

Michigan Equipment Maker Eyes New Markets

Holland – Ensign Equipment, Inc., a bulk material handling equipment manufacturer in Holland, has been in business for 20 years, and over that time, they've focused on "commodity" products primarily within the plastics industry. While the company plans to further develop in plastics and move the industry forward, a new vice president of operations and a fresh strategic direction for 2011 has them developing new products, customized equipment and automated systems while they build an even greater presence in other industries.

Wayne Linderman came on board in July of 2010 as Ensign's new vice president of operations, leaving owner David Pulver with more freedom to develop product applications. Having formerly held management positions with Prince Machine, Royal Plastics and Genzink Steel, Linderman is excited about what the future holds for Ensign as the company continues to diversify its offerings.

"Like many businesses, Ensign had a tough year in 2009. But we bounced back in 2010, and this coming year is looking very strong," said Linderman. "Over the last 20 years, Ensign has mostly stayed in the commodity market, but they developed an extremely loyal customer base there. We're going to grow in the plastics industry and expand what we offer there, but 2011 will see us expanding into the food market as well as we begin to focus on tier 2 and 3 food manufacturers. Just recently we wrapped up our first new bulk bag filler product and we've

recently added a silo line. At the same time, we're continuing to expand our work on custom equipment, and the next step will be a push into systems integration."

A quick look at Ensign's website (www.ensigneq.com) shows the wide range of individual components the company offers: hoppers, conveyers, storage bins, unloaders, mixers, fillers, etc. along with a variety of certified parts for repairs and upgrades. But Linderman says that the days of selling a single piece of equipment may be over.

"We want to bring automation, efficiency and whole systems solutions for engineering," he said. "We find that quite often, individual equipment components aren't working together. When we handle all of these individual elements as a greater connected system - as a whole - efficiency can increase dramatically. Energy is one of the higher costs on manufacturers and everyone is looking to manage the power in their plants. Not only can we help with that, but we continue to look at our own controls and motors insuring that we have the most efficient equipment out there."

Ensign's movement towards offering the food industry their equipment and efficient solutions is a natural one, but that doesn't mean they don't have their work cut out for them. Food manufacturing comes bundled with a wealth of FDA requirements and many elements including motors and electrical panels need to be washdown-friendly. This isn't to mention the added challenge of generating presence – the

equivalent doing some old fashioned marketing and selling by "knocking on doors." However, Linderman is undaunted.

"The great thing about Ensign Equipment is that we're bringing a new level of customer service that I think is missing out there. We want to offer the very best in service all the way through the process – from the whole assembly and customer acceptance process to service after the sale. We want to be there for a customer years in the future. For example, we recently had a company call about two machines dating back to the early 1990s. We were able to pull the file, pick out the parts (which we had in stock) and were able to get them out in short order. That's the kind of customer service we want to provide: quick, reliable and efficient."

As manufacturers move into the future during these lean times, their focus is going to continue to sharpen on eliminating waste, fully utilizing available resources, and integrating systems together. Ensign Equipment hopes to use the success they've built over the last 20 years to continue to grow and add value and efficiency to their client's production lines.

"We're not just selling a piece of equipment," said Linderman. "We're making our clients faster and better than their competition with our products and keeping them that way with our exemplary service. What companies are going to need moving forward are solutions, and that's what we aim to provide."