

www.jandksales.com / Headquarters: Manchester, N.H. / Employees: 25 / Specialty: Heating systems and plumbing products
/ Jeff Young, director of engineered services and sales: "Contractors look to us as a resource."

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Standing Apart

J&K Sales' focus on unique products and offerings gives it an edge in the heating products market. **BY JIM HARRIS**



Director of Engineered Services and Sales Jeff Young says J&K Sales' staff is well-versed in the products the company sells.

lines do not have a lot of competition to them because they have a number of unique features and benefits. We don't want to just function on price, we want something that sets us apart."

The company took a big leap into the "blue ocean" in 2006, when it first entered the hydronic heating market. Prior to that, J&K Sales offered mainly behind-the-wall plumbing products as well as tools and specialty plastics. The company that year first began carrying hydronic boiler and heating products after attending a trade show in Germany, where it learned about the technology. At the time, hydronic heating in Europe was considered to be technological 10 years ahead of the U.S. market.

"We didn't have a lot of experience in heating at the time, so we decided to invest our revenue into hiring highly competent and technical former contractors into our salesforce," Young says. "Our technical folks are truly the tip of the spear for us, as they're well-versed in the products we sell."

CHANGING THE DYNAMIC

Founded in 1981, J&K Sales serves six New England states and upstate New York. The company's facility in Manchester includes a 28,000-square-foot warehouse and more than 4,500 square feet of office space. The warehouse gives the company the ability to introduce new products to the marketplace or redistribute large products on behalf of its manufacturing customers.

The Blue Ocean Strategy, first described in an October 2004 issue of *Harvard Business Review* and later expanded upon in a book of the same name, compares markets to two kinds of "oceans." "Red oceans" are all of the markets now in existence, which are overcrowded with similar and commodity products, leaving companies to compete mainly based on price.

Conversely, the "blue ocean" is a wide-open market space with new and unique products and services untouched by competition. "We truly buy into this

idea," says Jeff Young, director of engineered services and sales for Manchester, N.H.-based manufacturer's representative J&K Sales Associates. "When we take on a product line, we are looking for something that separates us from the rest. We're looking for something technologically advanced and above and beyond what's currently on the market.

"We have added new lines to our agency that fall within the blue ocean mentality and that separate us from the competition, whether it's a new water heater line or a PVF plumbing line," he adds. "Our

In addition to warehousing space, J&K Sales' facility also includes a 35-person capacity classroom and training lab. The J&K Sales Training Center, as the lab and classroom are known, hosts contractors, engineers and others who learn about the products the company represents. Training includes classroom sessions as well as "live-fire" demonstrations using equipment mounted on the walls of the lab area.

"This allows us to train with contractors who will be installing this equipment and gives them the chance to troubleshoot and show what they've learned," Young says. "Investing in the training center has allowed us to separate ourselves from competitors, as most of the other representatives in the market do not have their own training center."

J&K Sales also operates a 17-foot trailer with wall-hung tankless boilers, water heaters and products that it can haul to

construction or client sites. Products in the trailer can be connected to electricity and water on site prior to demonstrations.

"Our training mission is that we will offer more and more frequent training opportunities than anyone else in the market," Young says. "In addition, anyone who

the dynamic from trying to sell them something to becoming educators. Contractors look to us as a resource."

The company has been able to invest in its operations by managing its expenses. A technology platform developed in-house by the company allows it to make much of

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is installing one of our lines will have a licensed support person on hand at system start up.

"The feedback we've received from contractors is tremendous – they appreciate the support we provide and our confidence in our abilities," he adds. "We've changed

its operation efficient and paperless.

"We are constantly looking at our business and finding ways in which we can improve," Young says. "All of the investments we make go into the technical side of the business, because we see that as the future and where we will survive." 