

Building Innovative Partnerships

Unique product lines and progressive marketing strategies set Gas Innovations/WWS apart.

Less than a decade ago, industry veterans Jason Willingham and Ashley Madray joined forces to create a new wholesale supply company for the gases and welding industry. Called Gas Innovations, the company name was chosen to reflect the partners' goal of bringing innovative ideas, technologies and processes to the marketplace. "We wanted to be progressive and different," says Madray, Gas Innovations vice president, "and we are succeeding—through the product lines we offer and in the high-end customer service we provide."

ON THE MOVE

In its short history, Gas Innovations, located in La Porte, Texas, has experienced sizable growth. One of the company's first expansions came with the addition of the Kobelco line of flux-cored and solid welding wire under a new business, WWS. Next, Willingham and Madray coaxed Bryan Willingham, Jason's father, out of retirement to head another company, Southern Propane, which supplies propane throughout southeast Texas. Gas Innovations/WWS then formed HCL Innovations to supply anhydrous hydrogen chloride to the industrial gas market. The company

also entered into a partnership with Diversified CPC International to produce and market electronic-grade propylene for the electronics industry.

"In each instance there was a need within the industry, and by getting involved, we were able to help our distribution network fill that need," company President Jason Willingham says. "For example, with the HCL Innovations partnership, a major producer was going to stop rail shipments of hydrogen chloride. So we found a source, convinced the source of the need, signed an agreement and formed HCL Innovations. We should begin shipping anhydrous hydrogen chloride in our tube trailers by the end of 2009." Willingham further notes that this partnership moves the company away from the role of an HCL repackaging and service company and more in line with that of a manufacturer bringing a product to the market.

Similarly, the partnership with Diversified CPC International is related to a product that Gas Innovations/WWS already supplies—polymer grade propylene gas for the cutting, heating and brazing of steel. "We chose to supply electronic-grade propylene because we knew it would be a major development

for our distributors and distribution network, including the majors, who are developing relationships with customers in high-tech firms that need pure gases for their processes, such as the semiconductor industry," Madray says.

Today, Gas Innovations/WWS is a dependable independent wholesale supply partner and source for flux-cored & solid welding wire; propylene; high purity hydrocarbons; propylene cutting, heating and brazing equipment; cylinder UT recertification; cylinder packs; diving gas packs; resale cylinders; tube trailers; ISO containers and more. "We believe that growing our distribution network's bottom line through our products and services is the best way to grow our own," Willingham says.

UNIQUE PRODUCT LINES

Beyond the core business of providing its distribution network with hydrocarbon gases, equipment and technical expertise, Gas Innovations/WWS offers quality innovative gas packaging and efficient asset utilization programs to the gas industry. Madray notes that the company strives to stand out from its competitors by the uniqueness of the majority of its product lines. "For example, we test our cylinders ultrasonically, not hydrostatically," he says. "We sell non-traditional specialty gases: Our gases are high quality hydrocarbons and chemical gases like hydrogen chloride. We have chosen not to compete in the atmospheric gases market because that area is already well represented by our customers."

"Our field reps wake up every morning with two major responsi-



An HCL Innovations 21,000-lb.-capacity anhydrous HCL tube trailer.

Photo courtesy of Diversified CPC



A series of propylene fractionator columns during final assembly at Diversified CPC, Channahon, IL.

bilities—to sell Kobelco welding wires and to sell our propylene as an alternative fuel gas to cut, heat or braze steel,” says Willingham. “Behind that, we follow with our more specialty-gas-related and non-traditional products, packages and services. They’re niche.”

Gas Innovations/WWS also prides itself on its responsiveness to customers, regardless of the request. “If someone from our distribution network, including one of the majors, approaches us and asks us to do something that is not exactly in the realm of our current product line, we still try and help them any way we can,” Willingham says. “A good example of that is liquefied or compressed natural gas. We do LNG as well as CNG work on a boutique basis, but we would not categorize ourselves

as a major natural gas producer. But if somebody is planning to launch a satellite or a small rocket for testing, or they are testing locomotive engines or something along those lines, we are an excellent resource to consult with, as well as a reliable supplier for products, that relate to these special-needs projects.”

MARKETING STRATEGIES

Gas Innovations/WWS also has an in-house marketing team that is available to assist distributors who are exploring new markets to grow their businesses. Recently, for example, when one of the company’s Midwest customers mentioned that he was looking for new opportunities to sell gases for laser applications, Madray put the marketing team to work on the project—even

though Gas Innovations/WWS doesn’t supply that line of gases. “This is a very good customer and we wanted to help him, so we ran a marketing survey of companies within his distribution range that met his criteria,” Madray says. “We were able to identify between 60 and 70 potential accounts for him to call on. That’s the type of thing we do to truly partner with our network.”

“We’ve done this with a number of specialty gases we don’t sell, where we’ve executed market surveys for distributors and outputted a list of potential customers for them—and these distributors actually went out and added a lot of money to their bottom lines,” Willingham adds. “We want our customers to look to us to be true partners in their success—not only with the high-end products we supply, but also with the tools and resources we have available to help their businesses grow.”

According to Madray and Willingham, the root of what separates Gas Innovations/WWS from its competitors is the combination of the company’s innovative product lines backed by progressive marketing strategies. “Put simply, when distributors come to us, what they will find is a means to grow their businesses,” Willingham explains. “It is not a traditional vendor/distributor relationship.”

“Basically, we have five major product lines which have afforded us the opportunity to become true experts in those lines,” adds Madray. “Distributors can lean on us with what we bring to the table as well as the best service to support it afterward. Distributors bring thousands of product lines to the marketplace. It can’t help but be a relief for salespeople, owners and operators to know that they don’t have to be experts in everything—or at least not when it comes to our products.”

Whether it is product information, service, marketing strategies or any number of other business needs, Gas Innovations/WWS builds unique supplier/distributor relationships designed to help both businesses thrive. 