

Personal Communication Still Key to Customer Service in Today's Marketplace

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In today's tough economic times, there is a lot of discussion about how to communicate in a more cost-effective and efficient manner. And while social media and the myriad of electronic tools we now have at our disposal certainly have their place in marketing and sales efforts, as well as customer relations, there is still a need for personal communication.

I had a chance to reflect on this recently as LORD Corporation – a supplier of thermal management materials, adhesives, coatings and encapsulants to the electronics, LED and solar industries – was selected by one of our customers for an award for outstanding customer service. The customer, an industry leader in the manufacture of modular power components and power systems, sells its power converters and systems to the communications, data processing, industrial control, test equipment, medical and defense electronics markets.

Since the early 1990s, LORD Corporation has been a major supplier to this company. Initially using a LORD thermally conductive epoxy potting system for its DC-DC converters, this company went on to apply several LORD formulations to their production process. LORD has developed thermally conductive silicone encapsulants, and thermally conductive low-modulus silicone materials that allowed this company and others to advance their production methods for surface-mount devices.

While I reflect on the myriad of products we've developed in response to customer needs, the one common theme is not simply our commitment to good account management or quality control, but our dedication to communicating across all spectrums. This is something that is often lost in today's marketplace, especially

related to the focus on customer segmentation. Although the process of segmenting customers based on their buying habits makes sense and is something we certainly practice, what is often lost in the process is communication and respect. For example, too often our prescribed action plan for a customer, based on their level of activity, is to leave the communication channels to customer service reps or for distributors to handle it. Unfortunately, what is lost in this approach is the proactive communication that ensures that challenges don't become problems, as well as the identification of future needs.

For example, for one major power supply manufacturer, it was a recent in-person conversation that helped us identify their need and then develop one of our most recent formulations for them - a low-viscosity, thermally conductive material. Key to success was listening to the customer and working with their design teams to develop a solution that not only addresses their current but also their future needs. The result was development of a new material that allows the manufacturer to produce converters with high-power performance in a smaller package, while maintaining its high-volume production. However, though this product has been a success, our work isn't done. Regular technology roadmap exchanges ensure that when a customer hits a particular milestone in its development cycle, that we are in-line with a solution that allows that next generation of products to be launched. Further, the key to success is building a long-term relationship so you can find solutions that result in a lower cost of ownership for customers, not simply making a product cheaper.

In summary, while many companies are forced because of the economy to cut corners related to customer service, I challenge our industry to remember that such shortcuts end up costing more in the end. It's being prepared to work through the holidays when customers have unexpected needs, pro-actively looking for lower cost raw materials to provide cost savings to the customer, and above all, listening to the needs of our clients that will improve the bottom-line for everyone. And, it's key to remember that, as a material supplier, we would be lost without our customers.

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