

# A Brief History of OTTO

With confidence in his ability and faith in the American dream, Jack Roeser started OTTO in the basement of his Park Ridge, Illinois home in July of 1961. Jack used an initial investment of \$5,000, along with his military, business and engineering experience to design pushbutton and rotary switches.

Initially, Jack focused on developing the P1 switch that soon became the core of OTTO's business. His long hours and hard work rapidly paid off, turning a profit in his very first year.

Consistent growth that year made it necessary to relocate to a facility that provided the design and machine space to meet OTTO's increasing demand. In 1962, OTTO moved to a building on Lincoln Avenue in Morton Grove. New tools and machines were added to develop the precision manufacturing that OTTO is famous for. This environment gave Jack the freedom to exercise the creativity needed to develop and test innovative products that were based on his elegant, simple designs.

By 1968, OTTO had developed a solid reputation as a high quality switch manufacturer. Floor capacity in Morton Grove was being pushed to the limit and it was time to expand. The town of Carpentersville, located about 30 miles west of Morton Grove, had space available at an abandoned liquor store. OTTO purchased the building and sold the leftover liquor inventory, coolers and refrigerators to help pay for the building. Carpentersville

became OTTO's permanent home.

OTTO continued to grow throughout the 70's becoming a key supplier to the military, aerospace, locomotive and avionics industries. OTTO switches were used in fighter and bomber aircraft as well as train locomotives. Key products included the T1, T2 and T4 switches as well as the B2, P5, P6 and the P7.

In 1979, expansion was needed again. OTTO moved to the neighboring building, the former home of Star Manufacturing, a foundry built in 1865.



As military spending increased in the 80's, OTTO experienced growth in the federal/military and aerospace markets. Engineering designed and developed many new products to meet the increasing demand. By 1986, new products included the Mini Trim, T5, and the T6. B series switches were installed in the space shuttle, F-16 and F-18 fighter jets, and unmanned drones.

In January of 1987, Jack's son Tom joined the company as General Manager and assumed responsibility for OTTO's day to day activities. A degreed engineer with an MBA and considerable supply chain business experience, Tom's presence made an immediate impact. Jack said of his son, "Tom is a great planner; he brings the mind of an engineer as well as a businessman." By applying his knowledge and experience, as well as his life history growing up in the shadow of OTTO, revenues continued to climb rapidly. The combination of Jack's entrepreneurial spirit with Tom's business acumen and engineering skills solidified OTTO's foun-

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## Celebrating 50 Years of Excellence



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**OTTO**<sup>5</sup>  
| YEARS

dation as a world class engineering and manufacturing organization.

As the 90's arrived, OTTO took advantage of a unique opportunity. OTTO supplied the B2 switch to a prominent radio manufacturer for use in their surveillance kits. Another supplier on this project had problems with product delivery. OTTO proposed a solution that involved supplying the complete assembly, even though the B2 switch was only a small part of the original design. By utilizing OTTO's vertically integrated manufacturing capabilities, OTTO was able to mold the housing, make the cable assembly and assemble the speaker microphone elements. This single product spawned the OTTO Communications Division which has grown to supply speaker microphones, headsets, surveillance kits and tactical communications accessories under private label to most of the major radio manufacturers and directly to the public safety, hospitality and industrial markets under the OTTO Brand.

Throughout the 90's, OTTO made significant capital investments in expansion and equipment. OTTO's vertical integration and manufacturing capabilities continue to be one of the key

reasons for continued success. An addition was added to the 2 E. Main Street building culminating in a grand opening on May 5, 1999.

As the 2000's unfolded, OTTO grew from switches to joysticks in the Controls division and implemented new products to meet the demand for the military market in the Communications group. Both divisions experienced growth in the value added market; designing, tooling and manufacturing solutions to meet specific customer needs. This precise response to unique customer requests is an important part of the commitment as OTTO navigates toward the future.

When it's all said and done, it's all about relationships; with our colleagues and our customers. Essentially that reaches to the core of OTTO's success. Jack Roeser still comes to his office at 2 E. Main St. every day where he manages and supports many political and philanthropic projects, and Tom still seeks his advice. Jack is the entrepreneur and Tom is the business man; and through their unique combination of skills they've built a company that has thrived for 50 years. That strong family bond flows throughout the organization and it is clear that Jack and Tom under-

stand that at the root of OTTO's success is the fine employees who arrive every day and commit to total customer satisfaction.

OTTO now begins the journey through the next half century. With OTTO's focus on new product development and value added services, OTTO is prepared with new equipment, room to expand and a growing staff. Plans are in place to continue OTTO's focus on meeting the needs of customers with demanding applications around the globe. Because of OTTO's vertical integration and ability to engineer value into specific product designs, customers seek OTTO's expertise in solving challenging problems.

Looking back at the last 50 years, OTTO is proud of their legacy, quality, innovation and employees. Looking forward, OTTO will continue to focus on their valued customers by achieving total customer satisfaction through continuous improvement.

**OTTO – designed, manufactured and precision tested, right here in the USA.**



**1961** OTTO is founded by Jack Roeser in the basement of his Park Ridge, IL home. Key products are the P1 and rotary switches.

**1962** OTTO moves to a new facility in Morton Grove.

**1963** A5 Epoxy Applicator machine is sold. The OTTO Equipment Division is formed.

**1968** OTTO moves to a larger facility at 36 E. Main Street in Carpentersville, IL.

**1971** B3 basic switch is developed.

**1972** T4 trim switch is developed for the F-15 fighter jet.

**1973** P6 pushbutton is used in military and commercial aircraft.

**1977** OTTO moves next door to 2 E. Main Street.

**1979** OTTO mini trim switch is used in the space shuttle.

**1980** OTTO Communications division is established from a single product prototype and OTTO produces its first audio accessory, the V1 surveillance kit.

**1987** Tom Roeser joins OTTO as General Manager.

**1988** OTTO's first grip becomes available.

**1994** OTTO's first speaker microphone is designed and manufactured.

**1996** Hall effect technology is designed into new products.

**2000** The Communications division grows to become 46% of OTTO sales.

**2004** OTTO expands from switches into joystick design and manufacturing.

**2006** OTTO Communications division moves into its own facility at 10 W. Main Street.

**2011** Celebrating our past, focused on our future!

