Czero advancing new technologies

By Pat Ferrier
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Question: Explain what Czero is and does.
Answer: Czero is an engineering service company that specializes in accelerating new technology development for our clients in the areas of clean tech and automotive.

Essentially, our strength lies in our ability to take someone's need or rough idea and quickly and cost effectively turn it into a robust design that can be made ready for high volume production. While a lot of companies can provide that service for products and concepts that are well developed and understood, our strength lies in the ability to do that with new concepts and things that have not yet been done before and need R&D along the way.

Q: You just celebrated an anniversary. How long have you been in Fort Collins and how did the company originate?
A: We formed Czero in January 2007, so we just celebrated our fifth anniversary. My business partner Chris Turner and I have been in the automotive industry our entire careers and have always worked on advanced technologies.

We wanted to form a company that would continue to do that but also work on other clean technologies that have the potential to be game changing.

The company originally was located in Colorado Springs, but we moved it to Fort Collins within the first year because of all the clean tech opportunities here.

Q: How has your business changed and adapted to new technology and a new economy?
A: In terms of the new economy, the recession hit within a year of us starting the company and service companies are usually the first companies to get hit, so we feel very good that we have been able to steadily grow the business during such challenging economic times.

Regarding new technologies, we like to think that we are helping define and develop new technologies rather than adapting to them.

Q: Where does the name come from?
A: It is intended to be a bit of a play on words highlighting that we focus our work around engineering solutions that increase efficiency and reduce emissions leading to a reduction in CO2. Rather than CO2, we have Czero.

Q: You started specializing in helping startup companies accelerate the development of their products. Can you tell us about some of your successes?
A: We have had a lot of great success in the past five years. Some examples of people might be more familiar with include: helping Solix Biosystems develop their photobioreactors to grow algae to make biodiesel; working with VanDyne SuperTurbo on the design and control of their engine test facility which puts power generated back on the grid and is part of FortZED; and working with CO2Nexus on developing dry cleaning machines that use carbon dioxide C instead of very harmful chemicals.

Q: What is the average cost for your services?
A: That depends greatly on the project. We have done some small projects that are relatively inexpensive, and have done other projects where our clients have trusted us to do turnkey projects where we do everything from concept development to delivering a running prototype, and those projects obviously cost more. Clients have told us that our rates are typical but that the value is high. That's exactly where we want to be competing, on quality and value, not price.

Q: How many people do you employ? How has that number changed in the past five years?
A: Currently we have five full-time employees, several part-time employees, a few student interns and a small army of subcontractors we can call in if needed. When we started five years ago, it was just Chris and I.

Q: What else do you want our readers to know about Czero?
A: Everyone involved with Czero is keenly interested in the environment and really wants to make a difference. From the outset, Chris and I said that we wanted to create a company that we can be proud of and will be part of the community and will work closely with local businesses, CSU and the city. We feel we have been very successful in that regard as we are part of the Rocky Mountain Innosphere, work directly with CSU's Engines and Energy Conversion Laboratory, have donated time to student projects at CSU and are involved with the Colorado Clean Energy Cluster. We have benefited greatly from these organizations and are trying to give back.
Guy Babbitt, left, president and CEO of Czero, an engineering service provider, and Chris Turner, right, vice president, stand next to a CO2-based dry cleaning machine that they helped design at the CSU engines lab. V. RICHARD HARO/THO COLORADOAN