

Phoenix Tapes USA

The tape business does big business by focusing on small dealers

When the International Tape Company of Holland decided to expand its market reach in the United States, Jim Merritt came on board to advance that goal. He did so by focusing on helping small dealers compete with the big guys. After 18 months, however, the Dutch company decided to sell off the U.S. division.

But Merritt felt like the work he had performed was leading to something great. "I thought we'd formulated the best products and had a moral obligation to help the dealers compete with big boxes and large chains," Merritt said. "We're kind of on a mission to sell to and bolster those companies." So after he was laid off on a Friday, he returned on Monday as owner and president of the company Phoenix Tapes USA.

Since that day in December 2010, business has been booming, Merritt said. He credits part of this success to focusing on a core group of products. "We had more than 500 products and whittled that



down to masking tape," Merritt said.

"We want to be the best at that and then expand." The company first featured nine tape products but is now up to 15, including this year's addition of duct tape. "We will continue to expand, but only after we're satisfied with what we have now," Merritt said.

Another key to Phoenix Tapes USA's success is a strong commitment to its dealers: small, independent paint and hardware stores. The company made this change when Merritt took the helm. "We're the only company dedicated to this client market," Merritt said. "Because we don't have stock-holders, we are in the fortunate position to do business in a market we believe in."

At least once a month, Merritt meets with his dealers to get their input and feedback. He said he meets with any dealer who wants to meet with him. "This has really paid big dividends for us," Merritt said.

To strengthen these relationships, the company sales representatives also meet with dealers frequently. "The key to our business is helping the paint stores make more money with our tapes," Merritt said. "That's the one metric we use for success."

For Lynda Hermosa, store manager for East Bay Paint Center in Albany, Calif., making more money with



Phoenix Tapes comes down to one key factor: “We give a great product to our contractors at a great price point,” she said. “It saves money for them.” In fact, most of her customers were going with a tape competitor because, for the most part, that’s all that was available.

Her boss decided to seek out new products and began researching other tapes on the market. He checked out web forums where contractors were discussing the products they used, and many were talking about Phoenix Tapes, Hermosa said. Her boss called the company, Phoenix promptly sent boxes of samples, and the customers loved them. “We received excellent feedback,” Hermosa said. Since that time – approximately three years ago – Hermosa has seen 85 percent of her customers switch to Phoenix Tapes.

Another factor Hermosa appreciates about Phoenix Tapes is accessibility to Merritt. Many companies are hard to reach, especially when you have a problem, she said. “Jim is always there and gets back to you,” Hermosa added.

Hermosa was so pleased with Phoenix Tapes that she

suggested them to noted industry buying group Allpro, she said. As a result, in an effort to reach more independent retailers, Phoenix Tapes joined Allpro in 2012. They joined a second buying group, Mid-America Decorating Stores, in 2013.

Merritt sees these developments as just one more step in helping Phoenix Tapes continue its mission to help the little guys. “We’ve chosen our dance partner, and we hope that market segment supports us the way we support them,” Merritt said. “And we’ve seen that. Once our products go in, dealers expand shelf space for them.”

Expect more of the same from Phoenix Tapes in the future, Merritt said. He continues to be on the lookout for new, innovative products to help expand his clients’ bottom line. He also wants to keep doing the best job servicing his customers.

“We will not change our philosophy of dealing with the little guys,” Merritt said. And why should he? Dealing with the little guys is proving to be big business for Phoenix Tapes. ●

~ Karon Warren



“We’ve chosen our dance partner, and we hope that market segment supports us the way we support them.”

~ Jim Merritt,
Owner and President,
Phoenix Tapes USA