

An interview with Bob Kleason, Vice President of Unified Screening and Crushing

Focus On Aggregates



Endless companies have claimed that they put the customer first. Unified® Screening & Crushing is one that really does. Although the original company...Minnesota Fence Works, was founded more than 140 years ago, Unified, in its present capacity has more than 66 years of history, sticking to the principle of giving customers what they want and more.

What began as a family owned wooden fencing business in St. Paul, Minnesota is now an industry-leading group of screening and sizing media manufacturers with expertise focused on the sand, gravel, aggregate and mining industries. Unified's expertise covers all wire, polyurethane, rubber and punch-plate screening media and includes crusher wear parts deployed across North America.

In this edition, FocusOn Mining, Aggregates and Construction, Publisher Editor in Chief Rick Vandekieft poses industry and company related questions to Bob Kleason, Vice President of Unified Screening and Crushing

Bob Kleason has been working with the Unified Screening & Crushing group for 37 years. What started as a summer job, during his University of Saint Thomas years, has transformed into a fulfilling career with Unified® Screening & Crushing. Stating out as a woven wire cloth weaver, Bob worked his way through all production operations and staff positions before becoming Plant Manager.

During the 1990's he worked closely with sales in developing a network of distribution with regional locations throughout the United States. This was the beginnings of the "Unified Group". In 2003, Bob was appointed Director of Sales & Marketing for Twin City Wire, California Wire and all regional locations. In 2005, as Unified® Screening & Crushing became a reality, CEO/President Tom Lentsch appointed Bob to Vice President of the Northern operations.

Today, Mr. Kleason is Senior Vice President and on the Board of Directors for all operations - 16 geographic locations that provide product and throughput solutions for crushing, screening and mining operations throughout North America. Bob has a BBA from the University of St. Thomas in ST. Paul, MN.

One of Bob's greatest joys... working with customers in providing unique solutions for their throughput and daily challenges. Bob lives with his wife and 4 children in Eagan, MN.

1. The 66 year history of Unified Screening and Crushing is very interesting originally the Minnesota Fence and Iron Works. The first of the Lentsch family joined the company more than 66 years ago. Within the last 6+ decades and having a member of the Lentsch family at the helm, is there a next in line to take control once Tom (Lentsch) retires?
A. Today, Unified has a Board of Directors of five members, elected annually, along with outside consultants. Now, we also have a much larger talent pool. The company is no longer run by just family members and there are qualified outside candidates.
2. There have been a number of companies in screen manufacturing as well as crusher replacements parts manufacturing that have come and gone while other seem to focus only on regional markets. How was Unified able to become a leader on a national basis?
A. Remaining small can be an advantage for cost considerations, but in order to grow Unified needed to expand our product offerings and customer benefits, as well as our presence in the marketplace.
3. Explain the structure of Unified and the other companies involved in the manufacturing sold under the Unified name.
A. We are mainly a regional network with strategic distribution agreements and a closely woven supervision of maintaining quality, service and trust.
4. It was quite a shock to several industries when the oil prices plummeted to the \$50 mark, what was the significance to Unified?
A. Our sales are tied in with construction, road-building, infrastructure and mining. As oil prices have dropped it hasn't been a large factor for us, except for the Frac Sand Mining business. The positive, with having our 50 Field Reps on the road is lower gas costs in our operating expenses. In addition, our customers lower fuel costs may free up resources for other products including those we provide.
5. What is the one component of the country's economic engine that has the greatest impact on Unified's business? Where do you see this going in the next 3 years?
A. We need a long-term program of proper government funding for roads and infrastructure. And, we need to earmark this investment and use it for funding intended projects.
6. In late May (2015), Metso's CEO announced that they were no longer focusing on the mining industry because there was not money to be made. Matti Kahkonen said he's resigned to just breaking even in the market for manufacturing mining equipment. In a down market that hits an equipment manufacturer hard, replacement parts manufactures often gain business as the equipment owners choose to repair and upgrade rather than invest in new equipment. Is there a silver lining in the downturn of the mining industry for Unified?
A. It is difficult to find silver linings in any economic downturn. They all effect the GDP, which is not good for anyone. Typically, this is a temporary situation. Within our business of screening media and crusher replacement parts, the crushed stone, sand and gravel production numbers are key indicators for our business model.
7. When we ask manufacturers what is the number one request from the end user, we hear a variety of responses: Lower maintenance costs, higher productivity, immediate availability of parts and service. Without saying "all of the above" what do customers most commonly ask of Unified?
A. All of those requests are vital to a good operation, but customers expect more. We find that we have to work closely with our customers to help them with new solutions.
8. Looking forward, what are the major trends in quarry operations that will effect Unified's product development?
A. We have to closely keep examining sustainability issues. Examples; noise abatement, dust and use of

water considerations can all have an impact on our customer's solutions. This means looking at screening media and all crusher wear part solutions that best fit our customer needs.

9. Focus On is contacted regularly by "off shore" manufacturers requesting we do feature stories or advertorials in Focus On Mining, Aggregates and Road Construction. Unless the company can provide verifiable details on the availability of after the sale parts and service in North America and Europe along with customer testimonials, we deny their requests. Do you see any of these new "off shore" manufacturers becoming a real factor in crusher replacement parts and screening systems business?
- A. Only if they can integrate jobs and produce positive results for customers. They have to be present at a customer's plant location to provide real solutions. Customer relationships and trust play a vital role in our industry. At Unified we need to know the real (on-site) problem, only then can we develop a workable and long standing solution which produces customer trust that we strive to accomplish.**
10. When one of the major manufacturers launch a new crusher fitted with all new cones or blow bars, how long will it take Unified to make aftermarket parts available?
- A. We have thousands of parts available. If it's a custom or new part, we can draw and make them available within 3 months.**
11. A few years ago, there was the hostile take over attempt by Martin Marietta and Vulcan Materials. There are rumours that another attempt will occur in the next 18 months. If it does occur and is successful, is this good or bad for the industry?
- A. We work with both companies, so it really doesn't matter to us. Our goal is to partner with all of our customers and deliver the best product and service on a timely basis.**
12. What is the number one reason why young people would choose Unified as the best place to work?
- A. We still have a small company feel or personality where hard work is appreciated and rewarded. Unified assures them growth and ongoing monetary rewards as long as they are willing to commit to our corporate culture.**
13. Your responsibilities at Unified must demand a fair amount of travel - what percentage of your time is away from home?
- A. I go where and when I am needed. This takes about 25% of my time in my job. However, we have a staff of service representatives across the US that are on the road, daily.**
14. Traveling executives all have their favorite customer visit story, what is yours?
- A. Early in my career I was on a sales call in California. My boss requested that I ask for an order while visiting the next customer. I did! The customer replied, I'll give you two order..."Get out of that chair and get out of my office" was what I heard, as I held my position. After what seemed like an eternity, the customer began to laugh... "I get rid of more salesmen that way - especially, guys like you". To this day, he is still one of Unified's respected customers.**
15. If I was talking to some of those who have worked with you without you in the room and I asked what it was like to work with Unified, what would they say?
- A. "Unified® continues to strive for continued improvement and customer trust by doing the right things for customers. They are the solution company and prove it through their high performance - helping us to increase throughput, productivity and our bottom line."**
16. When the workday ends for you, what makes it a good day?
- A. The feeling of accomplishment ...to be able to further help (our) people that I work with every day...But, most importantly, to be able to help the people I work for - our customers, by tailoring viable solutions for their unique operations.**