

PEOPLE

A DAY IN THE LIFE BY A. LEE CHICHESTER

Tech-savvy distribution

LiveWire Supply Founder Adam Messner makes vision of a wired distribution industry reality.

After working more than two years in outside sales for an electrical distributor, Adam Messner saw the growing gap between tech-savvy customers and the conventional supply chain.

"If I got a request that I couldn't say yes to immediately, I would tell the customer that I would get back to him or her within the hour," he said. "But by then it was too late; the customer would say, 'I went online and found a source; it's on its way.'"

Messner recognized that more and more business is being conducted electronically, and more companies are building effective, useful Web sites. "I saw no reason that the same could not be done in this industry," he said.

At 27, Messner started LiveWire Supply.com, an entirely Web-based electrical distribution business. That was just over a year ago. His goal is to become the premiere online supplier in the business.

With eight employees, a warehouse, outsourced delivery by global carriers including UPS and DHL, no physical street presence, and an ever-widening vendor network, LiveWire offers a user-friendly Web site and toll-free phone access.

"People find us online when their supply chain has failed," he said. "So almost every call I get is an emergency—there is an immediate need for a part or a delivery or access to a manufacturer to solve a problem. While my day generally starts around 5:30 a.m. PST, I am ready to be contacted at any time, from any place. I have one shot to get it right—I have to answer that e-mail or that phone call."

Messner estimates that 10% of his business comes from one-time users, such as homeowners. His major clients



Newly engaged Adam Messner made it perfectly clear to his fiancée that she isn't the only one in his life—his "baby" is his Web-based electrical distribution business, LiveWire Supply.

are industrial—such as Lockheed-Martin and Coca-Cola—and he has significant government contracts, including the U.S. Coast Guard.

Still, around 40% of LiveWire's sales come from traditional electrical distributors. "If distributors have customers asking for something they don't carry, they'll call me to drop-ship that item to them," he noted.

Knowing that he would start small and grow, Messner invested in a solid and expandable infrastructure. "I envision several locations and many more employees," he said. "Essential to what we're doing is reliable infrastructure like phones and a Web server; but even more important are the Web-based tools that empower users to easily find items."

LiveWire's Web site offers these tools to end-users while saving on overhead. "With our search tool, if a customer is looking for a specific circuit breaker, he or she has to know some minimum information, like the

manufacturer, the amperage, the voltage, and the number of poles. The search tool will offer, say, two examples that meet those definitions, and will show photographs of the two options. The customer chooses the one he or she needs.

"Traditionally, it can take 15 minutes to quiz the customer on what he or she needs, or to go into the warehouse and match the part. We place the power into the hands of the customer. If an end-user wants to cut to the chase, he or she can phone us and we'll do the work and have the order processed and ready for pickup by our shipping partners in minutes."

Like most of his generation, Messner is constantly connected. But downtime is important, too. Every day Messner has his surf board and wet suit handy. "I watch the wave reports, and if I get the work done, I grab my board and surf." ■■■

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