



Hartson-Kennedy has become nationally recognized for the variety of colors and distinct looks of their countertops, which often compare favorably with much more expensive materials.

HARTSON-KENNEDY

Counter Company Prioritizes Quality, Caring Amid Growth

By Anthony Schoettle

Address: 522 W 22nd St, Marion, IN 46953

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Website: www.hartson-kennedy.com

Employees: 300 (185 in Indiana)

Resources: Nicole Schwartz, general manager; Courtney Bozarth, director of business development

Hartson-Kennedy Inc. celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2023, and the Marion-based company's employees are already looking forward to the next 75 years.

One of the largest laminate, post-form countertop manufacturers in the U.S. – with its products sold through home improvement stores and fabricated for individual kitchen layouts – Hartson-Kennedy is intent on expanding its national footprint, adding showrooms and growing online and other direct-to-consumer sales.

In the wake of spiking sales during the pandemic and post-pandemic building boom, the business is projecting 5% to 10% annual revenue growth through 2026.

"This is a really exciting time for the company," says Nicole Schwartz, Hartson-Kennedy general manager. "We see a lot of opportunities for growth in the coming years."

Legacy of durability

Founded in 1948 in Marion by Leo Hartson and his son-in-law, William Kennedy, Hartson-Kennedy quickly became known for its durable, easy-to-clean and attractive laminate countertops.

The organization gained a strong market share initially in the Midwest and then in the Southeast before spreading westward to Texas and beyond.

Hartson-Kennedy countertops became a staple in multi-family housing projects and popular with home builders due to their longevity and affordability. The styles too have continued to evolve and improve, and now homebuilders and fabricators say rival much pricier options such as quartz and granite.

In the mid- to late-1980s, the company expanded with facilities in Gulfport, Mississippi and Macon, Georgia to support the need of a growing market. Hartson-Kennedy's production facilities in Marion, Gulfport and Macon are equipped with computer-controlled manufacturing technology to ensure high quality and compliance with consistent dimensional standards. State-of-the-art equipment and processes combined with an expert staff enable the firm to produce postformed countertops that allow for some bend and flexibility in installation. The company recently brought online a facility, including a showroom, in Statesboro, Georgia.

"The majority of our customer base is fabricators. They can do additional customization," explains Schwartz. "We also sell to the major home centers throughout the U.S., contractors and do-it-yourselfers. In addition, 13% of our business is multi-family. Our customer base runs the gamut."

A small, but fast-growing segment of sales is direct to consumer. The company is adding showrooms – including

one planned for Atlanta – to its portfolio to accommodate this expanding business segment. “That’s our focus,” emphasizes Courtney Bozarth, Hartson-Kennedy’s director of business development. “There is more value in the product as we do the customization. It also brings us closer to the end user, which provides us with valuable feedback as we continue to develop our product.”

In 2014, Christopher Kennedy became CEO after his father, co-founder William Kennedy, passed away at age 91. Christopher Kennedy piloted the company through continued expansion.

In 2022, Hartson-Kennedy was sold, joining the Broadview Holding Family of Companies. Broadview, a Netherlands-based global leader in material technology, owns several major brands including Formica.

Customer satisfaction

Though Christopher Kennedy retired following the sale, Hartson-Kennedy customers say it still has a family feel.

“Our relationship with Hartson-Kennedy goes way back, and it’s good to do business with people you know and trust,” offers Bruce Mosser, owner and general manager of Huntington, West Virginia-based countertop fabricator and distributor Chandler Plywood. “Our (Hartson-Kennedy) sales rep has been there 30 years, and that personal, dependable relationship has always been there.”

Mosser emphasizes that Hartson-Kennedy creations also have a strong foothold on the corporate market. “It’s a very versatile product,” he touts. “We put their countertops in schools, hospitals, nursing homes and other businesses in addition to family homes.”

The established tenure of employees along with the quality of the product has kept the company on a growth path, Schwartz surmises.

“I’ve been with Hartson-Kennedy for 23 years and Courtney has been here for 21 years. Because this is a great place to work, and the employees really believe in the product, we’ve been able to keep a lot of our people for a long time. We have several employees who have been here for more than 40 years.”

Jeff Snyder, general manager of C&M Countertops LLC in Duncansville, Pennsylvania, says “it’s not easy to find a partner in business like Hartson-Kennedy.”

“This is a really dependable company, and we’re grateful we have a provider like that,” he states. “Not only is their product great, but their customer service goes above and beyond. In business, there are always bound to be some problems. But if there are any, Hartson-Kennedy is responsive and gets things taken care of quickly.”

And it’s not just the customer service that makes Hartson-Kennedy good to work with.

“Due to the many colors they have to offer as well as the quality, durability and price

point, their products are really in demand,” Snyder emphasizes. “They have laminate that looks like granite, and that really helps. A lot of people will say I can’t believe the quality of the laminate they sell. They have products for just about anyone’s price point and project.”

Beyond the numbers

While growing the bottom line is always top of mind, it’s far from Hartson-Kennedy’s only focus.

The company, which has 300 full-time employees, 185 of which are in Indiana, has made big investments in employee safety, Bozarth notes. “First and foremost, our concern is for the safety of our employees. We’ve put a lot of time and effort into training, education and safety awareness,” she adds. “At the end of the day, we want everyone to go home in the same shape they came here.”

That concern for people’s well-being extends to a number of team building and care programs for employees. It also extends out into the community.

Hartson-Kennedy employees are offered Friendship Snack times to bring them together as well as monthly meals. For those meals, the company often contracts with Indiana Wesleyan, which provides the meals out of their food trucks. “It’s a great way to show the employees how much we appreciate them and at the same time Indiana Wesleyan is teaching students skills they can use not just at home but also to get jobs in the food service industry and take care of their families,” Schwartz describes.

The business also has been generous supporters of Marion’s arts and cultural initiatives, including the Kennedy Arts Center and Marion Arts Commission, the city’s parks department and Grant County Rescue Mission and Radiant Health – including mental health initiatives. Additionally, Hartson-Kennedy supports the local school systems and youth athletic endeavors.

“A lot of our employees are involved in these programs, so it means something to them for the company to be supportive,” Schwartz relates. “It’s also our responsibility to give our employees a great place to live, and that also helps us with employee attraction.

“But more than anything, we feel like we need to be a good neighbor,” she stresses. “That’s so very important for the company as a whole and the employees who work here.”

Customer relations isn’t the reason Hartson-Kennedy is involved in charities and the community, but clients have noticed nonetheless.

“You want to do business with a company that doesn’t prioritize the bottom line above everything else,” Mosser asserts. “We want to work with companies that value people. And that’s the kind of company Hartson-Kennedy is.”



Much of the skilled talent needed to keep Hartson-Kennedy growing has been found in the Marion area.