

Building Business on a Cardboard Box!



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By **Alicia Saunders**

Alberta's Instabox focuses on small quantities and personal service to corner the market in custom display and packaging solutions.

Greg Mace's Uncle Malcolm had a problem. As an entrepreneur in the printing business in England, he found he needed boxes small enough to transport his products without becoming too heavy. The problem was, there were no such boxes – they were either too big or not strong enough to transport paper. Being an enterprising sort of fellow, he decided to make his own boxes – solving his own problem and unwittingly creating a business that would, over the next 30 years, cross the ocean and become a thriving family business.

"We started off pretty humbly in the 1970s," says Greg Mace from the company's current head office in Edmonton. "Business conditions in England weren't ideal, so my father Jim Mace brought the box business over here and started it up with three or four people in 1975."

Initially, Instabox made good old-fashioned brown cardboard boxes, but as times changed and marketing and merchandising became more sophisticated the company found a niche in specialty, small quantity custom display boxes. (We still do a grand job on regular slotted cartons; we have never forgotten where we came from.)

"Companies don't always need large runs of these things," says Mace. "They can save money on storage and shipping by just ordering what they need at any given time."



Our most valuable assets in Calgary – our staff!

Photo by Alicia Saunders

Mace, who had been involved with day-to-day management and ownership of the company since the beginning, says focusing on that particular niche was a recipe for success. With products ranging from simple slotted cartons, to telescoping top and bottom boxes, to five panel wraps, cut out trays, pads, dividers and custom die cut designs, Instabox and its sister company, Cactus Corrugated Containers (a purely Internet-based company), has served clients ranging from Hollywood (they manufactured the boxes for the latest Simpsons' DVD release) to Silicon Valley to international marketing, research and development companies. The result has been the creation of a team of people and technology that has put Instabox on the leading edge of custom box manufacturing.

"We are at the forefront of technology and have been able to take what we've learned by doing business around the world and apply it for our clients right here in Alberta," says Mace. "In doing so, we've built a repu-

tation and our company from four people to 74 people in Edmonton and Calgary."

Mace attributes a great deal of the company's success to a loyal employee base – many of whom have been with the company since its early days in Canada. Mace's "right-hand man," Rick Bain, is one of those people. He is now in charge of the Calgary operation.

"He's been right by my side since day one," says Mace. "He's seen this company through all the hard times when we were out selling during the day and in the back making boxes at night. We grew up together in this business."

As a family business with close friends at the ready, Instabox knows the value of relationships and prides itself on providing that "50s-style service" and "new millennium technology" to its clients – large or small.

"We'll make anything for anybody," says Mace. "And they all get our very best. That's what we've built this business on." 

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