



Partners in Success: Midland Metal provides more than just product solutions

Midland Metal has made it their business to help their customers succeed, adapting to meet the demands of its customers and offer solutions beyond just supplying a product. To complement its robust product offering, it offers a full suite of marketing tools – from custom catalogs to a fully functional e-commerce site – to help its customers grow their business and identify sales opportunities. Hose + Coupling World had the pleasure of speaking to Brett Powell, National Sales Manager, and Vince Hodes, President & CEO, about where the company is going, what the future holds and how it intends to help its customers to thrive in the face of disruption and a changing landscape.

By Jody Hewitt, Editor



From left to right: Vince Hodes, President & CEO, and Brett Powell, National Sales Manager – Midland Metal Mfg.

Midland Metal is a nationwide supplier of fittings, valves, clamps and accessories. While its bread and butter has always been brass fittings, they also offer a wide selection of ball valves, steel nipples and malleable fittings, red brass nipples and bronze pipe fittings, stainless steel fittings and nipples, hose clamps, hose accessories, hydraulic adapters and pneumatic fittings and accessories, as well as plastic fittings and tubing.

Distributors can choose from over 13,000 products from the catalog alone, and what they can't find, they can have made. As an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) wholesale partner, Midland Metal can help its customers work with OEMs to specify or match a product they are finding difficult to obtain. According to Brett Powell, National Sales Manager, with enough volume the company can help develop or manufacture any product its customers need to their exact specifications and store it for them in one of the company's warehouses.

"We want to be number one in service," says Powell. "Our customers needed products faster, so we offered a 24-hour shipping policy. They wanted to be able to order in smaller quantities – they don't want to sit on a lot of inventory – so we offered drop-shipping and private labelling. They needed to be able to offer solutions to their OEM customers, so we offered them custom solutions. We put a lot of work into creating a great customer experience."

The company spends much of its time and efforts focusing on ways to help their customers succeed in the marketplace today – and tomorrow. "We have big, audacious goals," says Vince Hodes, CEO of Midland Metal Mfg. "I am very proud of Midland's history, but I am more interested in its future, which we are building by providing solutions for our customers today, and constantly working on new ones to offer in the future."

Family values

A family-owned business since 1980, Midland Metal operates in much the same way that a healthy family would. Trust, collaboration and mutual respect are the backbone of its company philosophy, and how it treats its employees and customers. In 2001, Hodes created a company-wide bonus plan, a profit-sharing system which awards phantom shares to employees based on how the company is doing. Performance metrics are posted daily; if the company does well, the bonus pool grows.

"It was one of the best decisions we ever made," says Hodes. "I had just bought the industrial side of the company a year before from my brother, Nick. I was the ripe old age of 29 and had grown up in the family business, so I knew what it was like to be an employee. I also knew the cost of finding good people, training them on our systems and the pain it causes when they leave. In my experience, turnover happens when only the short-term needs of the employee are being met, so we decided to do something that would make every employee feel, and be motivated, like an owner."



Brass fittings are the company's "bread & butter", but it offers a wide selection of stainless, plastic, hydraulic and pneumatic fittings.



Product Manager Patrick Valdivia works with distributors to find solutions for their OEM customers.

Incentivized, Hodes found that employees were more likely to speak up, contribute ideas and look for opportunities to lower costs and save money. "The bonus plan created an atmosphere of trust and teamwork, and now all of our employees are invested in the success of the company. Leadership through service culture, teamwork mentality, our profit-sharing bonus plan and data-driven decision-making are fundamental elements of our business model and have allowed us to continually build new tools and systems for our customers to use to grow their own businesses."

Too convenient not to buy from

Having worked for Midland Metal for over 20 years, Brett Powell, National Sales Manager, has seen many changes in the industry. "We've moved toward a more integrated supply chain," he explains. "When I first started, you could be 'the hose guy' or the 'cutting tool integrations guy'. Today, end users want to consolidate their orders, so distributors need to offer a much broader selection of products or risk losing business to the big competitors."

This has put increasing pressure on distributors to do more with less – to be product experts, to offer easier and faster service, to deliver product at lightning-fast speed – all while juggling the day-to-day and trying to grow their business.

"We listened to their frustrations and we adapted," says Powell. "We changed to be easier to work with,



CUSTOM CATALOG



Print custom catalogs with your brand, your pricing and your contact information.

BRASS CATALOG



An unbranded sales and marketing tool. Use it to provide customers with product specifications, pictures and pricing.

E-COMMERCE SOLUTION



Fully functional branded e-commerce site, pre-loaded with every item in the Midland Metal catalog.

BIN LABELS



Create and print personalized bin labels with your brand to affix to bin boxes. Helps with reorders and managing your warehouse.

MIDLAND APP



Use the app to scan bin labels on location to quickly reorder, check stock and pricing. Save orders to submit later. Available for iOS and Android.

PRIVATE LABEL



Private label shipments with your logo on boxes, packing slips and product labels.

Midland Metal has developed a suite of marketing tools to help distributors to expand their product offering and grow their business.

and we realized that we could help our customers in more ways than just shipping a product to their door. This is when we came up with the idea to offer online ordering, giving our customers easy access to more products and marketing tools."

Today, customers can login to their *Account Manager* on the website to place orders, check inventory, review current and past orders, create and print bin labels and manage their accounts. Since its inception, the company's online sales account for a whopping 75% – up from 10% in its first year.

"*Account Manager* is a testament to the collaboration between this company and our customers over the years, making us easier to work with and building upon our company motto, 'too convenient not to buy from,'" says Hodes. "We have recently adopted another motto – 'your brand is our brand' – which speaks to our commitment to growing together with our customers."



Distributors can download and print customized line cards, pictorial index, catalogs and more to assist in their marketing efforts.

Your brand is our brand

"We consider ourselves silent partners, working in the background to promote our customers' brands," says Powell. "We don't put our name on anything because we want our customers to sell our products as their own. With our new suite of marketing tools, we offer our customers all the resources they need for marketing, order gathering and shipping."

These resources include printed custom catalogs, online marketing tools, private-label shipping, and even a fully-functional branded e-commerce site, pre-loaded with every item in the Midland Metal catalog.

"We carry a lot of different products," explains Powell, "and we know that it will help our customers to increase their sales if they offer more options. Many of our customers specialize in one product group – hoses, fasteners, etc. – and it is very difficult to become an expert in all the different groups that we offer. It can be overwhelming, so we came up with tools to make the transition easier, which allows our customers to sell our products with confidence."

It began as a generic catalog; then, with advancements in digital printing, the company was able to offer custom catalogs, giving distributors the freedom to design the front and back cover themselves. As the world moved away from print catalogues, Midland Metal recognized the change in how its customers, and their customers, wanted to consume information, and created *BrassCatalog.com* – a free, online, unbranded website that distributors can use to provide their customers with specifications, pictures and pricing, with no reference to Midland.

Using their existing login, customers can also regis-



The company offers a wide selection of hose and other accessories.

ter for their own e-commerce site, upload their logo, company & contact information and choose price points. They can take advantage of the free customized sales and marketing tools to promote their business, and when they receive an order, they can choose to fulfill the order from their own inventory, or drop-ship the order, using private-label shipping, from one of Midland's warehouses. Midland shipped over 14,000 private labeled orders for their customers last year.

"It's a quick and easy way to offer everything that we can," says Powell. "We want to build through our distribution network, and to sell more, distributors need the right tools. Not every distributor has the resources to develop these quickly, so we provide them because we know that when they succeed, we succeed."

Analytics

Another benefit of registering for an e-commerce site with Midland is access to analytics and reporting metrics. Through the site, distributors can track who is ordering what, which products are selling well, which ones are not as popular and other pertinent information that can help them to better understand customer buying behaviour.

"We use analytics to help our customers to identify opportunities to sell more," says Powell, "and we give them access to that information so that they can make informed decisions that will help their business. It's a game-changer, because we can't just hop into our customers' warehouses to see how we can help them improve, but the online platform really provides us with the opportunity to do that in a digital space."

Midland Metal proudly considers itself a data-driven company, citing measuring and reporting as the key ingredients in a successful business model.

We measure everything," laughs Hodes. "We assign numbers and measurements to every aspect of the business, so we can analyze them and find out what



A company-wide profit-sharing system means all Midland employees think and act like owners and are invested in its success.

our strong points are and what we need to work on. We created reporting, so we could make informed decisions that allow us to provide the best product value to our customers. We use decision-making tools in our day-to-day operations, and we provide these tools to our inside and outside sales people; our sales team uses these tools to help our customers recognize which products other customers in their industry are selling. We are just getting started in this endeavor, but we are already seeing the value in these resources."

An eye to the future

CEO Vince Hodes told *Hose + Coupling World* that he is more interested in the future than in the past. We asked what that might look like.

"In addition to our marketing suite, there are some new things on the horizon," responds Hodes. "Midland's new Virtual Sales Call is in development and expected to be available in Account Manager by the fall. Supply chain services are in the works for a new cross-docking program to help lower costs and manage inventory and deliveries. We are constantly adding new products and customers are providing new opportunities on non-catalog products. We also have expansion plans in the works we are excited to announce soon, that will build on our product capabilities and market penetration."

He adds: "These are exciting times at Midland Metal. Change is in the air and we see that as an opportunity. We want to be known for being a great partner and a resource for our wholesale and distributor customers. We want to be known as the place to work, the vendor to partner with, and the company you can set up a deal with to get all your fittings and valves from."

"I believe our customers enjoy doing business with us, are able to depend on us and that we are fun and easy to do business with. Each day we are striving for greatness in methodical ways to ensure our customer's success."

