

No Borders; No Problem at UniNet

With an international infrastructure of customer support and custom solutions, the supplies-side leader is a true global partner.

by Craig Berosh • Recharger Magazine

Nestor Saporiti has one overriding message for remanufacturers worldwide: his company is listening.

The affable president of UniNet Imaging Inc. has molded every aspect of the company — from the individual sales representative to the technical support team to a global web of branch offices — with customers in mind.

UniNet does business in 120 countries, so listening to customers can sometimes resemble a United Nations conference. Saporiti guesses UniNet's employees speak about 20 languages. Regardless of location or dialect, he sees more similarities than differences with customers around the world.

"We listen to our customers. What all customers have in common is that they want you to listen to them," said Saporiti, who speaks Spanish, Portuguese and a little Italian and French. "If you listen to them they will explain what they want and if you can speak their language it makes it a lot easier.



Nestor Saporiti, President of UniNet Imaging Inc.

We have salespeople that will speak their language whether they are in Japan or Brazil or Hungary. In the end, we all want the same things: good product, good quality, good service at a competitive price."

The company's flagship products are its Absolute Black and Absolute Color chemical and blended toners. The catalog is thick, totaling some 12,000 products. Of UniNet's 400

employees, approximately 100 serve in a sales capacity. With its growth (Saporiti says sales grew around 30 percent the last several years), keeping business on a personal level remains a high priority.

"The close relationship is the key point," said Randall Lane, U.S. sales manager. "That relationship allows for prompt and immediate answers to questions and issues customers

may have. It might be quote requests, special product information, pricing information, order tracking and back orders. Special packaging comes into play with drop ships as we have resellers that resell toner on a Web site, for example, so they need generic labeling and special invoicing. These are all services that help customers' needs and understanding the specific needs of the customer is real important."

Of course listening is one thing. Having the capability to provide the appropriate solution — oftentimes a custom or niche solution — is another. It's this combination of customer service and technological know-how that has built UniNet into a \$100 million company with plans to expand its Southern California headquarters to more than 100,000 square feet and to open three new satellite offices in India, Canada and Australia later this year.

"We are ready for growth," Saporiti said. "We consider ourselves a growing, worldwide quality manufacturer and solutions provider to OEMs, we deal with many OEMs who do recycling, and large and small remanufacturers. We see a lot of small remanufacturers as our partners. We want them to grow so we can grow and we have been growing rapidly because our customers are very loyal and they stay with us. They see us as a partner who can provide them with solutions."

One of the strengths at UniNet, says Saporiti, is innovative product development, whether at its chip development facility in Las Vegas or toner blending location in New York. Products developed in-house include wiper blades, PCRs, mag



UniNet Corporate Staff: (clockwise from top right) Advertising Manager, Erick Jones; Purchasing Agent, Ximena Kelleyan; Sales Manager, Randall Lane; Technical Director, Neil Robinson; Controller, Ingrid Johnson; Purchasing Manager, Pam Santiago; Logistics Manager, Mark Miyatani; VP Accounting, Claudia Saporiti; President, Nestor Saporiti; Sales Director, Diego Gesualdi; and PR Manager, Marcela Gasanz.



UniNet maintains a worldwide presence, with its sales teams in several countries including (clockwise from top right) Europe, Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico.

rollers and doctor blades. The company also prides itself on its ability to develop specialty solutions, which might include special color chips, darker toner, matching components, MICR toner, and pigmented and dye-based inks.

In the past four months alone UniNet has released its branded Unichip Smartchips for the Samsung SCX 4725 and ML3050, Dell 1815, and Okidata C5700/5600 and C5800/5500. Chip production is projected to reach 1 million units a month in the near future.

"We think of ourselves more like HP. We are very good at developing products and subcontracting to manufacturers," said Saporiti, who said OEMs or OEM subcontractors do the majority of UniNet's contract manufacturing. "At the same time, where the aftermarket couldn't get up to speed, we decided to take the flag and develop it ourselves, like with OPCs. There are so many [OPCs], we decided to partner and invested in a production line."

UniNet's capacity to develop new product was greatly enhanced with the acquisition of Summit Technologies in March 2007. Saporiti calls the merger the "perfect match." Although based in the United States, UniNet has historically concentrated sales growth outside the U.S. The acquisition provided a stronger presence in the U.S. backed by the proven brand of Summit Technologies, which specializes in the development of chips and components for remanufacturing. The partnership also added East Coast distribution (from Summit's location in New York), and seasoned sales and technical sup-



UniNet's 2007 acquisition of New York-based Summit Technologies was the "perfect merger" according to Saporiti, bringing with it the expertise of Technical Director, Mike Josiah and VP Chip Manufacturing, Joe Cachia (above).

East Coast distribution center and sales staff (right).



port teams. In fact, Summit's reputation as a quality leader is so strong in the U.S. market the company decided to retain the brand and last month introduced Summit Technologies OPC drums for several HP models specially designed to work with Summit and UniNet toners.

"We have found that the Summit brand is very well respected. Now we are giving a second option to our customers," Saporiti said.

Much of UniNet's product devel-

opment efforts over the years have focused on OEMs other than Hewlett-Packard and Lexmark machines or non-mainline products, as Technical Director Neil Robinson says, like Kyocera Mita, Xerox and Dell. Robinson and his 30 years of industry experience joined the company this year with the immediate task of organizing quality control for all distributors.

"We want to be known for delivering these solutions and that means working with our customers

on these non-mainline products. We specialize in these hard-to-find products. Our customers might have a specific application where nobody else is doing that and they can go in and grab some key business if they had a certain part, so we want to work with these guys and help them develop these products going forward," said Robinson, who gives the example of specially developed high-yield toner for cost-per-page applications.

"What happens is that customers (who enter niche market sectors) enjoy a better profit margin than HP monochrome customers," Saporiti said. "Unfortunately, they are all focusing on the HP market and we try to open their minds and say, 'Hey, get a bigger mix of cartridges and you will profit from it.' "

The challenge of product development for a supplier of imaging solutions such as UniNet is complicated further when dealing with an international customer base. Technical Director Mike Josiah is charged with assuring product compatibility worldwide.

"There are regionalized versions of the same cartridge," Josiah said. "Sometimes it's strictly that the coding on the chip is different, sometimes it's the chip and a piece of plastic that changes things, and in rare cases even the toner is slightly different. There are different power requirements in different machines in different areas of the world ... there's a lot you need to keep in mind."

Another of Josiah's responsibilities is ensuring a company-wide awareness of the technical advancements of the industry. The company uses online technology to support all



UniNet has greatly expanded its quality control with the addition of Technical Director, Neil Robinson, who is charged with organizing quality control for all distributors. Pictured: Neil (left) with UniNet R&D Manager, Javier Gonzalez.

staff members who may come in contact with customers, including an internal Web site with technical info and tips, bulletin board postings and commonly asked questions.

"Especially with the worldwide presence that we have and everybody in dramatically different time zones, it equalizes everything for us and we can get answers to everybody worldwide very quickly," Josiah said.

One unique training initiative at the company is that all UniNet sales reps get their hands dirty and participate in the remanufacture of cartridges.

"Every salesperson spends a

week building cartridges," said Josiah, who is well known for teaching remanufacturing classes at industry events as well as authoring technical articles in trade publications. "They also spend some time helping pick orders in the warehouse and watching the bottle-filling operations. That way they all start off with a decent knowledge of all the operations in the company and have a good idea of what our customers do every day."

The end result is a sales staff that has answers and solutions that can generate business for UniNet's customers. In many cases UniNet reps are uncovering markets that may

otherwise go underdeveloped or altogether neglected.

"We try to train our salespeople that they need to develop these markets," said International Sales Director Diego Gesualdi. "I was working in South American back in 1998 and was telling them that the color market is here and they need to start working with the color ... we have the tools and we have the products to help develop these types of markets."

UniNet's 12 owned subsidiaries and 10 distributors on five continents surely aid in assisting customers with developing local markets. While the imaging supplies industry has become a global marketplace for many, it's hard to imagine any company that has been more ambitious than UniNet in establishing a worldwide presence. The company currently has East and West Coast offices in the U.S., three European locations in Spain, Hungary and the United Kingdom (announced this month), and offices in South Africa, China, Japan, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela and Argentina.

A local presence is advantageous on several fronts. First, it gives the company creditability and insight into local markets.

"After many years of working internationally, I can say that all the markets are almost the same," Gesualdi said. "To enter into certain markets you need to understand their culture, but the markets themselves are very similar."

From the perspective of a value proposition, local offices allow for more competitive prices due to lower delivery costs while allowing customer to carry less inventory. UniNet's distribution goal is to provide the delivery of product to the major cities




UniNet's West Coast sales team is part of a global network that includes 12 owned subsidiaries and 10 distributors on five continents.

of the world within three days using ground rates at less than 3 percent freight cost.

"When price is an issue we came up with a freight solution that allows customers to not have to carry a lot of inventory because they can get it from us locally. In the end it saves time and money," Saporiti said.

As with most every initiative at the company, UniNet provides educational tools and resources to anyone in the spirit of promoting product quality industry-wide. The company's Web site, which Saporiti emphasizes is not password protected, includes written and video remanufacturing instructions and other technical articles, many in English and Spanish, for hundreds of models. UniNet staff member are some of the most active speakers at

industry events around the world. These types of commitments highlight the UniNet culture and philosophy that the president has tried to ingrain into every aspect of the company.

"We see a very, very bright future. Something that we do here at UniNet is reinvest our money because we believe in the industry," Saporiti said. "Our mission is to develop our customer's business through profits, marketing plan, product development and instructions. At UniNet we consider everyone a partner: vendors, customers and employees." 

Contact UniNet at 310-280-9620
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