

## **Protocase Helps Creative Connors Inc. Bring Automation to Live Theatre**



Anyone who appreciates live theatre knows that there is a lot more to it than just acting. Good quality sets are essential to create the correct mood and atmosphere for each scene. It is common for set designers to use motion to create dynamic sets that enhance performances. This is done through the use of moving elements such as rotating platforms, linear motion, and even theatrical flight. In the past, elements were moved manually by stagehands, limiting what could be achieved. But today, automation technology is invading the theatre, and opening up a whole world of opportunities to add depth and excitement to performances.

Gareth Conner, and his company, Creative Connors Inc., of Barrington, Rhode Island, are the moving force behind the introduction of automation to theatre. For over a decade, Gareth worked the theatre industry, creating sets for everything from regional theatres to large productions. Here he discovered his passion for bringing theatre sets to life through motion.



But he also saw that much of the theatre world did not have access to automation, because existing systems were too expensive and complicated. This led to his vision of an entirely new automation system that was modular, open, easy to use, and affordable. The rest is a classic American entrepreneurial success story. In 2004, Gareth left his job, mortgaged his house, and set out to develop his vision into a line of products that make automation accessible to all levels of theatre.

Developing and manufacturing a high quality, professional looking product line, on a tight budget, and at niche volumes was challenging, but four months later, he had sold his first product, and he achieved breakeven within a year.

According to Gareth, "Protocase was instrumental to our success during the early years. At this time, I was just one guy in a basement, and I didn't know much about sheet metal. I tried to get a combination of local shops to build and finish the metal parts that I needed. But they had little interest in my small jobs, and the cost they quoted was so high I would have blown most of my budget just on the metal parts. Then I stumbled on Protocase in 2004. They were able to work from my stack of rough designs, gave me a lot of advice, and then delivered high quality enclosures and parts, fully finished, in one stop, at a reasonable cost. Without this, I don't know how I would have gotten off the ground."

Today, Creative Connors Inc. has become a thriving company, working with organizations that range from high school theatres to Broadway. And Protocase remains an important part of their supply chain. "Protocase can supply me with the quantities that I need for my production runs, and their short lead times let me order when I need to. And I'm now making use of their blanket order program, which allows me to get pricing on my annual usage, while still ordering product only as I when required."

Now that the thrills and chills of startup phase are gone, Gareth says he's still having a great time, as he continues to innovate and extend his product line. "Creativity and technology really come together in theatre. We get to work with amazing people who are working on whacky and wonderful ideas, and I get to fulfill my passion for making things move in the theatre."