



# Profitable Sustainability Initiative Helps Quality Packaging Grow Sales and Jobs



## The Company

In 1985, Larry Wills was a successful sales representative for a distributor of packaging materials. His best customer was having a problem meeting demand for packaging products and services during seasonal peaks. The solution, Wills realized, was to provide excess packaging capacity available on an as-needed basis.

To serve this unmet need, he founded Quality Packaging, Inc. (QPI) in Fond du Lac. Wills' initial focus was to build a turnkey operation to provide packaging materials, consultation on retail packaging design and packaging services.

Since 1985 the QPI family has grown to include over 100 employees. QPI offers customers a full range of packaging services and products, expanding from its original 5,000-square-foot facility to a 125,000-square-foot multiple shift operation. In the intervening years, Ken Wills, president, and Kevin Wills, vice president of finance & quality, joined the business. The company became ISO-9001 certified in 2002, and QPI continued the tradition of adapting to meet customers' ever-changing needs.

## Sustainable Packaging a Major Innovation

In 2007, the company turned a major challenge into a stellar growth opportunity. One of QPI's key customers

## Results

As a result of the PSI program, QPI has:

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- ▶ Expects to hire 10 more high technology employees as designers, customer service representatives & machine operators
- ▶ Provided high-level training to three employees

faced the loss of a critical consumer products account because QPI did not offer an environmentally-friendly retail package.

Company president Ken Wills drew upon his deep knowledge of processes and materials for retail packaging to invent an innovative new product that was environmentally-friendly, and had the additional benefit of eliminating the need for package-sealing machinery.

QPI's RePac™ packaging system is a custom-designed blister-pack product that is exceptionally easy to work with. The package has a patent pending in both the US & Canada, and meets the stringent packaging sustainability scorecard used by global retailers including Walmart and Costco. It uses completely recyclable materials, and requires no equipment for sealing the package.

Since 2008, RePaq™ has been used in over 14 million retail packages. It uses 40% less plastic than comparable clamshell packages, and because the RePaq™ blister is made from recycled water bottles, it keeps that material from ending up in landfills.

## Time is Money

Despite this early success, QPI realized that it was missing opportunities to apply RePaq™ to other customer applications simply because of the time it took to design & prototype new packages for their customers. “We had a great product, but we couldn’t get it into our customers’ hands fast enough,” said Ken Wills.

At the time, the company relied on suppliers to perform the design and prototype functions.

QPI set out to learn whether taking those processes in-house would reduce the cycle time and expedite RePaq™ production and sales.

“We were at a crossroads,” said Wills. “We needed to determine the cost and impact of having the capability to design packages & manufacture package prototypes ourselves.”

## State Initiative Provides Needed Direction

In April 2010, the State of Wisconsin invested \$1.75 million through the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership (WMEP) to help small and mid-sized manufacturers use sustainable practices to save money and gain a competitive edge. QPI immediately applied for the program and was one of the 50 Wisconsin manufacturers selected for participation in the Profitable Sustainability Initiative (PSI).

This unique program introduced a new model for public/private sustainability innovation. Instead of telling manufacturers what they must do to meet

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Larry Wills  
Founder  
Quality Packaging, Incorporated

requirements to receive funding, a team of sustainability experts including WMEP and its partners, BT Squared, Inc., Logi-Serve, and Baker-Tilly, work with each firm to assess opportunities for improvement – and the company chooses which it will pursue.

The PSI team follows a three-phase process: diagnostic, assessment and implementation. The diagnostic offers a snap-shot of where the company is with respect to lean practices, energy usage, environmental practices, logistics, and finance. Together, the PSI team and the company choose areas of focus for the assessment phase that involves more in-depth research to gather information to develop a plan for implementation. At QPI, the greatest need was in the area of business planning and development.

Marie Mansheim, WMEP marketing specialist, worked with Wills and his team to create a business plan to understand the market potential for the RePaq™ product. To develop scenarios and understand the competitive landscape, WMEP provided a Fintel Analysis – a powerful tool that analyzes and benchmarks a company’s financial performance and produced 5-year financial projections.

## Results: New Jobs and More on the Horizon

A project to help QPI reduce the cycle time to produce package designs & prototypes was identified. The project involved a proposed technology upgrade and employee training that would expedite design of the packaging. QPI received \$12,000 from the PSI program for this upgrade and contributed \$6,000 of its own funds. Employees are now being trained to use the new technology.

"QPI is a company with a long history of innovating to meet customer needs," Mansheim said. "They're not afraid to 'step outside the box' to take a clear-eyed look at the future, and then take the action necessary to seize the business opportunity."

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QPI is pleased with the results. "We've already grown as a result of the 100 hours of assistance provided by WMEP, and we expect to add more employees and more equipment in the coming year," said Wills. "I've been very impressed by how smooth the whole process has been. The Profitable Sustainability Initiative is an excellent example of a public/private partnership that is driving growth for our company and in Wisconsin."

## About WMEP

WMEP is a private, nonprofit consulting organization committed to the growth and success of Wisconsin manufacturers. A leader in Next Generation Manufacturing, WMEP brings best practices to Wisconsin firms to help them achieve world-class performance through innovation and transformation. During the past five years, WMEP-assisted manufacturers have reported nearly \$1 billion in economic impact with 6,557 jobs created and retained.

**For more information, visit [www.wmep.org](http://www.wmep.org) or call 877.856.8588.**



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