



Indsights

A Window into the Indigenous Economy

Case Study

Wilcox Door Service Inc.

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Wilcox Door Service Inc.

Meet Zach



Meet Zach

Zach Stewart is the president of Wilcox Door Service Inc., a full-service commercial door company that installs and services overhead doors and loading dock equipment. He has a joint degree from the University of Toronto and Sheridan College in digital enterprise management. This program taught him business management in the digital era with a focus on graphic design, communications, public relations, information technology (IT), consulting, and professional services.

Wilcox Door Service is a family-owned business and was started by Zach's father, Bill Stewart. The company dates to 1992, when Bill first established his own company, Select Overhead Door, after spending years working within the industry. After acquiring a local competitor in 2006, the company was rebranded as Wilcox Door Service and has been servicing its clients across the Greater Toronto Area and Canada ever since.

Zach spent time working alongside his father in the business while growing up, holding jobs in the sales, marketing, and operations, eventually working his way up to vice president, and now the president role within Wilcox Door Service.

Products and Services



Products and Services

Wilcox Door Service has offices in Toronto, Hamilton, and in the Six Nations of the Grand River, (Ohsweken, Ontario). They work exclusively with commercial businesses to supply, install, and service overhead doors and loading dock equipment. These can include shipping bay doors, high-speed doors, and truck restraints. It services a wide range of industries, including warehousing and distribution, manufacturing, retail, food and beverage, logistics, and transportation.

“Anything that comes into the back of a building through a 53-foot or any size truck. We service the equipment that helps load that into buildings.”

The company prides itself on its customer service and has a dedicated team of sales and marketing professionals, technicians, and operations that put the customer first. It has numerous staff that have been with the company for over 25 years, allowing Wilcox Door Service to leverage that experience across the variety of industries it services, making for stronger relationships and partnerships with the clients it serves.



Market Background

The door supply and service industry in Canada is a growing trade sector that provides installation, maintenance, and repair services for several types of organizations and businesses (Digital Journal, 2022; Wilcox Door Service Inc., n.d.). The industry plays a crucial role in ensuring smooth and efficient operations while providing safety and security to assets and employees (Dataintel, n.d.).

Leveraging their expertise across different areas, door service businesses can offer their customers a wide range of products and services, such as loading dock equipment, air curtains, and hands-free technology (Wilcox Door Service Inc, n.d.). The door market has experienced significant growth globally and is projected to continue to expand, with an estimated compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.31% from 2022 to 2028, resulting in an estimated value of approximately 2.65 billion dollars by 2028 (Digital Journal, 2022).

Successes



Successes

One key aspect that Zach credits for Wilcox Door Service's recent successes is the implementation of the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS). EOS is an external program used by business leaders and entrepreneurs to help their organizations meet their goals and growth objectives while achieving a proper work-life balance (EOS Worldwide, 2022). The program does this by helping organizations create open, honest, and accountable working environments while ensuring everyone within the organization is on the same page and has a clear understanding of their role (EOS Worldwide, 2022). With these systems in place, organizations are better equipped to work through problems while promoting consistency and discipline as they grow and achieve goals (EOS Worldwide, 2022). Zach acknowledges that the program has helped the business gain a stronger vision, structure, and core values that will help align the company with its goals for the future while allowing them to continue to serve its clients at the highest level.

Another key aspect that separates Wilcox Door Service from its competitors is that it is one of the largest companies operating within this market, and it is an Indigenous business that fully embraces its heritage. Vendors are frequently looking to establish partnerships with Indigenous businesses to help meet social procurement goals. With the capacity to work with these vendors, Wilcox Door Service is positioned to take on larger projects and is on the verge of expanding.

"We've been able to gain a lot of traction with these larger customers that have mandates in the United States and social procurement here in Canada. We landed Amazon across the country, as being Indigenous really helped us along the way because we went direct to their social procurement people that were looking for diversity."

Successes



Establishing Relationships

Zach credits Wilcox Door Service's long-standing success in the industry as a key characteristic for establishing relationships with a larger company like Amazon. Wilcox Door Service has been able to scale its business slowly, over the course of 30 years, by properly establishing a presence in its industry and partnering with large companies in the area. Landing large accounts did not happen initially for Wilcox Door Service, and it was able to build its record of accomplishment by staying true to its growth strategy and not biting off more than it could chew.

Working with Amazon was a slow process; Wilcox Door Service began earning small jobs, which helped them establish their credibility with Amazon. By being consistent with their work, delivering quality service, and keeping an open dialogue, they could stay on Amazon's radar for future opportunities to work together. One key lesson Zach learned in building this relationship was to remain in front of critical decision-makers, ensuring that Amazon remembers who Zach and Wilcox Door Service are.

"They do want to talk to you, especially if you are Indigenous. Just staying really on top of it."

What Does the Future Look Like

In the next five to ten years, Zach sees the company continuing to leverage these relationships and expanding across Canada and the United States. It has recently established a national accounts division that allows them to service clients across Canadian markets. Zach sees their work with Amazon as a model to follow when it comes to their growth trajectory. This relationship forced Zach to think of ways that they could expand and service various cities, communities, and businesses while allowing them to maintain their profit margins.

"My goal is to have ten locations across the country. That's always been my goal. Significant growth in revenue and probably a location in the United States is going to be one of our goals as well. Yeah, we're right on that bell curve where it's really starting to take off, and the growth is really starting to happen."

Successes

With this growth strategy in place, Zach feels connected to Indigenous communities and would like to see the company continue to build partnerships with Indigenous communities in British Columbia, Alberta, and the Yukon.

“Working with the First Nations in those areas to show them that there is a revenue model here, there is something that we can build here. It is helping us a lot, gaining the funding to either purchase a company or start our own in these locations.”

In the door supply and services industry, procurement can play a key role in establishing connections with new customers and expanding operations. Procurement refers to the process that the government and other organizations take to purchase goods and services, which involves the evaluation of needs, contracts, and selection of suppliers (Government of Canada, 2022). Businesses require a thorough understanding of procurement processes to be able to navigate bidding and proposal requirements to secure contracts and build partnerships.

The growth of the door service industry has been driven by the rising demand for upgraded systems, such as energy-efficient doors, creating more procurement opportunities for businesses to accommodate these improvements (Dataintel, n.d.). Rebate programs are used as a common marketing tool to encourage both sustainability and stimulate these types of procurement deals (Kennedy, n.d.). By offering partial refunds to customers who purchase specific products and/or services, businesses are well-positioned to grow their sales along with their customer base (Lavelle, n.d.). These programs can be implemented by businesses themselves or in collaboration with other private corporations



and government organizations. Many incentive programs have been launched by companies like Enbridge, such as their Fixed Incentive Program, to encourage consumers and businesses to reduce energy use and costs (Enbridge Gas, n.d.).

More recently, the Canadian Government has implemented new measures to encourage the procurement of goods and services from diverse businesses. One of those initiatives is the annual 5% federal procurement target for Indigenous businesses, aimed at supporting Indigenous economic development and bridging the gap in economic opportunities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, 2021). Many private companies are also prioritizing procurement from Indigenous-owned businesses as part of their diversity and inclusion efforts. As part of facilitating this, the government has established an Indigenous Business Directory on its website, enabling government and private sectors to be able to collaborate with Indigenous businesses more easily (Government of Canada, 2022). However, there continues to be room for inclusion efforts to grow as many businesses continue to face challenges in accessing procurement opportunities.

Challenges

Labour and Education

Despite the door service industry's overall growth, businesses have faced many barriers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Digital Journal, 2022). As the Canadian economy recovers, many skilled trade sectors, including door service businesses, are struggling to find enough skilled workers to meet the growing demand for their services, as depicted in Figure 1 (3M Science Centre, 2022). One of the primary factors of this shortage is the interruption of education and training programs due to the pandemic, as many were put on hold or delayed during this time (3M Science Centre, 2022).

While Wilcox Door Service is uniquely positioned within its own industry, it is not insulated from the obstacles and challenges that the broader Canadian workforce is facing. One way to combat this shortage is for businesses to rethink their hiring methods. This strategy is something that Zach has had to adjust in recent years. Rather than hiring based on the candidate's skill set, Zach focuses more on finding candidates with the right attitude and fit.

"There are not enough skilled trades coming in for us to train them in our type of work. So, we are recruiting people from Newfoundland and Labrador to come here, and we are starting to change our recruitment strategy to procure the people that we want here. We are hiring based on the right attitude, and we can train all the technical stuff."

These strategies may work in the interim, but it is predicted that the labour shortage faced by many industries in Canada will only continue to worsen over the next five to ten years. Governments are starting to recognize the issues that employers are facing and have begun to entice students to enter skilled trades programs.

Zach recognizes that the messaging in recent years has changed, and the stigma of entering the trades has slowly begun to fade.

"I think from an educational standpoint, ... not shaming people going into trades is going to be a big shift for the Canadian culture and American culture and pretty much every first world nation."

Zach also recognizes that there is a connection to Indigenous students when it comes to post-secondary education. There is a big push for Indigenous students to learn various software and computer science skills and to attend professional schools. While these are great, they often require students to leave their communities. Learning a trade or developing these skills can have a direct impact on their communities while allowing Indigenous youth to stay close to home.

Another major contributing factor to the shortage is Canada's aging population. The Canadian government estimates that approximately 700,000 skilled trades workers will retire between 2019 and 2028, creating a significant gap in the workforce that will be difficult to fill (3M Science Centre, 2022). Due to this, businesses may struggle to meet customer demands and timelines. This gap could result in longer wait times for customers and put additional pressure on businesses to take problem-solving into their own hands. **Over the next five years, it is estimated that over 256,000 new apprentices will be needed in the skilled trades to meet the demand in Canada, with industrial electricians expecting to be one of the top careers in demand from 2022 to 2026 (Government of Canada, 2023).** With the right support, the Indigenous population can play a big part in helping to solve Canada's labour shortage. The Indigenous population in Canada is growing at nearly twice the rate of non-Indigenous populations and will eventually enter the labour force (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2022a).

Challenges

To address these challenges, the Canadian government has taken steps to encourage young Canadians entering the workforce to pursue a career in the skilled trades. Programs, like the Skilled Trades Awareness and Readiness program, have been launched by the government to ensure that enough skilled workers are available to meet the demand in the door service industry and other trades sectors (Government of Canada, 2023). Additionally, the program aims to encourage the inclusion of marginalized groups in these sectors (Government of Canada, 2023). Generally, the door supply and service industry in Canada is anticipated to continue expanding in the coming years, presenting more possibilities for businesses to expand their operations and amplify their customer reach. However, more work needs to be done to address the immediate labour shortages in the industry to ensure its continued growth and success for future workers. By addressing the challenges facing the industry, door supply and service businesses can better establish themselves for long-term success and growth.

Procurement

Various levels of government across Canada have started to recognize the importance of the Indigenous economy and the role it can play in advancing reconciliation, particularly with economic reconciliation. In 2020, the Prime Minister of Canada launched a mandate to ensure that 5% of the value of federal contracts is awarded to Indigenous businesses.

While the intent of the mandate is well-meaning, many Indigenous businesses often do not qualify to bid on these opportunities, as explained by Zach in this apt observation:

“There are so many aspects to these federal bids. Indigenous businesses are small, and most of them do not have enough people to qualify for these federal bids. They set these requirements that Indigenous is preferred, but you need 3 million of revenue, and you need this and three years of that as a track record. So, you have eliminated all Indigenous business right off the bat.”

“There should be programs to help these Indigenous businesses get to that level, whether that is an assessment or an audit, that they are able to do the work that the federal government requires. They need to set up some sort of structure that enables Indigenous businesses to win the work because all that is happening right now is they are just partnering with another company. And that has been something that has been going on for a long time in that regard.”

This is an issue that Zach feels very strongly about, and he recognizes the role that Wilcox Door Service can play in helping smaller Indigenous businesses take advantage of these opportunities. Zach would like to see the company continue to expand and work more closely with Indigenous communities and businesses. Wilcox Door Service is in a unique position to be an ambassador for its industry and to partner with Indigenous companies to help them meet their procurement goals.

“Establishing those relationships [is important] because they have a lot of influence, I think, [on] where those companies in those areas purchase and procure from. So, if we are able to partner with them, it is kind of an instant business development, and we can help fill that through partnership. We are helping their communities. It is just a win-win for everybody involved.”

Figure 1 – Canada’s Delayed Apprenticeship Registration Recovery

Figure 1 – Canada’s Delayed Apprenticeship Registration Recovery

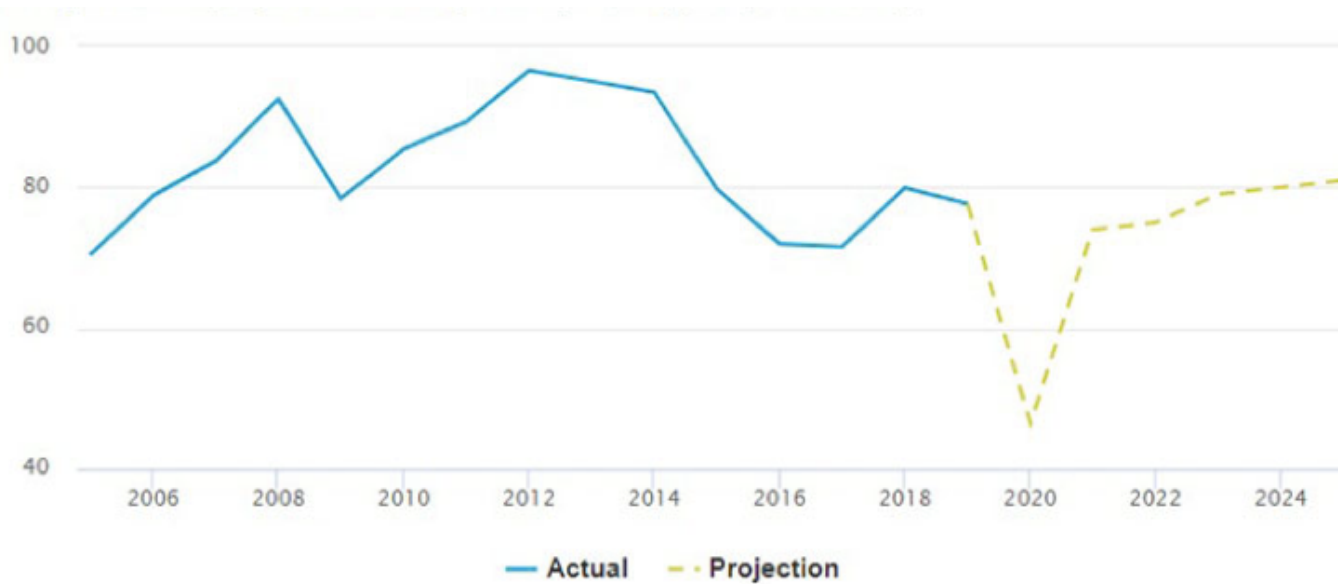


Figure 1 illustrates a sharp decline in skilled trades apprenticeship registrations in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a projected delayed recovery reaching 2025.

Powell, N. & Richardson, B. (2021). Preparing Canada’s Skilled Trades for a Post-pandemic Economy. Retrieved April 6, 2023. https://www.rbccm.com/en/insights/story.page?dcr=templatedata/article/insights/data/2021/09/preparing_canadas_skilled_trades_for_a_post-pandemic_economy



Community Connection

Wilcox Door Service has a deep connection to the communities it serves and represents. This connection can be seen in the philanthropic partnerships that they have established with various organizations across Canada.

They have partnered with the **Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund**, whose goal is to build cultural understanding and a path toward reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people. Wilcox Door Service has made numerous donations to support its initiatives. Zach's father, Bill, was on the board of directors and helped launch the fund, so the fund has a deep connection to Wilcox Door Service. They have created a dedicated legacy room within the company's headquarters that honours the legacy of the Residential School System. Zach sees this as an opportunity for non-Indigenous staff to learn more about

Indigenous history in Canada, specifically about the Residential School System and its lasting effects on those impacted by it.

Wilcox Door Service has also partnered with **Black North Initiative**, an organization that is committed to removing the systemic barriers that are affecting the lives of Black Canadians. The goal for Zach is to continue to increase the diversity of Wilcox Door Service's staff by committing to hiring more Indigenous and People of Colour. This partnership was a natural fit for Zach as he is proud of the diversity of the team and sees the value in bringing in people with different perspectives and backgrounds.

Zach also recognizes the importance of being environmentally conscious and has explored the idea of the company becoming carbon neutral. While the nature of the business makes it difficult to reach those goals, they have partnered with **Tree Canada** and have agreed to plant a tree for every service call that its technicians make. As of today, they have planted over 5000 trees.

Thinking of Entering a Trades Program?

Thinking of Entering a Trades Program?

Zach recognizes the importance of education and the role that it can play in opening doors, both financially and by providing purpose to one's life. While the push in the past has been to encourage students to pursue a university degree, Zach has seen firsthand that pursuing a skilled trade can be equally valuable and rewarding. Zach has some excellent advice for any student looking to enter the trades professions:

“One, you are in high demand. So, getting started should not be the most difficult thing for you. I would probably take a couple of courses to learn where your skillset lands and what your passion is, but it is a great career. Our guys all earn pensions. They are set up for retirement when they retire, but they also get highly paid. It is a very high-paying career where, if you are working hard, you will be making six figures (salary).”

Secondly, working in a skilled trade can provide purpose and camaraderie with your colleagues:

“It provides a purpose. It provided a direction for them. We have a great group of technicians (back there). They are kind of their own division in there. They have their own brotherhood where they are trying to help each other, guide each other, and teach each other. I think you get that network of support for sure. Being inside an organization and engaging with such a work culture is something that you might not get anywhere else.”



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