

## Gyproc Tools **BladeRunner** New Product Development



<b>Project Title</b>	BladeRunner
<b>Category</b>	Product
<b>Sub-Category</b>	Consumer (suggested)
<b>Client Company</b>	Artex Ltd
<b>Design Consultancy</b>	Fearsomengine
<b>Date</b>	04-Jun-09

“The addition of the BladeRunner cutting tool and accessories has been a phenomenal success in the UK and in over 25 countries worldwide. BladeRunner plasterboard cutter is just the beginning; there are already several new innovative product additions in the pipeline that are sure to be a great success.”

*Carl Gardner, Sales Director – Artex*

## Executive Summary

Working practices with plasterboard have remained unchanged for decades and accordingly there have been no breakthrough innovations in the associated market for cutting tools.

Cutting and shaping of plasterboard is traditionally carried out using a utility knife. Although experienced users reach high levels of productivity there have in recent years been increasing concerns over health and safety. Lacerations, slips/ trips and lost time accidents are major issues for contractors and indeed open blades are banned on certain types of site.

The Gyproc Tools division of Artex Ltd approached Fearsomengine with the challenge of devising a new cutting tool which would eliminate the need for an open knife blade. In addressing this need several other opportunities were identified and the resulting BladeRunner offers revolutionary functionality compared to traditional methods.

Since launch in August 2008 100,000 BladeRunners have been sold into 25 countries. The uniqueness and marketability of BladeRunner have facilitated Artex entering several lucrative new markets including the US and Russia. 2008 sales targets were exceeded by 320% and a major UK retailer proclaimed the Blade Runner launch their 'most successful product launch ever'.

BladeRunner's origin was a statement of intent regarding safety. Through a user focused design process it is not only safer but quicker, cleaner and able to perform cuts which a utility knife cannot. It is genuinely revolutionary and as one of the sales team commented "Once people see the BladeRunner in action it sells itself". Thus it can be seen that the product design is the primary influence in BladeRunner's success.

The success of BladeRunner has driven positive cultural shift within Artex and significant investment in the design of a family of BladeRunner branded products which will offer similar benefits in safety, productivity and performance. In 2009 three BladeRunner siblings will be launched.

*296 words*

## Project Overview

### Outline of Project brief:

- Develop a new product for cutting plasterboard which will address the health and safety issues posed by traditional open blade methods.

### Description:

Historically Artex have acquired commercially available tools deemed to fit their range and sold them on to distributors under the Gyproc Tools brand.

In a bid to increase profitability they looked to new product development and an opportunity was seen in health and safety issues posed by traditional open blade plasterboard cutting methods.

*“The most reliable course of action to reduce knife injuries is to eliminate the use of hand knives.”<sup>1</sup>*

*HSE Information Sheet: How to Reduce your Hand Knife Injuries*

### Overview of Market:

The market is dominated by the Stanley utility knife. Professional users become expert wielders of the knife over many years and are proud of their acquired skills. Trades are male-dominated and there is macho bravado in knife wielding – a challenge when looking to introduce a safer alternative.

- In the UK 10,696 people were absent from work for more than 3 days as a result of cuts or lacerations.
- 1706 people sustained a non-fatal yet major injury.
- 7 fatalities resulted from cuts and lacerations.

*\*Figures from RIDDOR 2007<sup>2</sup>*

### Product Launch Date:

August 2008.

### Size of Design Budget:

£60,000.00



## Outline of Design Solution:

The objective was to devise a safer alternative to the traditional knife for cutting plasterboard. The design process considered the cutting procedure and all influencing factors, leading to the identification of several additional opportunities. Thus the end result delivered substantially greater value to the market than was expected at outset.

Plasterboard is produced in a sandwich construction with an outer layer of coarse paper on both sides of a gypsum core. The gypsum itself has little strength and it is the paper layers that hold the board together. Traditionally the process is:

1. Score the paper on one side.
2. Manually flip the board over.
3. Snap the gypsum.
4. Cut the paper on the other side to finish.

BladeRunner's principal innovation is to use a unique magnetic loop to allow the user to score both paper layers simultaneously. The procedure is:

1. Run the BladeRunner down the cut line.
2. Snap off the cut section.

The final solution delivered the following key benefits:

### 1. Reduced risk of accident and injury on site:

- Small, concealed, freely rotating blades: *Laceration risk effectively eliminated.*
- Remote button-release blade cartridges: *Blades never in contact with user's body.*
- User and tool move forward for cutting: *Trip hazards are visible, reduced injury risk.*
- Reduced man-handling for board-snap: *Reduced risk of musculoskeletal disorders.*

### 2. Time savings on site:

- Cutting time halved for straight cuts: *No turning to cut reverse of board.*
- Shapes, corners and apertures: *Up to 10 times quicker than by traditional methods<sup>3</sup>.*
- Neat, professional finish: *Consistently clean edge.*

Importantly the Blade Runner has wow-factor in its unique ability to cut both sides of the board simultaneously and alongside the pioneering magnetic system careful attention was paid to the ergonomics and visual ID of the casing. This combination of strengths made for effective marketing.



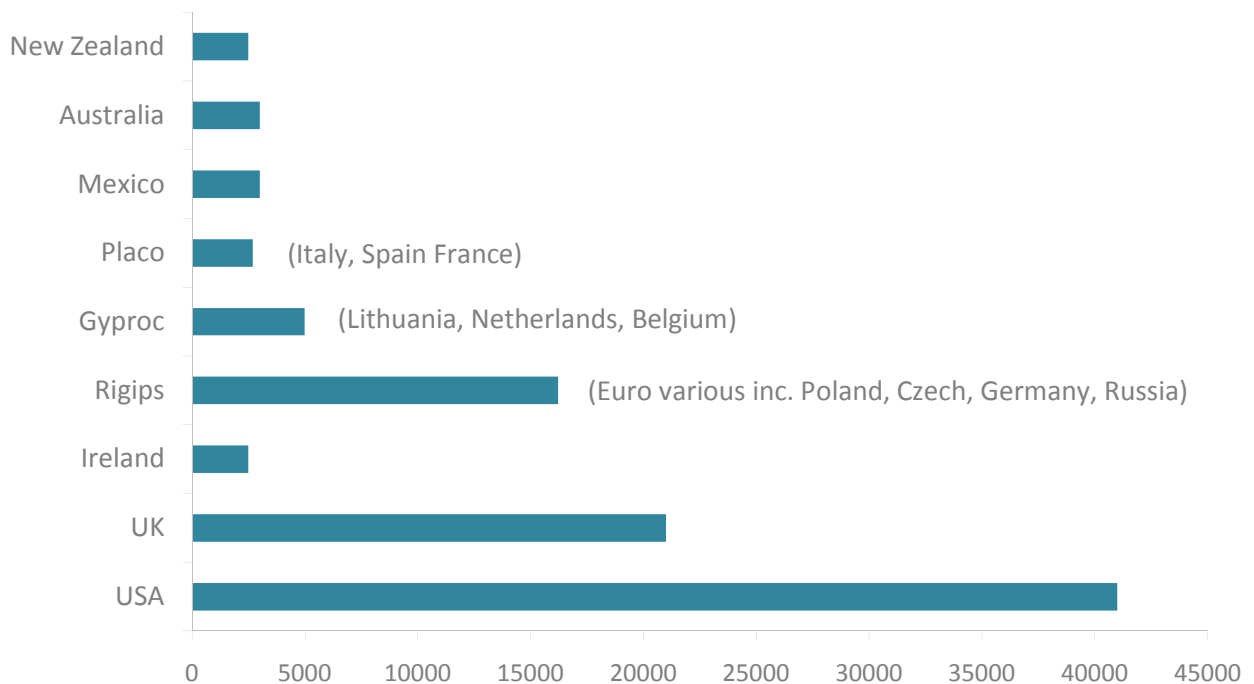
499 words

## Summary of Results

### Increase in Sales (figures as of March '09):

- 2008 sales target exceeded by 320%.
- 100,000 units sold worldwide.
- Breakeven on design investment within 1 month of launch.
- >1000% Return on design investment inside year 1.
- Profitable trading continues strongly.

### BladeRunner Key Territories/ Brands - Sales Volumes as of March 2009:



### Improvements to Staff Morale:

Sales teams were excited about the launch of the BladeRunner and this had a very positive effect on morale. They could instantly see the potential of the BladeRunner and were keen to demonstrate the new product to the market. Comments from the sales team included:

“Once people see the BladeRunner in action it sells itself”

“When you’ve got a product that is clearly this good it makes the job of selling easier”

### Reductions in Manufacturing Costs:

BladeRunner is a completely new product and so there is no direct manufacturing comparison, however it is relevant that the accompanying family of products will make use of the same blade cassette consumables hence standardizing for cost reduction.

### Increases in Market Distribution:

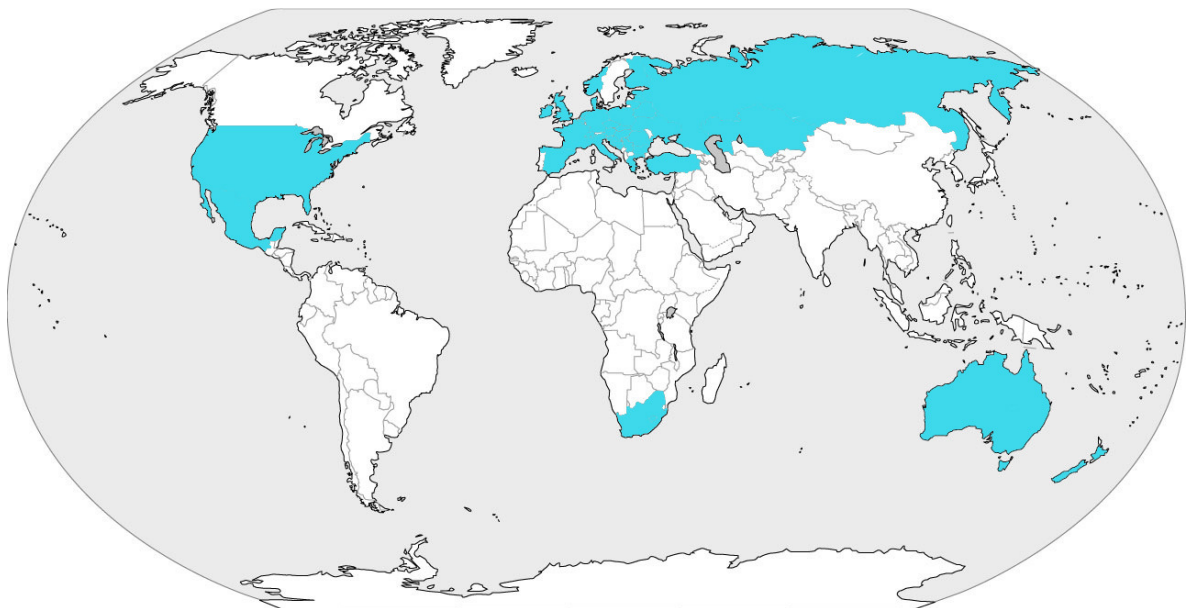
Artex are a well established supplier of plasterboard related tools and prior to BladeRunner were widely represented in UK retail outlets with their existing range. The BladeRunner however stimulated unprecedented uptake with a number of major retailers placing allocation orders on first sight where normal practice would be to test impact in a handful of stores. None of these stores were under any obligation to adopt BladeRunner and all have stringent criteria for new product lines. The level of uptake was due to the immediately understandable user benefits and breakthrough functionality instilled in BladeRunner through the design process. Currently BladeRunner is stocked in over 2500 outlets in the UK alone. The list includes:

- |                         |                |             |
|-------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| • Travis Perkins        | • B&Q          | • Jewson    |
| • Jacksons BM           | • Selco BW     | • Buildbase |
| • Sheffield Insulations | • Wolseley     | • Platform  |
| • Minster               | • Neville Long | • Encon     |
| • CCF                   | • CPD          | • CBA       |

### Increases in Market Share:

BladeRunner has been well received globally and has opened up new markets for Artex to trade in. Currently BladeRunner is selling into 25 countries as indicated on the map below. Several of these territories, including the USA, Russia, Australia, Ukraine, Italy and Scandinavia, are new having been made possible by the marketability of BladeRunner, and doors have been opened for future trading. Several additional and significant territories are in the pipeline and expected to be added to the list in due course.

BladeRunner Geographical Sales as of March 2009:



## Changes in Perception:

Traditionally 'Artex' is associated with textured wall coatings and this is not the preferred image of Artex Ltd. Following BladeRunner their brand is emerging as being synonymous with innovation and this is how they want to be perceived. Expectations are much higher from distributors and users alike:

### Distributors:

Distributors have been immediately convinced of BladeRunner's sales potential. A major UK retailer described the BladeRunner launch as their most successful new product launch ever. Others have said:

**"One of our branches has a piece of plasterboard on the counter and is demonstrating BladeRunner. They sold 10 in the first 24 hours. Not bad for our lowest collection branch!"**

*Tony Adam, Elliotts Builders Merchants*

**"If you use plasterboard this is a must have tool"**

*Trade Centre Manager, B&Q Great Western Rd, Glasgow*

### Users:

BladeRunner allows the user to cut board in half the time, more safely and with greatly reduced strain on their body. It is labour saving without consuming power or making noise and usage is slick with little practice. Perceived value is indicated by these comments taken from an online plastering forum<sup>4</sup> referring to a video of BladeRunner in use:

**"That looks awesome"**

**"I have no use for one of these really but I still want one... no, I NEED one"**

**"I want one... Looks like a nice bit of expensive kit"**

**"Wow, love it... I think I'll get one"**

**"It be witchcraft it be"**

## Improved Conversion Rates:

BladeRunner has proven to be a relatively easy sell due to its obvious advantages in safety and time and its unique mode of operation. To cite one example in particular: In 2008 a team from Artex attended a major hardware show in Las Vegas hoping to expose the new product to potential distribution partners in the States. As this was one of the very first significant exposures to the market there were no great expectations. In fact their stand was buzzing throughout all 4 days of the event with the sales team cutting board after board for intrigued attendees. The show paved the way for swift entry to the sizeable market in the States and the 40,000+ BladeRunners which have been sold there so far.

Other overleaf...

## Accolades:

So far BladeRunner has had recognition from several quite different sources. For example:

- At the Design Week Awards 2009 it was shortlisted in the Industrial Product Design category and received a commendation on the night.
- At Totally DIY in Earls Court in February 2009 BladeRunner received a Gold Award for 'Best New Tool'.
- Numerous publications and websites have independently singled it out for praise, for example Popular Mechanics magazine in the US recently nominated BladeRunner as one their 'favourite new tools'.

## Ongoing Revenue from Unique Consumables:

BladeRunner's revolutionary functionality depends on its rotating blades. These have twofold purpose: (1) To minimise friction so that the lower half follows the top and (2) To minimise risk of injury as a freely rotating blade will do substantially less damage than a fixed one. Rotating blades are not generally used for cutting plasterboard and the blades are necessarily housed in bespoke cartridges which facilitate safe handling. These same cartridges are being used in other members of the BladeRunner family hence minimising costs and providing an ongoing source of revenue for the lifetime of the products. The blade cartridges are also covered in the patent claims deemed novel by the searching authority (see below).

## Positive Impact on Company Culture:

The marketability of BladeRunner and impressive sales figures have spurred on substantial investment in further new products. A product family is emerging with a strong brand represented by superior safety, efficiency and performance. Three BladeRunner siblings are already well down the development path and the launches of all three are planned for 2009. The management team is 100% committed to leading in new product innovation on an ongoing basis.

## A Bright and Ambitious Global Trading Future:

The penetration of new geographical territories through the innovative appeal and market relevance of BladeRunner has extended the global reach of Artex. These markets are now hungry for more and the development of the BladeRunner siblings has been pressurized by clamouring distributors who have wind of the new additions to the product line. Their perception of the brand is high and uptake is expected to be swift and voluminous.

## IP Generation:

The inventive steps in arriving at BladeRunner's unique functionality have facilitated Artex filing for a patent on its defining aspects. This is currently patent pending (PCT/GB2006/002222), key aspects having been deemed novel and inventive by the searching authority, and EC Design Registration Number 000655758-0001 is also in place.



## Research Sources

1. [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/pps12.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/pps12.pdf) (HSE Information Sheet: How to reduce your hand knife injuries).
2. Figures from RIDDOR 2007 (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations).
3. Testing has shown that cutting complex shapes such as arches can take 10 minutes by traditional methods of marking, scoring and sawing to finish. BladeRunner can perform such cuts in less than a minute by scoring upper and lower simultaneously.
4. <http://www.ultimatehandyman.co.uk/forum1/blade-runner-t9942.html>

## Other Influencing Factors

### Launch Event:

In summer 2008 a launch event was held in Soho, London. Trade press and potential distributors were in attendance and the benefits of BladeRunner were laid forth. After an introductory presentation the event majored on practical demonstrations as the primary way of conveying benefits to attendees, who were encouraged to get hands-on with the product. Hence there was no intermediary marketing smokescreen involved – target customers were introduced directly and on a practical level to the functionality of BladeRunner. This demonstrates that BladeRunner's key marketing strengths lie in the quality of the product which resulted from the design process and its success can be attributed accordingly.

### Other Marketing Activities:

Distributors were supplied with launch support kits containing POS materials, technical literature and features & benefits sheets and training sessions were delivered by areas sales managers for staff who would be selling the product in-store. All these activities centered on the user benefits of BladeRunner, for example the training days were laid on so that staff would understand the benefits first hand and in-store activities majored on practical demonstrations. Hence it can be seen that marketing activities relied heavily on the benefits instilled in BladeRunner in the design phase.

## Materials Innovation Award (N/A):

It is considered that the materials choices for BladeRunner are not worthy of any special mention as although appropriate for the purpose they do not break any new ground in themselves.