Sonic Manufacturing Technologies is an electronics manufacturing services (EMS) provider that works extensively with startups and emerging technology companies throughout Silicon Valley to help develop and execute their plans. Since its start in the 1990s, the company has taken a steady approach toward growth and has managed to weather the economic storms that have plagued many companies.
Company President Kenneth Raab spoke with Business in Focus about the company’s services and its success over the years. “We’re not necessarily focused on mass production,” Raab explains. “We work with companies on products that require speed to market and often involve complex technology content.”

Launched in 1997, Sonic Manufacturing Technologies started with a “surface mount line and a dream” with six employees. The company’s mission hasn’t changed much in the intervening years, but the overall industry environment has. When Sonic first started, the local EMS providers focused on building high-volume in California. Due to the early 2000s recession, many companies moved overseas and those that maintained their presence acted as feeder plants to facilitate product introduction. Raab feels that staying the course has positioned Sonic well for the way the environment has played out and developed. “We never intended to be an offshore company,” he says. “We’re trying to be the best within a specific niche.”

He admits that the industry is “tough and competitive,” and has been so throughout the company’s tenure. “Due to consolidation and globalization, onshore manufacturing in the US has become weaker than when we started,” says Raab. “Many companies have moved to lower-cost locations, which left a big hole in communities where manufacturing was a staple. America is able to compete through focus on specific competencies – not through cheap wages, but through innovation. Those of us here, we have a set of challenges to face. It is rewarding to do it, and while there are fewer competitors, the ones that are still here are attuned to what needs to be done.”

**“Product design and engineering capabilities, in particular, are key components in Sonic’s product development process.”**

Sonic Manufacturing Technologies’ skill set is broad, and the company has worked with hundreds of companies in a variety of industries, providing diverse services. Product design and engineering capabilities, in particular, are key components in Sonic’s product development process. Staff members team up with their customers to transform their concepts into a working design, provide engineering analysis, then integration, all the way through to the manufacturing process. Sonic offers turnkey solutions and customized services to meet the needs of its clients, and a partnership with Sonic is thus the ideal solution to address product design and engineering requirements. The company’s excellence in manufacturing requires a specific combination of preparation, equipment and know-how.

The team specializes in mid-volume, high-mix printed circuit board (PCB) and electro-mechanical assemblies. Its products are manufactured to customer specifications with leading-edge technology, world-class support, and a robust quality assurance system. As such, clients are ensured the highest level of quality in manufacturing. Sonic has versatile processes including Surface Mount Technology (single and double-sided assemblies, rigid and flexible circuits), Pin Through Hole Technology, BGA rework and reballing, leaded and lead-free assembly, and water soluble and no-clean
processes. Quality assurance capabilities include 3D X-Ray inspection and Automated Optical Inspection (AOI).

Sonic has also become a leader in logistical services, where it provides customers with a full range of supply chain solutions. By managing tight deadlines and speedy delivery, Sonic offers industry-specific expertise with solutions tailored to meet the operational needs and market demands of its customers. As a supplier portal, Sonic Manufacturing extends this customer supply chain through extensive automation and feedback with Automated MRP Forecast Sharing, Automated Procurement & Rescheduling, Pipeline & Bond Programs, Interactive Lead Time Updates, Web-Based Supplier Quotations, Won/Lost Analysis and Notifications, and Shared Supplier Scorecard Ratings. The company has also diligently worked on a supplier self-service portal which will be integrated with its ERP system.

“Many companies have moved to lower-cost locations, which left a big hole in communities where manufacturing was a staple.”

These services have been successfully utilized across a number of industries and niches. For example, electronics manufacturing services plays a larger role than ever in the automotive industry due to the increasing amount of electronic content in today’s cars. Similarly, Sonic provides contract manufacturing services to the defence and aerospace markets and helps develop products to function in these demanding environments. Sonic’s services are tailored to meet these challenges...
with ongoing support. Additionally, Sonic has experience in supporting a broad range of products with infrequent build requirements and also has the capabilities and programs to support legacy products.

Sonic supports projects from inception through to production, providing prototyping, test development and manufacturing of services for global leaders in the manufacture of electric vehicles and green technology applications. Additionally, Sonic provides complete EMS services, including electro-mechanical assembly and testing in real time supply chain management and security solutions for the commercial, defence, and public sectors, the company explains.

Raab feels that the company’s work in a number of fields and industries has helped the business and its workers remain agile and flexible, making them prepared for industry changes. “Everyone who works at Sonic has to learn ‘The Sonic Way,’” he explains. “We train everyone to a certain degree. Over past five to ten years, we have been hiring people with little manufacturing experience, but we provide high level training.”

“Recently, Sonic Manufacturing moved into a new 82,000 square foot facility in Fremont, California boasting nine surface mount lines.”

This training has afforded Sonic Manufacturing the ability to build and establish relationships with its clients that are mutually beneficial. “Our employees are well seasoned and have worked with contract manufacturers and OEMs. We have put systems in place to handle challenges. We don’t ignore difficult situations that come up; we see a way to help our customers by solving them. For our suppliers, we share information like crazy; we’re an open book as far as sharing information, giving them the best chance to succeed.”

The company’s careful approach has paid dividends. Recently, Sonic Manufacturing moved into a new 82,000 square foot facility in Fremont, California boasting nine surface mount lines. Raab says the new building is a “big boon to allow growth.” The facility contains high-speed lines designed to minimize production bottlenecks, maximize flexibility, and maintain high product quality. Additional features include in-house “Passive Stores” that optimize materials logistics, shorten response times, and improve inventory management; automated procurement and materials flow, which speeds up receipts and improves the quality of materials released to production; customized IT infrastructure designed to support real-time transaction processing and online data management; and dedicated functional test suites that help Sonic enhance customer productivity.

Raab is also excited at the future plans the company has in store for their clients. “For the supply chain, we are developing a new program that will advance eCommerce,” he shares. “Right now, our key suppliers are on a pilot program to learn how to integrate it with Sonic. The program will give Sonic the ability to run MRP and process the majority of orders the same day, adding another level of supply chain integration.”

For almost two decades, Sonic Manufacturing Technologies has provided industries with turnkey fulfillment of their outsourced products. Mr. Raab feels that Sonic’s niche in the industry will guarantee its success in the years to come. “In the Electronics Manufacturing Services industry, while there are a lot of companies out there; there are not a lot of them where you feel you have a true partner, committed to succeed with your goals,” says Raab. “We’re a very dedicated company and we show that it is possible to do that in North America. We’re in it for the long-haul.”