CANADA’s
PINO NONIS

This Italian Immigrant Has an Invention He Feels Is Sure To Revolutionize the Industry

The problem with the Canadian government official was that he totally underestimated the resolve and pride of Italo Pino Nonis.
Nonis, an Italian immigrant to Canada in 1949 who had spun his Lido Plastering Company Ltd. into a multi-million dollar mini-conglomerate, was simply asking the Canadian government for a loan to launch his new invention — a 4-in-1 texture gun that he hoped would revolutionize his industry.

The idea was sound enough: the gun had been in the thinking and working out process for years, and it has been field tested by fervent critics. All were agreed that Nonis had come up with an innovation that justified naming it after his daughter, Diana.

Everyone, that is, except the government bureaucrat who couldn’t understand why Nonis just didn’t sign his invention over to a big corporation with time, talent, money, interest, etc., etc. to market the gun properly. History does not record—and Pino will not relate—the precise response this urgent earned, but one of Nonis’ companies, Marmo Spray Limited, is now manufacturing and distributing the new texture gun.

An uphill fight? Yes, but Italo (Pino) Nonis has been struggling uphill successfully ever since he departed his native Pordenone, Italy, a town 30 miles north of Venice, to start a new life in the Toronto, Ontario, area. Son of a farmer, Pino opted for North America as a 22-year-old under the sponsorship of an uncle who found him a farm laborer job in Milton, Ontario, a Toronto suburb. Soon thereafter his wife, the former Iva Marcuz Nonis, also of Pordenone, joined him. Today, Pino is the father of three children, Carol, Albino and Diana. Carlo runs an interior contracting company, Albino runs a construction consulting company specializing in cost controls and Diana is an office coordinator.

As for Pino, he originally worked his year as a farmer, then went to work as a construction labourer eventually becoming a plastering apprentice. Five years later, he was head of Lido Plastering, a company launched more by confidence and ambition than capital assets. These conglomerate days, the construction company has been re-organized and Lido is primarily a real estate holding firm.

Pino’s other companies are well-known throughout North America. They include Marmorite Enterprises Ltd., a manufacturer of stucco products, and Marmo-Spray Ltd., manufacturer of the new Marmo Spray products and the recently introduced texturing gun. In line with his construction and manufacturing interests, Nonis classifies himself as an exterior specialist.

A member of the Association of Wall and Ceiling Industries - International, Nonis’ company is also a member of the Toronto Builders’ Association. Pino had served on the board of directors of the Toronto wall and ceiling association. Despite his past successes, today Pino Nonis is dedicated to making his manufacturing interests succeed. He’s not before been involved in a classical marketing situation, depending instead on word of mouth to open up new areas and customers.

With the Diana gun, though, he admits encountering the need to en-
“It has been said that construction in extreme climates will come of age when it’s possible to work year round without a cost penalty. Now we have that . . . the factory system is the only approach.”

gage in marketing techniques such as promotion, advertising, and the like. It’s a new field—but then Pino Nonis has been entering new fields for the last five decades.

DIMENSIONS: You mentioned that you’re now an exterior specialist? Does this mean precisely what you say—no interior work at all?
NONIS: That’s right. Today, our construction division does only pre-fab, Dryvit, exterior lath and plaster and resurfacing. Believe me, that takes in a lot of work, especially when you consider that we’re manufacturing exterior products, too. You can’t do it all, so you do what you do best.

NONIS: Well, in the late 40’s we were strong on plastering. Drywall was coming on strong and I’m one of those individuals who didn’t have a great deal of confidence or desire to get into this product. So I diversified into synthetic stucco and concentrated even then on resurfacing. My own company developed the Marmorite product line about this time, and this gave us additional impetus in that whole market area.

DIMENSIONS: With manufacturing comes the need to market, to distribute. How did you handle that?
NONIS: Frankly, we let it handle itself. You know to bring a successful construction system to the market, everything has to be right. The manufacturer has to be backed up by good applicators, so we were picky about our applicators. We trained them carefully, too.

As a result, we’ve got an excellent reputation from here to Vancouver, to San Diego and Arizona to the Caribbean. It’s been strictly word-of-mouth advertising—the most effective kind. I’m very proud of the quality that we have been able to maintain. I intend to keep our quality up. My name and my reputation are connected to these products.

DIMENSIONS: That’s the same attitude that led you to go your own route when the Canadian government official suggested you give your texture gun to a big company, isn’t it?
NONIS: I have my own name, my own reputation. I am proud of my daughter, Diana, and I put her name on that gun. I don’t want anyone else promoting this tool and perhaps not taking the same pride in quality, workmanship and service support that I provide.

Look at it this way. Being famous is an illusion, money has wings. The only lasting quality is character. I started with nothing—hope, really—and my company is tops in resurfacing. My name is my honor, my pride—and I intend to keep it that way: not allow someone else to trade on it.
DIMENSIONS: But a big corporation could indeed give the gun a marketing sendoff, marshall an awful lot of promotional strength—

NONIS: —the same thing I plan on doing.

DIMENSIONS: Pino, why a texturing gun? That is, what got you going to come up with another gun? Dissatisfaction with existing products . . . a feeling that you could do better . . . a burst of creative thought that produced an idea . . . what started this thing?

NONIS: Well, I just never liked the idea that an operator couldn’t control the flow of material with existing hardware: it is strictly gravity. You had to keep shooting until you’d exhausted the aggregate load.

My idea was this: a master gun unit with a removable swiveling barrel that can cut off the gravity flow with a quick open/close twist, controlling the top feeding orifice. I toyed with the idea for three years, made a prototype—without a single drawing—and after field testing applied for the patent. That was in 1982 and in March, 1985 we got a patent.

DIMENSIONS: And the results? How have contractors responded?

NONIS: We originally introduced the gun at the AWCI convention in Kansas City in 1985 and we knew right away we had a winner. Now it’s just a matter of getting the word out.

We’ve been getting orders from all over the world.

DIMENSIONS: You emphasized its use with the new synthetic finishes, the exterior insulated material systems. Can it really apply a surface with these materials? They’re generally trowelled on, aren’t they?

NONIS: I realize they are trowelled. Guns in the past have had a problem but this is due to overspill. You know, compressors are the key to a gun system. Our gun is clean, but for any system to work, everything has to be in balance, the gun, the compressor, the material and the operator.

I think contractors should take a hard, knowledgeable look at the gun for handling synthetic materials and...
cold joints. A number of good reasons exist for using a gun even though it does, admittedly, supply a different surface finish than does a trowel. On a hot, dry day, hand trowelling these synthetic materials can be like trying to tame a monster. The setup time is accelerated and unless very careful controls are introduced you can get all those cold joints—

**DIMENSIONS:** —and the speed of the gun could overcome this?

**NONIS:** —exactly. Seventy percent of the jobs on the market today could be sprayed.

**DIMENSIONS:** But contractors argue that they can’t always get the uniform depth on the surface coat, that material is wasted?

**NONIS:** So what? The key to profits is productivity, isn’t it? Profits are always made in labour seldom in product markup. One man—with the right piece of equipment—can cover at least 2500 feet a day.

As far as wasted material is concerned, a sloppy mechanic can waste material, besides you save $1 on material and lost $3 in labour—what kind of profit figuring is that?

Analyze the job: that’s what I say. Count up the scaffolding, the equipment, the climate, the situation, the height—all the factors that spell loss or profit on a job.

Using a gun in a 20-man a year situation, I can probably save four men—and I’ve got an additional $120,000 in one year.

With a good gun man you aren’t going to waste materials. Like I say, the productivity gain will wipe out any if it does occur.

**DIMENSIONS:** Pino, a thin border separates the two countries, but do you see any differences in the Canadian vs. the U.S. market? With you selling product and materials in both countries, you should be in a position to notice.

**NONIS:** I think there are differences. In Toronto, the buyer is much more insistent on traditional systems. In the U.S. it’s an economic trade-off: owners want the building up fast.

I’m not trying to get back to my gun, but it does represent a first rate upgrade. It can give you speed, yet maintain quality.

**DIMENSIONS:** The sight of a mechanic cleaning out hardened materials in a mixer or gun is a common one. That holds true for synthetics, too, and they can set up a lot quicker when the equipment is warm or hot. How about cleanup?

**NONIS:** This is a cliche, I realize, but I repeat again: a mechanic is only
as good as his tools. Every mechanic should be thinking this advice constantly. With the Diana you don’t even need a screwdriver to dissemble it. If a mechanic takes it down 10 times in a day, it’ll take only 10 minutes: now, that’s not too much to ask. Other guns require 10 minutes or more for each over-haul.

Furthermore, we have a special water soluble lubricant that provides inside and outside protection. You never want oil or grease, obviously.

**DIMENSIONS: The future? Where do you see your companies going in the next five years? More resurfacing?**

**NONIS:** It has been said that construction in extreme climates will come of age when it is possible to work year round without a cost penalty.

Now we have that. We build panels in controlled factory environments and truck them to the site. It’s easier to train people indoors. You can hire better people when they know they are not going to be standing on an open deck eight floors up in the freezing cold.

The factory system is the only approach—and once the building envelope is up the interior mechanics are working out of the weather, too.

**DIMENSIONS: Plus, it’s cheaper for the buyer, too, isn’t it?**

**NONIS:** Exactly. The exterior insulated system is fully accepted. The panel prefabricated systems are cost effective when all factors are taken into consideration, i.e. weight savings, project scheduling, availability and so on.