

Sprowt Labs Gets Brewers Malting at Home with Help from Protolabs and the Cool Idea! Award

While developing a niche in the craft brew scene, Sprowt Labs used Protolabs to reduce manufacturing complexities and time-to-market

MAPLE PLAIN, Minn.—September 4, 2018—The craft beer scene is exploding across the U.S., but the popularity of home- and micro-brewing has uncovered a gap in the supply chain when it comes to malting. To date, malt—a critical ingredient in beer—has been dominated by large industrial malting operations. While it’s easy to get standard bulk malts, brewers looking for local malted grain sources and new flavors have been out of luck.

A new “personal malthouse” from Minneapolis-based Sprowt Labs aims to democratize small-batch malting, creating a supply chain from local farmers to craft brewers, while maintaining the quality and precision of large-scale malt houses. Unlike industrial operations, the malthouse from Sprowt will produce malted barley in small, customizable batches and significantly automates the malting steps of steeping, germination and kilning.

Sprowt Labs co-founders, Brian Hedberg and Christopher Abbott, knew they had a winning design for craft brewers but wanted to make sure their product was built to last. While developing parts and equipment, the founders applied for and won a [Cool Idea! Award](#) from [Protolabs](#). The award offers up to \$250,000 of the company’s manufacturing services, which include industrial 3D printing, CNC machining, sheet metal fabrication and injection molding each year to be used to develop prototypes and low-volume runs of production parts.

Sprowt’s personal malthouse, called the Acro, is sized to produce 10 – 35 lbs. of finished base and specialty malts, and it’s easy to use. Through the Cool Idea! Award, the company was able to accelerate its manufacturing timeline and create a higher quality product than it would have been able to do without Protolabs’ help. In fact, the company had tried to work with previous contract manufacturers to produce parts, but they were turned down due to the complexity of the design and the quick turnaround time required.

“We’re enabling local farms to produce barley for their own community by engaging stakeholders in craft beer’s supply chain, from breeders to brewers who can then use our equipment to test and prototype recipes,” said Brian Hedberg, co-founder of Sprowt Labs. “We connected with the team at Protolabs because they, too, are helping people prototype ideas and create something new.”

Protolabs worked with Sprowt Labs to create an injection-molded humidifier box for the Acro and, in doing so, helped the company reduce its cost per product. With the humidifier box and other components in hand fast, Sprowt Labs will be launching a better, more efficient product to market. “The Protolabs business model is similar to ours,” said Hedberg. “We’re both trying to democratize a production process to accelerate innovation. We’ve been very impressed with Protolabs, especially the design for manufacturability feedback on the web.”

After a series of design iterations, Sprowt is getting ready to launch the Acro later this summer.

“Protolabs and the Cool Idea! Award are making this launch possible,” said Hedberg. “Without them, the Acro would have been more expensive, and we would not have been able to get the quality and turnaround we wanted. Protolabs is creating our custom parts and offers the perfect ‘in-between’ scale we need as we grow.”

About Protolabs

Protolabs is the world’s fastest digital manufacturing source for rapid prototyping and on-demand production. The technology-enabled company produces custom parts and assemblies in as fast as 1 day with automated 3D printing, CNC machining, sheet metal fabrication, and injection molding processes. Its digital approach to manufacturing enables accelerated time to market, reduces development and production costs, and minimizes risk throughout the product life cycle. Visit protolabs.com for more information.

About Sprowt Labs

Sprowt Labs is a technology startup based in Minneapolis. The company is building a platform of malting technology, heritage seeds, and knowledge to accelerate the growth of craft beer's own supply chain. Sprowt Labs’ Acro™, the first personal malthouse, is an IoT product that makes it possible to malt grain with industrial precision on a pilot scale. Acro™ makes malting accessible to a dramatically larger community, driving flavor and quality innovation across the supply chain, and building local connections between farmers and brewers. Visit sprowtlabs.com for more information.

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