottom. We need to keep reinvesting in new technologies to compete with world.”

The Canadian textile industry has deteriorated over the last 25 years; many names no longer exist. But MW is no different than any other manufacturing business. They need skilled employees, government policies that encourage entrepreneurs to take risks, and trade measures that put Canadian industry on a level playing field. It is companies like MW Canada that have a dedication to making a quality product in Canada by Canadians that are left standing.

“People buy from people they like, and they trust,” says Bob Berger. He says that none of this is magic; treating your customers with respect and providing them with unique design, quality product, and fast delivery is essential.

MW Canada currently employs around 100 people and is continually diversifying, modernizing, and adding new equipment as needed. With a focus on the future, Bob’s son Matt has joined

MW Canada, and Bob has begun preparing the fourth generation of the Berger family to take the helm of the operation.

All of MW Canada's operations are done in-house, from design, warping, weaving, laminating, to dyeing and finishing. With all the operations under one roof, they control their own destiny, and they control quality at all the stages of production.

As a member of the Canadian Textile Industry Association, they are active in promoting Canadian businesses and advocating for manufacturing in Canada. You can't complain if you're not willing to work towards a solution, and it is only by working together as an industry and ensuring that the government is taking us seriously that we can hope to effect change. The textile industry, although much smaller than it has been in the past, is still a vital part of the Canadian economy. Being a part of the CTIA gives companies like MW Canada the opportunity to join with other industry leaders in being a voice to the provincial and federal governments, advocating for the textile industry when and where it is needed. Bob Berger has done just this during the pandemic, advocating with politicians along with the CTIA for keeping the manufacturing of PPEs in Canada. It was disappointing to him, and to many others in the industry, how quickly the Canadian government has gone back to importing these vital products.

As we look forward to the future of the textile industry in Canada, it is companies like MW

Canada working alongside other leaders in the industry, under the umbrella of the Canadian Textile Industry Association, that will lead us forward.



Thank you, MW Canada, for all you do for your direct community and in promoting the textile industry in Canada. With leaders like this in the textile industry, we can have confidence that textiles will continue to play a strong part in the Canadian economy well into the future.