

Energy Industries, LLC

Local Company Goes International From Hilo to Honolulu to the World

By Alvin Koo



Darren Kimura

I love it when things just work out. Like they're meant to be. For instance, Elvis went to Sun Records to make a gift

for his mama. Bill Gates got a small contract to make a quickie piece of software for IBM. J.K. Rowling was riding a crowded train home to London when the idea for Harry Potter simply fell into her head.

Darren Kimura is a third generation electrical professional. He learned his business in the cradle of the family business.

From his earliest days, he could see that energy production was not being planned well and that our dependence on oil would lead to problems someday. He asked his dad's customers if they were interested in energy efficiency.

They said, "You mean like in saving money? Let's do it."

His first customer was a small office building in Hilo, where he's from. It was the kind of dark, dingy type country building with dark wood and incandescent lights. He cut the number of fixtures in half and replaced them with fluorescent lights. Not brain surgery. But it worked. Even you knew that.

A lot of the world's best ideas are like that... simple.

Today, Kimura has a company with offices in Kahului, Hilo, Seattle, Spokane, Boise, Portland, Guam and New York. Originally founded in Hilo in 1994, Kimura's company, Energy Industries, LLC, is a national energy efficiency company with headquarters in Honolulu. In total, the company has about 180 employees worldwide.

His next step is Hong Kong.

Then, of course, the world!

It was only two years ago I first talked to him and he sounded like a nice local kid you'd invite to meet for business at Zippy's. In 2000 Pacific Business News listed him in its inaugural top Forty Under 40. He then went on to win Entrepreneur of the Year for SBA in 2002 (Hawaii, California, Nevada, Arizona and Guam). That same year his company was named service firm of year for SBA.

He started by doing mostly consulting work with the electric company to improve its rebate programs and started moving toward project development type work, where he could go into a customer facility and figure out ways to save energy and bring in the components to make it happen.

When he got big enough to hire contractors or buy things acting as an owner's representative, he started adding staff and opened his first branch office in Maui.

He went to Honolulu in late 1996, early 1997, and started Pacific

Energy Services in 1998. It did engineering work, meaning more mechanical work with chillers, heat pumps, the kind of components that made him a player in the biggest buildings in Hawaii.

In 2000, he opened eControls for building automation systems, which means wiring up a building to a computer, from lights to A/C, anything that uses energy, thermostat, timers, the works. Then in 2002, he began Energy Smarts, which was designed to market all these different services and include rebates from manufacturers and utilities in a complete package.

"I realized most electrical contractors or mechanical contractors had the technical expertise but not the sales engineers able to communicate these great ideas with the customers effectively. With Energy\$mart, we now had a really comprehensive approach to energy," Kimura says in his youthful voice.

In 2003, he decided to begin changing the umbrella organization which had seven different companies. It had the Facility Service Group, Energy Conservation, eCONTROLS, Lighting and Electrical, Pacific Energy, Quantum Lighting and Energy\$mart. He rolled them all into one, called Energy Industries, and began expanding to the West Coast starting with Sacramento. By this time, he had about 90 people.

"Ninety people is not a large company when you look at the



national level," Kimura says.

In 2004, he opened in Seattle and January 2005 bought a company in Spokane, Wash., which gave him a presence in Canada, Idaho and Alaska. In 2005, he opened a training center for customers and employees in Seattle. "The training center was designed for continuing staff education which leads to a better, more professional business," says Kimura.

In mid-2005 came Guam. Kimura plans to go international next. The reason is simple.

"People need our services and there are no other firms like us in the U.S. Some firms do a portion of what we offer, but no one provides it in a one stop shop. The complete package allows for our customers to not only identify their savings but achieve it. Without a full line of services, our customers wouldn't achieve their ROIs! "

And why not the world? Energy is everywhere we look and our lives are becoming more dependant on electricity now more than ever.

"Today, our firm's Honolulu staff exceeds 50 professionals experienced in a wide range of disciplines all focused on the goal of helping our customers save money by saving energy.

"Our strength lies in our ability to provide high-quality products with:

- 1) proper energy efficient design,
- 2) proper installation, and
- 3) proper long term maintenance.

"We specialize in finding solutions to the problems that commercial and industrial customers face."

Kimura's motives are not like Donald Trump's.

"My goal always was to help people. This has been instilled in me from my parents and promoted though out my career as a scout, ultimately helping me achieve Eagle Scout. I had a vision that as long as I can help others, the rest will be taken care of.

"By helping businesses save energy, we help the environment in reducing atmospheric pollution, we help the electrical utilities by reducing rolling blackouts, ensuring our energy security and deferring future generation and we help the customer by saving money... of course we also help the government by paying taxes.

"Additionally, we help reduce dependence on imported oil, help integrate renewable technologies into today's facilities and help provide efficient solutions without the sacrifices of traditional conservation.

"Through our concepts of energy economics, our goal is to save our customers so much energy that from the first day we install their measure, they're at a positive cash flow.

"This is a unique win-win-win industry."

Alvin Koo has been a writer and public relations practitioner in Hawaii for 30 years. His book "Stuff Nobody Told Me" can be found at Amazon.com.

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