



Smart Tools for Smart Distribution®

NEW MEMBER PROFILE

The distributor for distributors

United Pipe & Steel brings dependability to wild price swings. by **Emily Acquisto**

“United” is more than a name for Ipswich, Massachusetts-based United Pipe & Steel—it’s a way of doing business. Whether it’s helping distributors work more competitively, encouraging employees to work as a team, or pursuing opportunities with vendors, the company is committed to carrying the theme of being united across its operations.

“It’s the triangle that makes us tick,” said General Manager Greg Leidner. “We are united with our employees, our customers, and our vendors.”

It’s a strategy that seems to be working.

Founder David Cohen established United Pipe & Steel in 1980 with a \$5,000 investment and a business concept built on helping distributors remain competitive while reducing their inventory levels.

The master distributor started out supplying steel pipe to plumbing distributors throughout New England, expanding later into copper tube, PVC pipe, SDR, and copper line sets. It also maintains an electrical division, which supplies a full line

of metal conduit, PVC conduit, and strut and threaded rod to the industry.

As United celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2010, the company’s distribution footprint stretched across 27 states; two years later, it serves 42 states.

This spring the company opened its eighth location in Topeka, Kan., providing fleet service to distributors as far west as Colorado and Wyoming, as far east as Missouri, and as far north as North Dakota.

“We have our own fleet and can control the shipping process from our



From left: Freddy Merida, floor supervisor; Michael Foley, senior vice president, purchasing and inventory; Lee Goldman, director of IT; Joanne Frazier, controller; David Cohen, president and owner; Greg Leidner, general manager; Roy Garnes, warehouse associate; Michael Blair, national sales manager; Nina Juel, inside sales representative; Eric Foley, director of operations; and Teri Cole, accounting

warehouse to the distributor's yard," Leidner said. "Throughout the entire process, the customer interacts with a United Pipe & Steel employee."

DEPENDABILITY IN A VOLATILE MARKET

Volatile metal prices can leave a lasting impact on a distributor's bottom line. Master distributors like United Pipe & Steel help ease some of that volatility by keeping stock levels high so that their distributor customers keep their levels low. Distributors can place orders in keeping with demand and price swings.

"Many distributors want to instill financial discipline in their organization, and they'll look to us for a fast solution for high-dollar, high-value commodities like copper and conduit," said Leidner.

Experience and industry knowledge run deep throughout the company's leadership. Cohen spent years in the steel service center business before founding United. Today, he is a well-recognized expert in the steel pipe market and is frequently called upon for his market insights. Michael Foley, vice president of purchasing and inventory, has worked to drive the company's growth and build solid, strategic vendor relationships during his 25 years with the company. And Leidner joined United six years ago, bringing an M.B.A. from MIT's Sloan School of Management and experience as an economist for Standard & Poor's and a management consultant for Digitas and the Boston Consulting Group.

In addition to its leadership, the company thrives off its strategic warehouse locations and unique routing system. Both factors are instrumental in helping ensure weekly deliveries happen on the same day so customers can plan their inventories accordingly.

"If you place an order with a mill, you have to wait for them to fill it, make it, and then find a trucking company to deliver it to your warehouse," Leidner explained. "However, distributors want to know immediately whether or not they can satisfy their customers. Our model enables them to do that,

while also giving them the ability to order smaller quantities of volatile products more frequently. This helps them improve cash flow and reduce their reliance on investing in volatile commodities."

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Joining NAED was a natural move for United Pipe & Steel, which expanded into the electrical industry nearly a decade ago.

"We opened an electrical division because

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—Greg Leidner, general manager

we saw a need for a company that handles the logistics of products like conduit," said Leidner. "Our trucks were going into industrial parks, seeing distributors, and literally driving right past opportunity."

Coming to NAED by way of reading *tED* magazine, Leidner looks forward to taking advantage of the many networking activities NAED has to offer.

"We're still learning about NAED, but I think it's a great organization with an awful lot to offer," he said. "We've met many distributors through the regional and national conferences and hope to meet more in the months ahead." ■

Acquisto is NAED's communications and public relations manager. Contact her at eacquisto@naed.org.

AT A GLANCE

Company: United Pipe & Steel

Headquarters: Ipswich, Mass.

No. of locations: 8

No. of employees: 115

Founded: 1980

Website: united-pipe.com

NAED NEWSBRIEFS

2012 "PAR Highlights" now available

How does your business stack up against others in the industry? Find out with the 2012 NAED Performance Analysis Report Highlights, the industry's source for financial benchmarks and operating guidelines that help drive profitability and performance. Survey participants have already received the PAR Highlights. The report is available to nonparticipating NAED members for \$300, with additional copies for \$20, as well as to nonmembers for \$495. For more information, contact memberservices@naed.org.

Don't miss NAED's AdVenture Conference

Get the latest marketing trends and enhance your skills at the 2012 NAED AdVenture Electrical Marketing Conference, Aug. 20-22 in Chicago. Hear insights from leading marketing authorities from throughout the industry and beyond while participating in hands-on workshops and networking opportunities, including *tED* magazine's Best of the Best Awards ceremony. Early birds save when registering before July 20. Visit naed.org/adventure to see the schedule and register.

New tech resources available online

As customers increasingly rely on the Internet to find and learn about electrical distributors, companies must have an online presence that's both easily found on search engines and stocked with helpful and relevant information. The NAED Technology Task Force has released new guides to help members understand the key questions to ask when creating a positive online presence, developing an e-commerce platform, and more. Visit naed.org/strategictechnology to download these tools today.