



## Full Spectrum Solutions – A Classic Tale of Product Diversification

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*At times we hear whispers of seemingly distant companies that achieve great things in the course of doing business. Somehow, they never seem quite real and often don't touch our lives. But for one Jackson based company - Full Spectrum Solutions Inc. - the road to success is real, hard-won and truly uplifting....*

Full Spectrum Solutions Inc. is a privately owned company founded in 1997 by Michael and Diane Nevins. There is a story of a company inextricably tied to its marketplace and to the voice of its customers. Ironically, the company was conceived when its founders sought - and could not find - a marketplace solution for a common problem. When Mike and Diane Nevins first moved to Jackson from Colorado, the reduction in natural sunlight prompted their search for "light therapy" products. Before long, they realized that the quality of products available in the marketplace didn't satisfy the need and decided to develop products to fill the gap - the UltraLux® light box and the BlueMax™ dimmable lamp. Both produce light similar to natural daylight and can be used for "light therapy".

Several years later, market research pointed to the importance of "full spectrum" lighting in commercial and retail applications. Armed with this knowledge, the company decided to diversify its product line to include full spectrum products. When asked about the decision to diversify, Mike noted:

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*"... I realized there was an untapped market for high quality, energy-efficient, full spectrum lighting in residential and commercial applications.... Now we carry full spectrum energy-efficient high bays, low bays, garage and parking lot fixtures, street and roadway fixtures, and outdoor wall packs for commercial buildings".*

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Could diversification really be that simple? Merely research the market, identify an unmet need and proceed to fill it? Well, yes...and no! As the interview progressed it became clear that this company's success didn't arise from an occasional polling of the marketplace. Rather, they are continually connected to their market on many different levels. Asked how long he had investigated and planned before deciding to diversify, Mike's response told the real story:

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*"Research, development, and planning are all ongoing processes. I'm constantly researching the market so I can plan for the future. The moment we quit actively working on the above processes is the minute that someone else will.."*

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Constantly tapping into the shifting needs of the marketplace is what makes "well-run" companies "great" companies. Having a solid understanding of your market's needs *today* is an opportunity to fill

that need tomorrow. The success of all efforts to diversify, expand or even transform a business can be distilled to a single consideration: How well does the company understand its market?

Now, I had recently seen Full Spectrum's new wind and solar powered area light – the EverLast® PV/W Area Lighting System - and had already concluded that this was an innovative company. But I hadn't fully appreciated the extent to which their customer-focus was integral to their decision-making. Asked to explain how the company had narrowed its diversification options Mike's response was simple:

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*"We really listen to what our customers tell us and stay up to speed on world trends".*

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In reality, Full Spectrum Solutions is connected to its marketplace in many other ways. A "learning" organization, the company credits much of its success to strong relationships and affiliations with accredited institutions - such as the California Lighting Technology Center at UC Davis and the University of Michigan Lighting Lab. These organizations increase the company's credibility in the marketplace and keep Full Spectrum's employees abreast of new trends and technologies. Indeed, finding new employees who are already well-versed in the science behind commercial and industrial lighting is an ongoing challenge. Thus, these affiliations and partnerships play a key role in keeping Full Spectrum's employees current in physics and light sciences.

Without a doubt, the company's diversification efforts have been successful. Sales revenues are higher due to the demand for more efficient lighting in commercial applications. Moreover, the company has already outgrown 3 facilities in the last 13 years, and has more than doubled its workforce in the last three years. As Mike noted,

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*"We're in the process of constructing a multi-million dollar 70,000 square foot facility because we've outgrown the one we're currently using. This building will provide the room needed to hire more staff, which will essentially enable us to expand our product lines and brand names even further."*

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Should the company undergo significant diversification in the future, Mike indicated that their ecommerce activity and their effort to build a strong network of affiliates are both worthy of replication. He credits the company's energetic and creative Sales and Marketing group for their ability to promote the company's brands through different channels.

I realized that this latter comment was perfectly consistent with a culture that stays close to its market and invests in maintaining connectivity. And, by the end of the questions a simple truth had emerged for consideration: "Diversification is a journey best driven by marketplace need; and best guided by the voice of the Customer". It is a classic business lesson that always pays dividends.