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PROFILE

Online Engineering Corp.
www.onlineengineeringcorp.com
Headquarters Cincinnati
Service Water and wastewater OEM
Richard A. Hittinger, president
"It shows that a small company can still be competitive in a world market."

Online Engineering Corp. offers services such as sawing, welding, plasma cutting and pipe threading to OEMs.

DAVID VS. GOLIATHS

Online Engineering Corp. says its flexibility and efficiency are the result of being a smaller firm in the wastewater treatment equipment sector.

By Chris Petersen

Online Engineering Corp. is not one of the larger competitors in the wastewater equipment industry, but President Richard Hittinger says this actually works to the company's advantage. He says being a smaller player in the market makes it easier for the company to respond to its customers' requests, and performing the majority of its own manufacturing gives it greater speed and flexibility. What's more, he adds, recent contracts with customers overseas shows that a smaller company can be a player on the global stage.

The company is an OEM of wastewater

treatment equipment, including aeration systems, valves, piping, gearboxes, airlift pumps and diffusers. The company manufactures much of its products in its facility in Cincinnati, and can provide services such as sawing, welding, plasma cutting and pipe threading to customers, as well.

SMALLER IS BETTER

Hittinger says competition in the marketplace is "fierce," and Online Engineering Corp. fights to keep itself noticed in the presence of much larger competitors. "We're one of the smaller players in our market, competing with the three big ones as we consider them," he says. These major

competitors are Sanitaire (ITT), Envirex (US Filter), and EDI. Even though these companies have Online Engineering beat in terms of size, Hittinger says his company can react faster to customers' requests. This is in stark contrast to larger operations that have difficulty dealing with sudden changes in orders due to their longer chain of command and more-involved processes. "[They] almost have to turn over their whole apple cart in order to change direction," Hittinger maintains, "and we have the ability to turn on a dime."

Hittinger says the company also holds an advantage in its approach to training. As a smaller company, Online Engineering can give its employees on-the-job training that is tailored specifically for them.

"Each person is educated differently, so you need to adapt your training to the individual," Hittinger says.

THINKING EFFICIENTLY

Being a smaller operation means that Online Engineering Corp. has to make the most of its resources. Hittinger says

the company has improved its facilities to become more efficient and accommodate the increased capacity a new lathe and mill have brought to the company.

"We reorganized our shop using lean manufacturing processes," he says. The new initiative, along with the new capabilities, has allowed [us] to manufacture many of its own products in-house.

STAYING COMPETITIVE

One of the challenges posed by Online Engineering's smaller size is how to keep visible and competitive among the larger players, Hittinger says. In particular, he says, larger companies often have representatives already established with customers. This means that Online Engineering has to work harder to establish good relationships with customers.

Hittinger says this often comes down to simply being more driven to succeed. He says Online Engineering keeps up with the larger companies by "constantly keeping in touch with our reps, keeping them motivated."

MAKING PROGRESS

The future looks good for Online Engineering, according to Hittinger. The company is working to develop new products through its joint venture with AerResearch LLC. The partnership has yielded a new, patented retrievable aeration system.

According to Hittinger, the new system will allow wastewater system operators to change diffusers without draining the lagoon by pulling them up from the lagoon from a boat.

Hittinger also stated he is in the final stages of establishing another joint venture which will broaden the products offered by Online even more.

The company also made two international sales in 2006, one to a customer in United Arab Emirates and another in Romania.

Hittinger says the company's Web site generated those contacts, and it bodes well for the company's future.

"It shows that a small [firm] can still be competitive in a world market," he says. *usb*



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