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YOUR ENTRY TO THE WEST MICHIGAN TECH COMMUNITY

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Critical Mass

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GRAND RAPIDS – **DornerWorks LLC's** niche is safety-critical markets, meaning in some industries, someone is going to die if a system fails.

DornerWorks Embedded Systems Engineering provides electrical engineering services and technical architecture assistance to help companies put together an overall view of how systems are supposed to work together.

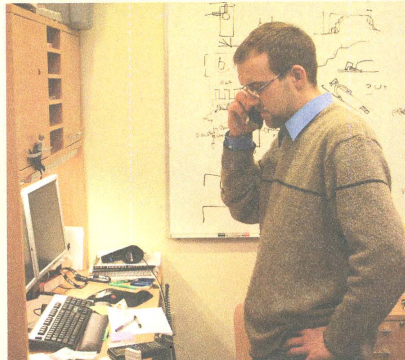
President and Founder David Dorner said market segments like aerospace have processes that have to be followed.

"In those markets, there's a very rigorous design process," Dorner told *Portal*.

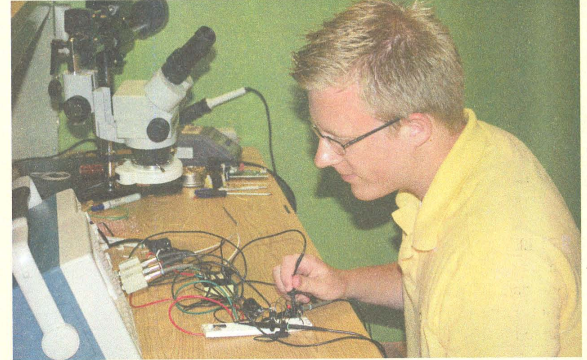
Staying on top of the latest technology is a challenge, according to DornerWorks VP of Sales and Marketing Tim Walker.

"We do a lot of work with a lot of different clients. There's a lot of different aspects – making sure we keep up with the latest and greatest," Walker told *Portal*.

For more than a year, many companies with functions utilizing a high volume of data are moving toward field-programmable gate array (FPGA).



David Dorner founded DornerWorks LLC after eight years of aerospace experience.



DornerWorks' engineers work with a variety of customers on all types of electronics including medical devices, airplanes and industrial controllers.

These semiconductor devices have self-configuring computer chips – logic blocks and programmable interconnects. They can be programmed to perform the function of basic logic gates or more complex combinational functions.

Dorner said embedded systems are included in a host of products from the simple systems in kids' tennis shoes that light up to complex aerospace and automotive systems.

He never envisioned some of the work that is currently being done by his company, especially with reverse engineering in which businesses turn to DornerWorks to investigate products to see if their patents are being infringed upon. Electronic devices need to be taken apart to figure out how it works to disprove or prove that a patent has been violated.

"We've had two or three firms approach us to use us in that capacity," Dorner said. Technical reports are used in court if it goes that far. Also a competitive advantage is DornerWorks' experience with government processes.

Walker said it's not so much government programs, but processes that prove actions have been done in a specific format. About 45 percent of DornerWorks' business is aerospace, 45 percent medical and 10 percent miscellaneous, including some automotive. Dorner said there is not a lot of local or national competition for DornerWorks. The company is looking at extending its regional reach to more national clients.

"Competition is limited; it's a nice niche to be in," Dorner said.

Embedded electronics for safety-critical medical systems is a fast growing area. To handle continued growth,

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DornerWorks consolidated two offices and moved into an 11,000-square-foot facility on Lake Eastbrook Boulevard near the East Beltline.

Exponential growth

Dorner founded DornerWorks in his basement in 2000. Dorner had eight years experience at **Smiths Aerospace**, now GE Aviation, before setting out on his own. He started with Smith's Aerospace and X-Rite as his two main customers. Today, the company has roughly 30 clients and 30 engineers.

Dorner said the hiring of his brother Jeff as VP of administration and finance enabled him to focus on growing the business. Since 2000, annual sales have shot up from \$100,000 to \$4 million.

"We switched from placing consultants on-site to winning projects," said Dorner of the business transformation that started three years ago.

Other key employees include Todd Burghgraef, VP of engineering and technology and Steve Van Derleest, VP of research and development. ❁