



Proactive representation

Having enjoyed consistent growth since its formation in the 1960s, **GSA** proudly represents world-class manufacturers in the electrical and electronics industries, from obstruction lights on high structures such as light houses, to the IoT (Internet of Things)

A diverse organization that is unlike almost any other operating today, GSA Companies (GSA) is a manufacturers' representative firm calling on OEMs and other major end users located from Maine to Virginia. Founded back in 1964, GSA represents world-class manufacturers working with engineers to design-in and sell electrical and electronic components.

During the course of its nearly six decades in operation, GSA has serviced a wide variety of industries, including – but by no means limited to – the aerospace and defense, critical power, data/communications, Internet of Things,

renewable energy, transportation, and utilities sectors. "One of the major advantages for GSA – from a business perspective – is that the diverse range of markets that we operate in means that one single area or field has never controlled our destiny," explains its CEO, John Beaver. "For instance, as well as being heavily into selling large transformers into the utilities industry, we are similarly strong in selling things like connectors into the military and defense sector; Bluetooth and Wi-Fi modules to the electronics world, and wiring cable to a number of different markets."

At the heart of selling the above-mentioned items across GSA's various locations are 23

outside and six inside sales professionals, four of whom are electrical engineers. Among a myriad of services these men and women provide are things like application engineering, purchasing focus, distribution training, and various mailing, marketing and participation skills. "The average tenure of our people comes in at well over ten years, so we are talking about highly knowledgeable, well-trained individuals who specialize in the products that they represent," John adds.

In recent times, renewable energy and the Internet of Things have been major sources of growth for GSA. "The solar and wind energy markets – backed by tax incentives from the



US Government – have been real driving forces for us, with sales to those reaching approximately \$35 million, which represents almost 30 per cent of our overall current revenue," John details. "The incredible rise of the Internet of Things industry – especially in the last year or so – and our engagement with several manufacturers, who are demanding IoT

solutions and bringing their collective challenges to their innovative suppliers who are enabling the advances, has also resulted in fantastic levels of business. This has been felt in our work representing the likes of Murata Manufacturing, which is a market leader in wireless modules with a comprehensive portfolio including Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, LoRA and Cellular modules."

LUTZE

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For GSA, its continued growth and rate of success has come at an unprecedented time in its history, what with the Covid-19 pandemic bringing about immense change to the way that the world does business. John goes on to highlight how GSA has had to adapt and evolve to the situation playing out around it. "Prior to Covid-19, the typical manufacturer representative conducted his or her business very much on a face-to-face basis, often visiting customers on a daily basis," he says. "Obviously, in a Covid-19 world that is no longer the case, and we needed to adapt quickly in the early phases of the pandemic in order to stay relevant. So, face-to-face meetings became telephone conversations, and while many of our seasoned sales people were able to adopt this process quickly, other needed time to adjust and we were able to give them that time as we were fortunate to be able to retain our entire team throughout 2020, due in part to the US Government Paycheck Protection Plan. "In addition, we also began embracing some more 'outside of the box' ideas, such as hosting Zoom or Teams video calls to display different product lines or inviting our principals

GSA's CEO, John Beaver



to join us in doing webinars which we can get customers to view at their convenience. We have even gone so far as to order in lunch for participants – via the likes of Door Dash – so we are taking what is now a virtual experience and making it feel just that little bit more like normal times. These will all be tools that we are likely to continue in some way going forward as we do believe that a number of manufacturers will reduce the number of trips their people make in the future now that they know that business can be conducted virtually." GSA has also built its reputation on the back of its exceptional lead times, something that was put to the test during 2020 especially. Fortunately, its proactive approach has helped its customers to navigate the various challenges. A good example would be its efforts on behalf of LUTZE, a manufacturer of control components for automation. "The biggest challenge LUTZE has experienced in transportation during the outbreak

of Covid-19 is overcoming the daily and unpredictable changes in the services and availability of transportation resources," says LUTZE's Logistics and Production Manager Mike Smith. "Efficient freight companies excel in service when things are predictable, however, with the pandemic spreading and affecting as many people as it has, the resources within these supply chains have been constantly changing. LUTZE has maintained continuous direct contact with our transportation service providers to ensure the most up-to-date information regarding transportation delays and restrictions. In doing so, LUTZE has been able to reschedule, reroute and inform our customers of the current transportation limitations involving their orders. Due to the efforts of LUTZE and our excellent manufacturers' representative partners such as GSA, we have been able to maintain an efficient distribution supply chain to our customers with a minimal impact on deliveries."

With the immense amount of change that the manufacturing world is seeing at present, it does present the question of why manufacturers' representatives are still a necessity today. This is a quandary that John has an interesting take on. "One reason is the relationships that we have cultivated within the industry," he states, "and these become all the more important in a such a huge territory as the US where you have multiple markets and a population of over 330 million. Here, manufacturers rely greatly on their representatives carrying synergistic lines to what they do, while having representatives that work with multiple product lines means that customers/end users can enjoy having a single person to source their needs, instead of having to call around to multiple sales people in different parts of the country. So, from those points of view, the manufacturers' representative model continues to prove very efficient."

So, can we expect the role of the manufacturers' representative to continue to evolve in the future? John certainly believes so. "The role of the representative will undoubtedly continue to change. I foresee that they will likely take on more of the marketing work for the manufacturers, as well as handling greater amounts of customer service. They will certainly have to be more technically minded than representatives of the past, which is one of the reasons why we have brought in more engineers as staff in recent years."

As far as GSA itself is concerned, it expects to grow during the course of 2021 and beyond, particularly as key markets such as renewable energy, the Internet of Things and defense – as well as the US economy as a whole – continues to rebound or expand. "We have designs on purchasing more representative firms in the coming year, on bringing more people into the organization, and increasing our footprint on the East Coast," John says, before revealing the longer-term goal he has for GSA. "It has always been my dream since I started the business when I was 26 years old to cover Maine to Florida. Today, we are about half way to achieving that aim, and I remain committed to making it a reality." 🌟

GSA
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representatives
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