

South Norwalk company named one of top minority-owned businesses in Connecticut

Superlative customer service 'label' sticks at Penmar Industries

When a cancer research laboratory discovered that the saline solution they used to wash their test tubes was eating through the adhesive and ink on the labels attached to them, they turned to Penmar Industries Inc.

Not only did Penmar provide them a custom-made label to meet their needs, but this South Norwalk manufacturer of pressure-sensitive tape and labels took the extra step: It designed a software program to generate the sequential bar code numbering on the labels as well.

"Our charge is in providing solutions to our customers," says company President Tony Soegaard. His family purchased the 42-year-old company in 1992, making it one of a growing number of minority-owned businesses in Connecticut. "If someone gives us a challenge or presents us with a problem they're having, we come up with a solution that's cost effective and economically feasible for them."

That's the kind of customer service that wins — and keeps — big clients such as United Technologies and AT&T, as well as smaller clients. It has helped this small, 16-employee company steadily grow in client base, product offerings and revenues. In the past five years it has enjoyed up to 7% annual growth and revenues ranging from \$3 million to \$5 million.

Soegaard attributes much of that success to the company's customer service.

"We really shine there," he says, pointing out that the company has implemented plant procedures and partnerships with suppliers that strengthen its ability to go the extra mile. For instance, after a year of preparation, Penmar became ISO 9000 certified last July. That assures

"We partner a lot with our suppliers to either find or alter an existing product that a customer might need, or work with them to develop a new one," says Soegaard. The company has two people on staff whose job is to consult with clients. It also has a design team that develops custom-designed tape, label and packaging components. "Most of our products are custom made for specific customer needs."

Sales representatives are faithful in following up to make sure the product is being used correctly and that there's still a need for it, says Soegaard, noting that the company is known for quick turnaround and follow-on support. "Just because you sell a client one time, it doesn't mean they'll buy forever. We make sure that the product is still useful or whether changes need to be made."

Its commitment to quality and customer service has not gone unnoticed. Penmar Industries most recently was hailed as one of the top 50 diversity-owned businesses in

Connecticut by DiversityBusiness.com. The recognition positions it as one of the nation's top multicultural revenue earners. It also received the 2006 Silver and Bronze awards at the 31st International Gallery of Superb Printing and has been twice recognized by the Connecticut Minority Supplier Development Council as the Supplier of the Year, in 1997 and 2004.



Tony Soegaard, president of Penmar Industries at the State Capital for CBLA's Manufacturing & Technology Day

more quality control and enables Penmar to easily track down any problems in production that may have caused customer complaints.

Penmar has also instituted a Circle of Quality, whereby each employee is responsible to review a seven-step process to assure quality control from order to shipment. The company also works closely with suppliers and calls them in on client consultations when necessary.