

# Offering seniors a lift

Aging baby boomers are going to want elevators in their homes, Cambridge company believes

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RECORD STAFF

## SMALL BUSINESS

**T**ony Strybosch says he can see the day when elevators will be a common fixture in the private homes of aging baby boomers.

The president of Cambridge Elevating is trying to persuade home builders that installing his company's products can boost the value of executive townhouses they build and make them more marketable to aging buyers who can't or don't want to climb stairs.

While some see the home elevator as a novelty or luxury item, Strybosch believes that perception will change, much as the perceived need for a dishwasher has changed.

"I think (residential) elevators are still a new concept," Strybosch says.

Nonetheless, Cambridge Elevating is definitely on its way up.

### REVENUES GROWING

Guided by its "make-it-happen" mantra, the home-elevator maker has seen its revenues increase by a factor of five over the last three years, Strybosch says.

It has also hired more staff members — more than can be safely crammed into one of its luxury lifts.

"We're in the up-and-down business, but we're going up," Strybosch says.

Cambridge Elevating, which employs 23 people at its facility on Industrial Road, manufactures, installs and services elevators and lifting devices for homes, including exterior models.

The company's growth strategy is focused on winning new business, investing in research and development, and providing superior customer service, Strybosch says.

The company is also moving up by responding to commercial and demographic trends shaping the housing market.

For example, says Strybosch, more real estate developers are building up rather than out — "going higher and skinnier" — because land has become scarce and expensive. So they've become one of the firm's key customer groups, both locally and across North America.

The cost of a three-stop residential elevator (basement, main floor and second floor) ranges from \$25,000 to more than \$50,000, installed.

Cambridge Elevating custom manufactures the devices at its 15,000 square-foot plant. It also makes deck lifts and sells stairlifts to complete its home-mobility product line, Strybosch says.

Inside the plant, staff work at all aspects of design and production, from cutting the wood for an elevator cab to examining

the circuitry of the controllers that power the lifts.

Through its research and development, Cambridge Elevating recently created a new elevator controller it hopes will simplify service calls.

The unit contains a circuit board with colored lights that a service technician can quickly examine to troubleshoot a problem — rather than having to sort through a mishmash of wires.

"We're getting to a point where our volume is increasing and we want to make it as simple for us and our dealers as possible," marketing manager Bob Nowack says.

**"We're in the up and down business, but we're going up."**

TONY STRYBOSCH  
CAMBRIDGE ELEVATING

Other product innovations, such as a home elevator built with a commercial-grade sliding door, contribute to the company's competitive advantage, he says.

The company hopes these innovations, along with its focus on customer service, will lead to new business.

"We're not the slick salesperson going in for the quick sale," said Nowack.

Residential elevators weren't even part of Cambridge Elevating's product mix when the company got started in the mid-1980s as a stair-lift dealer.

It moved to its existing location when one of the current owners, Derek Hamilton, purchased the company three years ago.

Hamilton remains the majority owner, but Strybosch and a silent partner have become part-owners.

Strybosch continues to monitor the business, right down to the ground level.

"I sign every cheque that goes through here," says Strybosch, a chartered accountant. "If you want to grow with the business, you have to stay with the business."

### COST CONTROLS

Strybosch says he has cut costs by monitoring expenses and instituting better controls on inventory and accounts receivable.

Rather than tie up money in real estate, Cambridge Elevating leases its property and invests its capital in the equipment, tools and computer software needed to generate revenues, he says.

The company has recently



Cambridge Elevating president Tony Strybosch (left) and marketing manager Bob Nowack stand with a display model of one of the elevators they make for the residential market. The company got started in the mid-1980s as a stairlift dealership.

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## Q&A

We asked Tony Strybosch, president of Cambridge Elevating:

- Q.** How much of a challenge is it for a small business to deal with managing growth?  
**A.** There has to be a fair bit of planning as to what you are targeting to reach as a small business — because sometimes you get explosive growth and you're not planned to handle that."

invested in its corporate identity as well, developing a new logo and redesigning its website at [www.cambridgeelevating.com](http://www.cambridgeelevating.com).

"It's given us a more professional image," Nowack says. Internally staff are empowered to spot and eliminate prob-

lems under a "continuous improvement" philosophy. The company is also considering a profit-sharing program for employees, Strybosch says.

"I need everyone to participate, to take ownership." Customer service will remain a priority for Cambridge Elevating no matter how large the company grows, Nowack says.

"It's service," Strybosch adds. "You don't change the basic principles of a small company when it becomes a big company" [rcureatz@therecord.com](mailto:rcureatz@therecord.com)