



Buying Time

Since purchasing TimeMaster eight years ago, Tim Abner has kept business booming.

by Don Sadler

Starting or buying any business comes with enough pressure, but following a legend only makes things tougher.

In 2001, Tim Abner and his wife, Susan, purchased TimeMaster Inc. from world-renowned time lock and safe and vault expert Dr. Dan Graffeo, who founded the company in 1987. "I'm certainly not Dan Graffeo, and I don't pretend to be," Abner says. "He's 'the man' as far as that part of the industry goes."

What Abner does bring to the table, however, is knowledge of the

engineering and development side of time locks, safes and vaults. "I cut my teeth on the engineering side of this industry, so I've been able to grow in areas Dan didn't want to go with the business." Graffeo is now manufacturing time locks and vault locks under his new company, TMI Corp., Abner notes.

A Steady Growth Curve

TimeMaster has been on a steady growth curve since Abner bought the business eight years ago and moved it from Topeka, Kan., to Lexington, Ky. The company represents most of the top lock and tool manufacturers and has become a top distributor for KABA-MAS, LaGard, S&G, TMI, Bullseye SD Locks, Videx (CyberLocks) and Strong Arm. In addition, Abner recently added



◀ **Top Left.** TimeMaster represents most of the top lock and tool manufacturers in the industry.

◀ **Top Center.** With a background in engineering, Tim Abner brings to the table knowledge of the development side of time locks, safes and vaults.

✓ **Bottom.** Since Abner moved TimeMaster to Lexington, Ky., eight years ago, he's focused on the safe and vault industry.



the complete CompX line of under-counter products, and KABA-Mauer in Germany named TimeMaster its North American representative for its European key locks and electronic locks in 2008.

“Over the past eight years in Lexington, TimeMaster has focused on the safe and vault industry and the specific needs of the professional safe technician,” Abner says. “This focus has allowed us to grow comfortably. We do not want to be a company that tries to be everything to everybody.”

Abner started in the safe and vault technology industry in 1987 as a test engineering manager with Sargent & Greenleaf in Nicholasville, Ky. “At S&G, I worked with several very knowledgeable people and witnessed firsthand the introduction of electronic safe locks in our industry,” he says. “They gave me an opportunity to work in and learn our industry from a unique perspective, which has given me a great appreciation of our industry’s history and importance in today’s world.”

His experiences at S&G led to Abner’s two patents: one for the initial 6120 series lock and another with Brian Costley for a mechanical manipulation resistant lock.

Customer Service

TimeMaster focuses specifically on the unique security hardware needs of banks and government GSA lock products, as well

“No matter what the economy does, I believe that a professional technician’s success in our industry is directly related to the amount of experience and education he or she obtains.”

as the locksmiths who service commercial safes and security hardware.

According to Abner, the key to being a good supplier is adding value to your relationships with your customers. “It’s not always about price, but rather about value and letting our customers know we’re here for them. Safe technicians can get anything that’s in our warehouse from other suppliers, so why do they come to us? I believe it’s because of the value and intangibles we offer to help them be successful.

“Many times, technicians have called us with questions or for help while standing in front of a safe, and we encourage this,” he continues. “It allows them to be a hero to their customers.”

Through the Supply Chain

Providing this kind of value and support is what Abner believes will help see TimeMaster through the difficult economic environment we now face. “The independent technicians and service companies are facing the economic demands on the front lines with their customers, who are the ones feeling the economic pinch first, and then it moves through the supply chain,” he explains. “Technicians have begun to see the changes in the way they need to do business, and this will challenge us all to determine how we need to change to meet these demands.”

For example, the latest wave of banking restructuring and consolidations presents

opportunities for the safe and vault industry, Abner says. "Banks like things to be consistent, especially when it comes to security. Retrofits and upgrades to new electronic technologies present opportunities for independent technicians in the banking industry. There's money to be made, but you can't sit back and wait for the phone to ring. The technicians doing well today are out there hustling."

In spite of the economy, Abner is bullish on his industry. "The future for the safe and vault industry is a good one. In difficult economic times, every industry puts a renewed emphasis on security."

In particular, he has noticed a growing demand for physical security in both commercial and residential applications. "This will open a lot of new opportunities for our customers that will likely be in nontraditional areas."

Experience and Education

Perhaps the most important factor in a technician's success, though, is ongoing education, Abner says. "As we're out in the industry at trade shows and local meetings, I see a growing focus on education, not only with tools and techniques and how to use them but also with the ever-changing new products coming into our industry. No matter what the economy does, I believe that a professional technician's success in our industry is directly related to the amount of experience and education he or she obtains.

"It's important to stay current on the new products in the market and challenge yourself to find customers who have a need for these products," he continues. "By understanding your end users' applications, you can identify a product that will meet

their security needs and create new business opportunities for your company."

This year, Abner is stepping down from the SAVTA board of directors after a six-year term in order to "allow some new folks to give their input." He adds, "I would like to thank every member of SAVTA and the talented guys I have served with on the board. I believe our association is in good and capable hands, and we are proud to be a part of it." ☺



Don Sadler is a freelance writer and editor based in Atlanta. He has written on all aspects of business and management, including access control and security, since he began his journalism career in 1985.

A SECURE FUTURE? It's A Lock.

For 24 years the ALOA Scholarship Foundation (ASF) has been dedicated to one mission: securing the future of the locksmith/security industry. By providing scholarships and financial assistance to current and aspiring locksmiths/security technicians, ASF works to ensure our industry is powered by motivated, educated trade professionals.

GIVE: ASF is funded through convention fundraisers, charity golf tournaments, individual and business donations and new this year, an online auction, which will feature collectibles, products and equipment. Auction donations, as well as financial contributions are now being accepted.

RECEIVE: Over the years, ASF has awarded over 300 scholarships to industry professionals seeking to advance their careers through continuing education opportunities. Information and applications are available at www.securityscholarship.org.

Submit completed forms to scholarship@aloa.org.

