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Publication: Inc.

Date: September 2006

Article: 500 Fastest Growing Companies

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## Manufacturing

At a time when it's hard to manufacture in the U.S., how do these companies defy the grim trends? By focusing on specialized products from tow trailers to industrial lasers.

**Evolve Manufacturing Technologies NO. 19**  
**2,121.2% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$14.8 million EMPLOYEES: 45**  
**FOUNDED: 1999 Mountain View, Calif.**  
**PAST HONOREE 2004 2005**

**What it does:** Low-volume contract manufacturing for semiconductor and medical device companies. **Why it's growing:** The company changed its focus, adding customers in the medical field, from a client base that used to be made up exclusively of semiconductor accounts. Switching markets hurt sales initially but Evolve is now back on a growth track. For more on Evolve and its founder and CEO, Noreen King, see page 156.

**Video Gaming Technologies NO. 25**  
**1,957.1% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$152.1 million EMPLOYEES: 140**  
**FOUNDED: 1991 Smyrna, Tenn.**  
**PAST HONOREE 2005**

**What it does:** Manufactures and distributes casino gaming equipment. **Why it's growing:** Last year's No. 1 company on this list (with a growth rate of 9,721 percent) continues to thrive by supplying the burgeoning Native American casino industry. **What's next:** Cracking Las Vegas, Mexico, and South America.

**iLight Technologies NO. 84**  
**929.9% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$11 million EMPLOYEES: 65**  
**FOUNDED: 2000 Chicago**

**What it does:** Creates lighting systems using LEDs to replace glass neon signage. iLight's systems are found in stadiums, movie theaters, and fast-food restaurants. **Why it's growing:** LEDs are easier to install and more durable than neon. And though LEDs cost more up front, co-founder Mark Clover predicts that by 2008 the price will be comparable to neon. **What's next:** Defending the company's intellectual property, which consists of 14 patents. Clover is currently pursuing litigation against a Chinese and a U.S. company that, he alleges, are knocking off iLight. To check out the product, see page 124.

**Guy Brown Products NO. 119**  
**833.4% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$52.1 million EMPLOYEES: 15**  
**FOUNDED: 1997 Brentwood, Tenn.**  
**PAST HONOREE 2004 2005**

**What it does:** Remanufactures printer components such as toner and ink-jet cartridges at facilities in Texas and Washington. The company then supplies the refurbished equipment to office superstores. **Why it's growing:** Though computers and

printers are dropping in price, new toner and ink-jet cartridges have remained relatively expensive, driving demand for recycled cartridges.

**Albar Precious Metal Refining NO. 128**  
**775.1% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$14.8 million EMPLOYEES: 15**  
**FOUNDED: 2001 Pompano Beach, Fla.**

**What it does:** Buys scrap gold, silver, platinum, and palladium from coin dealers, pawn shops, aerospace companies, and even dental labs (those old fillings). Albar then melts and chemically refines the metal and resells it to jewelers, mints, and private investors. **Why it's growing:** The increase in the prices of precious metals has turbocharged business. **Albar is currently refining 100,000 ounces of silver a week—that's more than three tons—up from 10,000 ounces per week a year ago.**

**Protomold NO. 257**  
**497.3% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$11 million EMPLOYEES: 100**  
**FOUNDED: 1989 Maple Plain, Minn.**  
**PAST HONOREE 2005**

**What it does:** Produces prototypes and parts for engineers who are building prototypes of equipment themselves. A fifth of revenue comes from medical device developers. **Why it's growing:** Protomold can price jobs in a day and deliver finished parts within three business days. **What's next:** The company has doubled its manufacturing capacity over the past 18 months and opened a subsidiary in Britain.

**Novae NO. 352**  
**366.4% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$47 million EMPLOYEES: 25**  
**FOUNDED: 1995 Markle, Ind.**

**What it does:** Manufactures tow trailers and lawn mower attachments. **Why it's growing:** Novae made only lawn mower attachments until 2001, when CEO Steve Berme made the first of two acquisitions that got him into the trailer business. Though it's a fragmented industry, with some 600 trailer makers in the U.S., Novae gained a foothold by filling orders in just three to four weeks.

**Hartmann & Forbes NO. 437**  
**337.4% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$5.1 million EMPLOYEES: 35**  
**FOUNDED: 1988 Tualatin, Ore.**

**What it does:** Manufactures window coverings, including Roman shades, cornices, and draperies, made from bamboo woven by hand in Asia and custom-finished in the U.S. **Why it's growing:** The company has built a distribution network of wholesale show rooms that cater to interior designers and architects. **What's cool:** Hartmann & Forbes recently started a recycling program to compost used shades.

**IPG Photonics NO. 442**  
**334.6% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$84.4 million EMPLOYEES: 850**  
**FOUNDED: 1991 Andover, Mass.**

**What it does:** Manufactures industrial lasers and their components. A typical laser can cut through five inches of steel. **Why it's growing:** Demand for lasers has increased as they have become cheaper, more powerful, and more portable. IPG's basic \$5,000 laser is used in a variety of applications from cosmetic wrinkle removal to metalworking. **Ferretroika continues:** CEO Valentin Gaponov founded IPG in Moscow in 1991 then moved it to the U.S. in 1998.

**Specialty Bottle NO. 457**  
**325.6% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$5.1 million EMPLOYEES: 19**  
**FOUNDED: 1998 Seattle**  
**PAST HONOREE 2004**

**What it does:** Makes and distributes bottles, jars, and containers. **Why it's growing:** The firm carved a niche for itself by focusing on small orders and carrying a large mix of products, in contrast with competitors that have high minimum orders and carry a limited variety of items. **Inspired by a bottle-neck:** Scott Eskenski was running an herb business in Seattle's famous Pike Place Market when his bottle supplier closed shop. Unable to replace that vendor, he decided to start a bottle business for himself.

**Paragon Plastic Sheet NO. 464**  
**323.1% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$4 million EMPLOYEES: 12**  
**FOUNDED: 2000 DeLainy, La.**

**What it does:** Makes polyethylene corrugated sheets that are used to line tractor-trailers, as hurricane shutters, and as siding on chicken coops. **Why it's growing:** Trucking and hurricanes are thriving industries, but Paragon's best customers are big poultry aggregators like Tyson, which use Paragon's polyethylene sheets to build coops that house as many as 25,000 birds. The sheets won't rust or dent, and they are easier to keep clean than wood, which is key because the industry is on a cleanliness kick since the threat of avian flu hit the news.

**Sidump'r Trailers NO. 478**  
**315.4% Three-Year Growth**  
**REVENUE: \$10 million EMPLOYEES: 25**  
**FOUNDED: 2000 Plainville, N.C.**

**What it does:** Manufactures a special kind of dump truck that unloads its haul sideways rather than from the rear. **Why it's growing:** This newfangled dump truck is well suited to the needs of road construction crews, and spending on highway work rose to \$70 billion in 2004, from \$61 billion in 2000. **New drivers:** In January, two investment firms bought Sidump'r.

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