



EDITORIAL | JACK FOSTER

Recipe for Success

MANA-Member 'Unity' Dishes Up a Winning Rep-Firm Formula

Begin with a rich background in sales, complemented by plenty of experience as reps, manufacturers and even some time spent as a distributor. Next, add a dash of electrical industry association experience. Mix well, and after only one year, you'll find yourself with a successful rep firm along the lines of **Unity Electrical Sales, Inc.**, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



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MANA-member Unity Electrical Sales is a broad-based rep firm serving the western Pennsylvania and West Virginia markets. That agency’s stated goal “is to provide value and growth to our manufacturers; reliable and consistent service to our distributors; and professional advice to end-users in the residential, commercial, industrial, mining and OEM market segments.

The agency was formed more than a year ago as the result of a merger of Pittsburgh-area rep firms Sherwin-Wilson and Madia-Paul. Personnel from those agencies were joined by electrical industry veteran Christy Goss to form the 12-person Unity Electrical Sales team.

“What we have today is the result of the two long-standing area rep firms who joined together in order to preserve the longevity of the businesses they created,” explains Goss. “For my part, I was ready for a change after 10 years with Pass & Seymour and more than 14 years working with manufacturers. This was an exciting opportunity for me to come in as a fifth owner-partner.”

As a result of some manufacturer merger/acquisition activity and other things that were taking place in the market, explains Mark Wilson, “We (Sherwin-Wilson and Madia-Paul) felt that we had some important decisions to make. In the end it just made sense

that we join forces to place more feet on the street. Having more bodies in place to serve the marketplace would allow us to drill down deeper into the markets that we serve.” He adds that the merger now provides Unity with the resources it needs to better serve the industrial, OEM, commercial and residential markets. “It also provides us with some diversity in that when one market may not be performing well, we can pick it up in another market that may be performing at a higher level.”

Keystone Input

Wilson adds that one of the contributing forces not only to the decision to merge but also to the success of the merger was a presentation at the second Keystone Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, two years ago. “One of the presentations and a breakout session that followed, was conducted by personnel from GV Financial Advisors, Atlanta, Georgia. We contacted them following the conference and they really positioned us in the right frame of mind to get the job done. We learned quickly that they truly understood the rep business model. Their consulting work allowed us to sit back and consider how all the aspects of the business would be affected when we moved ahead with our plans. They were a large part of our success.”

Once the decision was made to bring the two existing agencies and Goss together, things progressed very smoothly. According to Goss, “We committed to due diligence early on and made sure that

our egos were checked at the door. As a result, the process was what we thought it would be.”

Wilson notes that if anything became evident from the beginning it was the fact that “We weren’t simply throwing two agencies together. Rather, we were taking important steps that would affect shareholders, employees, manufacturers and customers. We had to be sure we got our acts together in a hurry to ensure that we had the proper infrastructure in place to complete the job correctly.”

As the personalities came together, Goss explains, “We all had to step out of our respective comfort zones, carefully define our roles within the newly constructed company and then work to eliminate any duplication of effort. We’ve already made a great deal of progress in this area, but it’s an ever-evolving process.”

Echoing Goss’ thoughts is Wilson who explains that “One area of duplication we had to take a look at was having more than one rep call on a customer. This developed because there were customers who were used to having a specific rep call on them. When we merged we might have one rep make an industrial call, while another calls on the same customer for the commercial business. Our goal was to avoid turning off the customer by presenting them with an unfamiliar face. We progressed at a slower pace until the customer could feel comfortable with the merged agency.”

The On-Going Value of Training


When Christy Goss was asked why her agency boasts of its membership in MANA and NEMRA and its participation in MRERF programs, she was quick to point to the educational and training opportunities that those organizations provide their members. "Continuing education, training and networking are the backbone of our business.

Thus, we make a sizeable investment in participating in many different industry organizations. Mark Wilson is a CPMR and Dan Sherwin recently completed the Certified Sales Professional (CSP) program that is administered by MRERF. Tom Paul, our industrial/OEM sales manager, is currently attending the CSP program.

"In addition, I serve as the president of the Western Pennsylvania Electric League and recently attended the first NAED Women in Industry conference. We're big believers in MANA membership and we remain active in both the local and national NEMRA organizations and participate in numerous training and sales meetings as they relate to the manufacturers that we represent."

Marketplace Reactions

Both Goss and Wilson agree that the reactions from customers and manufacturers to the merged agency were very positive. According to Goss, "The majority of manufacturers and customers were very supportive. Perhaps a handful of people were a bit skeptical and wanted to sit back and see how it could play out. After a year, however, I believe everyone sees that it has been a productive move for all parties involved."

When asked why Unity Electrical Sales is an agency a manufacturer or customer ought to consider conducting business with, Wilson doesn't hesitate for a moment when he responds, "I believe it's a combination of things for us. Naturally, there's our ability to penetrate the market and the number of our feet on the street. But there's more to it than that. Our experience has allowed us to identify the customers' needs and wants. We know how to create demand for product for both our distributors and our manufacturers. When you put all of that together, it goes a long way toward creating a winning formula for us." 

Members of the Winning Team

The ingredients in the form of key personnel who came together to form **Unity Electrical Sales, Inc.**, a little over a year ago are:

Mark Wilson began his career with Midland Ross — now Thomas & Betts — as a sales trainee. He worked his way through the ranks to become a sales manager and from there went into marketing as a product line manager. In furthering his sales and marketing experience, he accepted a position with Appleton Electric (a division of Emerson Electric) as a specification engineer. In 1996 he joined forces with Sherwin to form Sherwin Wilson Electrical Sales, Inc. He is the managing partner of Unity.

Tom Paul joined the Westinghouse Electric Corporation in 1978. Two years later he joined a Pittsburgh-based rep firm Robert W. Colley & Associates. In 1987, he partnered with Madia to purchase the agency, renaming it Madia-Paul & Associates. He is the industrial-OEM sales manager for the firm.

Mark Madia entered the electrical industry as a sales representative for a rep firm. In 1987 he joined forces with Tom Paul to purchase Robert W. Colley & Associates, forming the Madia-Paul organization, which focused on the OEM/Industrial market. That partnership, which lasted 19 years, continues with Unity.

Christy Goss entered the electrical industry with the National Association of Electrical Distributors (NAED), managing their EPEC training program through the association's education foundation. Following that experience she joined Thomas & Betts as a quotations specialist. After completion of an in-depth sales training program that company transferred her to Pittsburgh as an outside sales representative. In 1998 she accepted a position with Pass & Seymour/Legrand, being promoted to district sales manager in 2001.



PICTURED, RIGHT
Members of the Unity Electrical Sales, Inc., team who joined forces a little over a year ago are (L TO R): Mark Madia, Christy Goss, Tom Paul, Mark Wilson and Dan Sherwin.