

Custom tackle that's not stuck in the Mud

How did what started as a tentative early online purchase from an electrical engineer and avid angler end up as one of America's largest suppliers of rod-building components? Welcome to Tom McNamara and Mud Hole Custom Tackle's story.

Remember the day when a 28,800bps (bit per second) dial-up modem was considered fast? Tom McNamara, the president and CEO of Mud Hole Custom Tackle Inc, remembers it like it was yesterday. The year was 1998 and Tom was an electrical engineer who was running his own consulting engineering business.

As a dedicated fisherman he used his new dial-up modem to place his first online order with Mud Hole. Shortly after that purchase, Tom bought the whole company from Forked River, in New Jersey, where he had been providing local fishing knowledge and custom rods to the local community for 24 years. He relocated the company to Orlando Florida where Mud Hole has grown into the largest supplier of rod-building components and tackle-crafting goods, with worldwide distribution.

"When we first relocated to Orlando, the business was actually operated from my home, with sales coming from the internet and catalogues," says Tom.

"In the beginning it was just me and my wife with help from the occasional baby-sitter who I would enlist to type in orders and enter new inventory.

"About a year later we hired our first employee and moved to our first warehouse. It was around that time we stopped selling



Mud Hole's stock holding means that you'll rarely be told that an item is not in stock!

fishing goods and focused on the custom-rod-building supply market. I wanted to do one thing, and do it well.

"By focusing just on custom-rod building we were able to concentrate on meeting the needs of our customers extremely well."

In those early days Tom found that Mud Hole's market share was increasing by the day and subsequently acquired other businesses.

Fast forward 14 years and three warehouses later and Mud Hole has successfully taken the craft of custom-rod building and tackle crafting out of the closet and is making it mainstream by exposing it to the fishing public like never before.

"We have had double-digit growth every year since we began.



The Mud Hole team is insistent on excellent customer service.

Last year was outstanding for us. The company was up 36 per cent and shipped more than 80,000 orders. Dealing with our growth while trying to maintain our high level of customer service and high fulfilment rates has been the biggest challenge. If you told me

in 1998 where we would be today I would not believe you.

"To think that we currently have more than 31,000 SKUs representing two million items and almost \$10 million in inventory is testament to our customers' confidence in us. Mud

Hole operates a world-class warehouse automation system and bar-coded pick-pack ship-fulfilment system, which has allowed us to improve fulfilment rates, customer service and the customers' shopping experience."

Mud Hole currently employs more than 50 people and operates from its 15,000 sq ft (1,394 sq m) headquarters in Oviedo, Florida. It's currently looking for a larger space to continue its growth. Mud Hole's in-house capabilities include laser engraving, direct-to-garment printing, embroidery, large-format vinyl printing,

pre and post-production video, catalogue photography, packaging, plus catalogue layout and design.

Tom continues: "Our catalogue and art-production departments do an outstanding job – all the design and layout, product information, creative copy and product images are completed in house. With so many SKUs, new products and marketing initiatives, we never run out of creative ideas."

Another reason why Mud Hole has seen such success is the quality of its staff, as Tom is keen to highlight, calling

them the most knowledgeable personnel in the custom-rod-building industry.

"The team at Mud Hole stays focused on the principle of growing a bigger pie. We constantly have to get new people to join our craft, be it custom-rod building, fly tying or lure making. We spend a large amount of our resources educating fishermen so that they have the option to build their own fishing rod, tie their own flies and build their own lures. I'm most proud of our team at Mud Hole for constantly thinking outside the box."

Dealing with supply logistics and vendors during rapid growth has required pioneering changes in how custom-rod-building components are supplied. In 2008 Mud Hole launched the Custom Rod Builder (CRB) line of products to fill the needs of rod builders that factories could not provide. The CRB line of products are specifically designed so the fisherman can easily access and afford them.

Meeting the needs of its customers is something the team at Mud Hole is always on the lookout for. In 2009 Mud Hole was the largest consumer of blanks from G Loomis, but when G Loomis stopped selling blanks it left a void in the blank market. The team at Mud Hole responded by producing the MHX blank series, which, in a few short years, has captured worldwide attention for its quality, value and innovative features never before offered to the custom-rod-building market.

Mud Hole encountered a similar situation in 2010 when long-time rod-building-thread supplier Gudebrod closed its doors. At that time Mud Hole was Gudebrod's largest rod-building-thread customer and was left without a capable thread supplier, so Mud Hole collaborated with the American Tackle Company and created the ProWrap line of threads.

Tom continues: "We could foresee the void in the rod-building-thread market with the Gudebrod foreclosure and had been working with textile manufacturers to design a suitable substitute. That led to creating the ProWrap line of threads – more than 1,000 SKUs of thread specifically designed for the rod-building industry. Today most of the top fishing manufacturers in the US, Europe and Asia use ProWrap." **ITW**

“ Mud Hole currently employs 50 people and operates from its impressive 15,000 sq ft (1,394 sq m) headquarters in Oviedo, Florida. ”



MUD HOLE FACTS

- ▶ 80,000 – estimated number of orders shipped in 2011
- ▶ 2 million – number of items on sale through Mud Hole
- ▶ \$10 million – estimated worth of Mud Hole inventory
- ▶ 50 – members of dedicated staff
- ▶ 450,000 – unique visitors a month to www.mudhole.com
- ▶ 222 – full-colour pages in latest Mud Hole catalogue



Mud Hole Custom Tackle

T: +1 407 447 7657

E: info@mudhole.com

W: www.mudhole.com