



Wisconsin Lift Truck

Jerry Weidmann says steady focus on its mission is helping this material handling solutions provider gear up for a national fleet service business.

Mission Driven



Wisconsin Lift Truck (WLT) was founded 47 years ago as a parts distribution company but rapidly developed into a material handling solutions provider. Today, it is poised to take its expertise to the national level. Jerry Weidmann, president, said the recession has slowed down the process by a few months, but it hasn't shaken his team's focus on the company mission.

"Ultimately, everything we do comes back to enabling our customers' success through value-added solutions supported by superior service and quality products professionally delivered with a sense of urgency," he said, reciting the mission that is proudly displayed in every department of the company. "We know that if we remain true to that goal, everything else will follow."

WLT is based in Brookfield, Wis. and has five regional offices throughout the state. Its 120 field technicians support products in the material handling, construction, and power generation industries. Most recently, Weidmann has led the company deeper into the service sector; he founded WLT's fleet management services business and envisions providing Web-based efficiency software and support to customers across the US.

"The material handling industry in Wisconsin is mature, and we are a big player in it. That means our growth in the state is somewhat subject to the overall state domestic product," explained Weidmann, adding that in the short term, the company will expand its presence in the construction industry with new product lines. "Our strategy to grow outside of the state will come from monetizing our biggest asset: our

knowledge and experience in material handling solutions and equipment."

New products and services

The fleet management service WLT offers is one of the most comprehensive in the country. The company's management experts aim to understand the client's business inside and out to make sure WLT provides exactly the solution the client needs, be it lift trucks or conveyors. They also conduct safety and efficiency assessments as needed.

The company will soon begin selling new products and services that are Web-based, including fleet tracking software. WLT's program collects information from mounted asset-management equipment monitors in the field that track how efficiently the equipment is being used. Another new product line is self-guided vehicles, which Weidmann said are designed for companies with large facilities that are looking to reduce manpower costs. WLT developed a customized online catalog for equipment to streamline the purchasing process for larger manufacturing and distribution companies.

Weidmann said the key is staying flexible; not every solution or package of products will work for every client. "Our customers want a solution that will allow them to get their jobs done faster and better, and it doesn't help them to offer expensive, unwieldy tools."

These products and services will still require a team of technicians to install and maintain monitoring equipment, for example, or to conduct fleet management assessments.

Weidmann's solution involves strengthening WLT's network of equipment dealers across the country.

When the economy recovers, WLT will start offering these new products and services. But in this recession, manufacturing is off 30%, meaning WLT customers need fewer rentals, less service, etc. The company will focus on bringing internal systems up to speed to handle the new offerings for the rest of 2009 and, once the market turns around, launch the new products to the company's biggest Wisconsin clients before a formal, national launch at the end of 2010.

Internal preparations

To prepare for this growth, Weidmann and his team have begun implementing new CRM and business systems. He said the company needs new tools to stay on top of a wider diversity of products and services and to prepare for meeting the needs of customers thousands of miles away.

Two best practices in service quality Weidmann cited are response time and first-time-fix ratio. For the former, four hours is considered the highest quality, but WLT's previous tracking system only measured in days. The latter refers to how often a service technician, when he or she arrives at the customer's site, is able to fix the issue on the spot rather than return to a field office to get the right tools or ask someone for help. WLT's goal is to reach 75% of field visits result in first-time fixes.

Weidmann said it will take a coordinated effort to reach those goals. "In our annual employee satisfaction surveys, the biggest issue that's come up is internal communication between the executive teams and the regional staffs," he said. "To accomplish our long-term goals, we are increasing our communication at all levels to make sure that our team is focused on the mission."

Over the last few months, the company has instituted a number of new measures to address that issue, and Weidmann said things are already improving. For example, value statements were developed for each department to outline what each department contributes to the WLT mission. Quarterly meetings are being held between every manager and employee to discuss how the recession is affecting business, the status of ongoing projects, and the general direction of the company.

WLT also invests a great deal in ongoing education for its employees in areas such as lean manufacturing through the Milwaukee School of Engineering's Business Excellence Consortium.



Weidmann said as the company's clients have adopted these practices, their material handling strategies have shifted. The language of the business has changed, he said, and he wants everyone at WLT to be aware of the latest techniques.

"All of these strategies come back to giving our clients the highest quality, value-added solutions that will bring them success," said Weidmann. "We do whatever it takes for our clients, and that's what has brought us success." ■

—Meghan Flynn

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