
Expanding The Rep's Role

If there is any doubt that the role of the independent manufacturers' representative is evolving, changing and adapting to the needs of the marketplace, a conversation with Tom deBoisblanc will quickly dispel that notion.

deBoisblanc is president of South Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Technology Company, which has been serving the needs of various commercial and military electronics industries since

1988. According to deBoisblanc, the company is dedicated to providing competitive quality workmanship and customer support. "Our main objective is to be able to seamlessly handle customer

manufacturing needs as if we were members of the company's technical staff and working like a department within their own organization. We achieve this goal by providing access to a wide variety of engineering professionals with a broad background of technical disciplines."

What deBoisblanc is describing here is a rep firm unlike many others, but similar to some in that it meets the needs of the marketplace in an innovative and creative manner. Instead of carrying a synergistic line of complementary products, South Coast operates much like what many companies involved in the electrical industry began doing several years ago. About 15-20 years ago, a concept called integrated supply became popular among providers of electrical products and services. Those providers, including electrical distributors and contractors, plumbing distributors and contractors, and building contractors, would band together under the banner of a single-supply entity. The customer was able to deal with that



Lonny deBoisblanc, president, LTD Technology, Newbury, California, watches Lionel deBoisblanc, director of sales, work on cable assemblies. LTD Technology is one of the many manufacturers represented by South Coast Manufacturing & Engineering Company.

single entity when making purchases and all their needs were taken care of in a manner similar to “one-stop shopping.”

Likewise, South Coast, Newbury Park, California, “manages projects for companies,” he explains. “We ensure that the engineering and quality are there, and we interface with job shops, etc., in order to integrate and ship the project back to the customer.”

Meeting the Customers' Needs

While the route deBoisblanc has followed to get where he is today is fairly circuitous, it has been a path constantly focused on locating customers that have a need, and then meeting that need. “The first company I was involved with provided in-house manufacturing services,” he explains. “With three partners — all with a manufacturing background — we provided in-house manufacturing services, including environmental and shock testing. We added chemical processing for

other customers and eventually we became very chemical in nature. From there we just evolved. Since then the partnerships dissolved, but I still rep my former partners.”

He continues that South Coast generally begins with a customer by serving as an engineering consultant on a project the customer is looking to outsource. “I have a network of companies that can do the work. Let’s say the project involves electronic assembly. I might pass that straight through to a supplier. But at the same time, I integrate the project with engineering expertise.”

Repping Former Customers

One of the key benefits he’s found in providing these services for customers is that South Coast has wound up repping many of the customers it started with. “In meeting the needs of my customers, I’m networked with sheet metal and machine shops, mechanical assembly and engineering firms. I work as a project engineer for my customers. In one

respect, I rep all these companies for their services, and on the other hand, I serve as a networked entity that can be repped by someone else.”

He explains that a key challenge he constantly faces is that of locating additional customers. “It’s all just a matter of getting our name out there. I don’t think my business model is all that complex, so what it comes down to is just working to market myself among prospects. I’ve had good success via word of mouth and direct mail efforts. Where I’ve enjoyed success is when I get a customer to understand what I can do for them. The expanse of my services may not be what a customer has in mind, but once they hear my message and learn that I can serve as a department of their organization, I’ve had good luck.”

Where does deBoisblanc hope to take South Coast in the short-term future? “I would hope that in the next five years, for example, I would be running a good amount of ongoing projects through my network one way or another.”

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