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/ Rob Beaman, co-owner and principal: "Our job is to represent best-in-class independent manufacturers."



JTH provides clients with the opportunity to choose the best products from an array of leading manufacturers without restrictions.

The Right Combo

With key partnerships and talent, JTH Lighting Alliance aims to be an industry leader providing cutting-edge solutions. **BY BIANCA HERRON**

For nearly 30 years, JTH Lighting Alliance has been a leading national independent manufacturer's representative servicing clients – including architects, engineers, lighting and interior designers, lighting showrooms, electrical distributors and contractors – in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Founder John Hartley started the agency in 1988 and sold it to Rob Beaman

and Jon Kirkhoff last April. Hartley now serves as a principal and JTH's new owners aim to continue to build on his foundation, emphasizing Hartley's core value of integrity.

As an independent agency in an industry influenced by larger corporate companies, JTH prides itself on providing its clients the opportunity to choose the best products from an array of leading manufacturers without restrictions. "In

all of our markets we have sought to have positive relationships with everyone we can," Principal Rob Beaman says. "We don't work with every single distributor in every market, but we work with most of them."

He explains that these positive relationships have been a key to the company's success since its founding nearly 30 years ago.

"We look to our wholesale partner to

JTH LIGHTING ALLIANCE

maintain and have a strong relationship with the construction community,” Beaman stresses. “Our job is to represent best-in-class independent manufacturers.”

In return, Beaman notes its wholesale partners bring a “strong relationship” with the construction community, specifically electrical contractors. “Together we work both sides of the project, and as long as we’re communicating effectively and exchanging data in a timely manner projects are completed efficiently,” he explains.

SEEING GROWTH

Although Beaman and Kirkhoff acquired JTH Lighting Alliance last spring, the two have worked for the company for nearly five years. In that time the duo has brought more manufacturers in who are cost effective, which allows the Apple Valley, Minn.-based company to compete more effectively. “A lot of our efforts in the last five years have been to represent more aggressively priced products,” Beaman says.

JTH Lighting Alliance has also doubled the size of its company in not only volume, but also employees. Today, it has 42 employees – up from 17 a couple years ago – and four offices located in Iowa (two), Minnesota and South Dakota. JTH Lighting Alliance will add another Iowa location soon and is looking to expand further.

“We’ve never really expanded our geographical territory, but our growth came through marketshare,” Principal Jon Kirkhoff says. “Rob has done a great job of growing our Iowa marketshare. We have grown in North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin as well because we’ve added more people there. This has allowed us to take marketshare from our competitors.”

Kirkhoff also attributes the company’s significant growth to JTH Lighting Alliance’s unique independent manufacturer’s representative model. “We aren’t affiliated with a conglomerate and this is resonating strongly with our clients,” he says. “They are starting to see that as conglomerates continue to grow and strengthen themselves it may not serve them as well today as it did 10 years ago.

“This is because they are now – independent manufacturers – being pushed to the side,” he continues. “With JTH, they don’t have to buy in to work with us. We will devote the appropriate amount of time as well. Our key manufacturers get equal time-share and mind-share from us.”

“We’ve built such a great portfolio that we can really provide solutions to all aspects of business from specification and high-end products to cost-effective items,” Beaman adds.

Additionally, Kirkhoff notes that JTH Lighting Alliance not only needs to be nimble and agile, but also have a proactive mindset instead of a reactive one.

“We have to communicate with our design and distribution

partners and their contractor partners to understand their needs, be it for next week or next year,” he says.

Ultimately, Beaman and Kirkhoff note that they are most proud of seamlessly transitioning into the leadership of JTH Lighting Alliance, but more importantly, maintaining the reputation and integrity John Hartley started. “We intend to keep the business as one of the most highly respected agencies,” Kirkhoff says. “We will remain ethical and do the right thing for our clients.”

Additionally, the two see JTH Lighting Alliance being an industry leader and providing the most cutting-edge solutions. “I look forward to having our agency be an influencer in this business model,” Beaman says, noting the company values service above sales.

“The sales will come as long as you’re serving your customer,” he says. “We’ve been able to more than double the amount of business and grow our headcount. We’re also proud of our culture. It’s important that the people who work for JTH have the ability to be professionally and personally fulfilled. Whether they want to continue doing the same job or grow and challenge themselves in different ways, being in a position to help nurture and encourage, that is a neat thing.” □



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