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Unico: A Manufacturer for the People



by Valerie Stakes, managing editor

When it comes to product and program development, Unico Inc. says it doesn't make a move without its dealers.

The St. Louis-based manufacturer is best known for its flexible mini-duct heating and cooling system. The system has helped many a contractor improve comfort in older homes without ductwork, as well as solve challenging applications in new custom homes. Unico also manufactures chillers and spot cooling products.

"Since the company's beginning in 1985, we've relied heavily on our advisory board, which is comprised of nearly 50 contractors," says Tom Taylor, Unico's marketing manager. "We take our advisors' suggestions very seriously because they are the ones who use the equipment."

In fact, before the company releases any new products or product upgrades, they're tested in the field by the advisory board.

"We have a meeting with our board at least once per year. Advisors meet

with all of our departments, including marketing and engineering. Here, they have the opportunity to discuss equipment challenges and their best solutions," adds Taylor. "This is key to Unico's approach to doing business."

A Commitment to Education

This past year, Unico has stepped up its training efforts to ensure that its dealers are thoroughly adept at properly installing the systems.

For example, the company will unveil a certified installer program this fall, and has hired a national trainer. The company is also constructing a St. Louis-based training facility, which should be complete sometime in 2005.

In the meantime, Unico has paired up with Vatterott College, a private career college in St. Louis, to provide contractors, sales representatives, distributors, and Vatterott students with product training.

Attendees have course options such as principals of operation, Unico system installation, ordering, UniChiller instal-

lation and maintenance, and zoning with Unico products. They will also receive a tour of the manufacturing facility as part of their training.

"At Unico, we feel education is key in the installation of any HVAC product," says Steve Intagliata, director of training. "Offering this training is just another tool to ensure that those who install the Unico System have all the necessary technical data and training."

Contractor Resources

In order to better serve its dealers, Unico is revamping its website (www.unicosystem.com).

"We're creating contractor-specific areas for product communication, technical tools, and sales and marketing materials specifically for certified installers of the Unico System family of products," says Taylor. "These upgrades should be fully implemented by the end of the year." For end users researching Unico equipment, the current site also contains a good deal of consumer-targeted information.

Finally, Unico offers a targeted direct mail program for its dealers. "We have truly narrowed our marketing efforts on our key end users," says Taylor. "With direct mail, a 1% response rate is considered quite successful. Our program typically generates a 2 to 5% return."

Meet Them in St. Louis

A long-time participant and supporter of HVAC Comfortech, Unico, Inc. will have the opportunity to display its wares in its home town of St. Louis, MO at this year's conference September 15-18. The company will also hold its advisory board meeting at this time.

In addition to obtaining more information on the Unico system and the new UniSpot spot cooling equipment at the show, HVAC Comfortech attendees can inquire about a tour of the factory by calling 800/527-0896. ■