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With *Project:Tyro*, ShopBot crowdsources the direction of digital fabrication

ShopBot opens the development of their next CNC system

Durham, NC (September 21, 2009) - "What would you want in a small ShopBot?" That's the question ShopBot is asking makers, do-it-yourselfers and current ShopBotters in the company's pursuit to develop the next powerful, affordable, small-format digital fabrication tool.

Since its inception in 1996, ShopBot has become a leader in the design and manufacture of innovative, affordable CNC equipment - commonly known as digital fabrication tools. ShopBot has sold more than 6,000 CNC systems to individuals, small shops and large corporations in 55 countries. ShopBots are being used every day to manufacture cabinets, furniture, boats, musical instruments, signs, surfboards, prototypes, automobile parts, toys and decorative art pieces. Even components for U.S. Navy fighter jets are produced on a ShopBot.

In 2007, ShopBot released the [Buddy](#) line of compact, modular CNC systems: The **PRSalph** **Buddy**, designed for industrial, cell-based manufacturing operations, and the **PRStandard** **Buddy**, designed for small businesses and serious do-it-yourselfers wanting to incorporate the advantages of CNC automation into smaller projects. Although these new machines are smaller in size, they still feature the same mechanicals as full-size ShopBot Personal Robotic Systems (PRS) and offer the same level of high performance. Recently, as consumers have begun to express a desire for smaller tools without as many industrial features, ShopBot has started to explore the possibility of developing tools more focused towards educators, hobbyists and inventors.

ShopBot president Ted Hall summed up the company's move towards a small machine in an open letter to the ShopBot audience:

We've often discussed if we should develop a smaller ShopBot, but we haven't done it, mostly because of clinging to one of our early formative ideas: that we wanted to produce real tools that could cut 4x8 sheet goods with enough power to make clean cuts and to machine at efficient speeds.

In recent years we've broken away slightly from the full-size concept with our Buddy systems - though these machines are certainly not lacking in power or capability - but we have been receiving many requests from educators requesting a smaller ShopBot that is oriented to training students in the classroom in CNC and robotics and from inventor-types and hobbyists who would like a tool that can fit on a desk or easily carried to craft shows or job sites.

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So, we are now considering producing a smaller ShopBot. The overall idea is that the tool be a convenient size for the desk, run from a 15A 110V circuit, be robust enough to do real work with power and accuracy, have enough speed for efficient chip loads and have attractive pricing. This will be a development challenge, particularly within the constraints of a small footprint and low cost. Our hope is that the tool can ship with full ShopBot Control Software as well as our PartWorks design package (developed for us by [Vectric](#)). In addition, we have been impressed by the ease of use of the [CarveWright](#) software for going quickly from an image, or library item, to a carving. This approach makes it very easy for beginners to get started without having to go through a tool-pathing or post-processor step that makes CNC more complicated. We would like to implement this type of straightforwardness and have had exploratory conversations with CarveWright about a design module.

Although the design process will be dynamic in nature, ShopBot is currently asking anyone who may be interested in a small-format digital fabrication machine for guidance on priorities. Issues like:

- Maximum size, minimum work area and expandability
- Router/spindle type and capability
- Materials that can be cut (i.e. cutting force range and tool stiffness)
- Necessity and type of enclosure
- Optimal pricing

The ShopBot R&D team aims to address as many needs as possible and are seeking input to help focus development goals and adjust trade-offs. To collect information, ShopBot has created this [Questionnaire](#) on their website and are asking anyone, from tinkerers to engineers for their input on the direction of digital fabrication.

About ShopBot Tools

ShopBot Tools designs and manufactures low-cost, high-value CNC tools for digital fabrication of wood, plastic and aluminum products. ShopBots are found in thousands of shops in the US and in 55 other countries around the world. Over the years, ShopBot owners have linked up in an informal network of user groups and social websites. Now, [100kGarages.com](#) formalizes the readiness of these ShopBot Fabbers to get to work creating a new economy in an environmentally conscious and community-oriented way. For more information about ShopBot, visit [www.ShopBotTools.com](#) or follow us on twitter at [www.twitter.com/ShopBot](#).

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