

ToolPro: doing the little things right

With uncertain market predictions for 2009, Tool Pro is planning to endure with consistent and superior customer service.

“We operate within a very small niche in the construction trade, so we must keep sight of what got us here: being customer focused and customer centric,” said Mike Waters, vice president of sales and marketing. “We don’t see 2009 being a big improvement over 2008, so we have to make sure we do the right things.”



Deborah Kelley, VP of finance; Kerri Lyle, sales manager; and Mike Waters, VP of sales and marketing.

According to Waters, doing those right things includes seeking ways to better serve drywall yard customers and helping them become more successful.

“We feel that we can take our experience in the market and help our clients endure this storm,” he said. “We will continue to introduce market-sensitive programs that address the conditions our clients see out there.”

The ToolPro team brings more than 100 years of combined industry experience to its business of selling professional-quality hand tools for drywall, acoustical, stucco, plaster, and concrete finishing. This market experience is complemented by a comprehensive inventory of more than 4,000 tools and accessories from more than 400 manufacturers.

Founded in 1990 by drywall industry veteran Rick Dawsey,

ToolPro serves a large dealer base across North America. The privately owned company has 98 percent fill rates and same-day order fulfillment from its Kennesaw, Ga.-based headquarters and distribution center.

With such a specialized inventory, the company’s culture has always included knowledgeable staff with product expertise.

“It is our job to know the trends as well as the standard core products,” said Waters. “We also keep up with certain geographical product nuances and stay close to vendors and manufacturers so we know what works.”

But knowledge is just part of what ToolPro’s staff brings to customers.

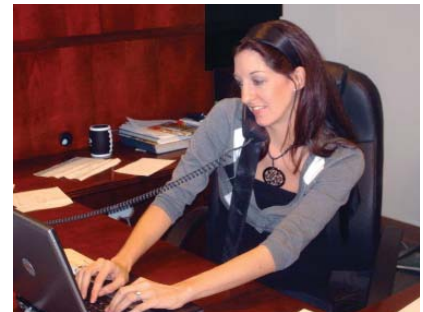
“We want our customers to remember their ToolPro buying experience as not just great service, but also as fun, enthusiastic, and a real highlight of the day,” Waters said. “It takes very skilled people to do that, and we’ve been fortunate to keep a core group of energetic, positive people who are also extremely competent in what they do.”

ToolPro also chooses quality over size, Waters said. “If you’re focused on just being the biggest, you’re not focused on being the best. Our company focuses on being the best so we will endure and stand the test of time.”

Another focus for ToolPro is helping customers maximize their investment.

“We want to help our clients be as valuable to their contractors as they possibly can be and still earn good money on their tool sales,” said Waters. “We have the resources available to help our dealers turn their inventory, achieve good gross margins, and create a value center for their contractor customers.”

ToolPro also offers customers assistance with merchandising in their showrooms.



Amy Spinks, business development/account manager

“We have a team of retail reset experts who do a really great job of upgrading the look and feel of our customers’ tool showrooms. This often turns an area of neglect into an area of world-class retailing,” Waters said. “It makes a huge difference.”

If a showroom remodel timeline allows, ToolPro’s experts go on site to meet with AMAROK customers, review drawings and concepts, and create a comprehensive plan to improve the tool displays, Waters said.

ToolPro offers the retail reset service and frequent product knowledge sessions to continue growing its relationships with AMAROK members.

“The AMAROK organization is incredibly important to us,” said Waters. “They are the backbone of our business. The organization is full of great small to midsize yards that do business like we do. These are the relationships where we really excel. That’s why AMAROK has been such a successful partnership for us.”

ToolPro also employs a value-added approach to new products.

“We take the risk out of trying a new product in a showroom. We’re going to invest all we can to make you successful with this product,” said Waters. “But if it doesn’t work out, no harm, no foul. We’ll take care of it. It’s our way of keeping the tool market energized and taking as much risk out of doing business with us as we can.”



But that doesn't mean that ToolPro jumps on the bandwagon of every new product that is introduced. Sometimes, Waters said, its staff feels that new tool products are more hype than substance. In those cases, ToolPro's staff advises customers to take a cautious approach and can protect customers from buying mounds of useless inventory. According to Waters, keeping a close eye on inventory is especially critical in unstable markets.

"When times are lean for AMAROK members and their contractors, it's important to take care of inventory dollars," he said. "It's about having the right purchasing levels, the right mix of products. That's the kind of purchasing assistance that we provide to our customers. We watch out for our customers' dollars as if they are our own."

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