

SPRING • SUMMER 2015

MADE TO MEASURE

THE UNIFORM MAGAZINE



**NEW YORK YANKEES STEAK
CUSTOM UNIFORMS ARE A HIT!**

inside
.....

Change vs. Tradition in Law Enforcement

Retailers Selling on a Smaller Scale

Product Innovations
& Manufacturer Profiles

+ Buyers' Guide

Leading Suppliers for Public Safety,
Hospitality, Medical & Industrial



selling smart on smaller scales

T&T UNIFORMS



T&T Uniforms Proves Service, Not Size, Matters Most

By Jackie Rosselli



Zach Freise knows customers have lots of choices these days: they can take their business to a mom-and-pop, or shop online with a larger national retailer, so distinguishing T&T Uniforms is a top priority.

“Price is always going to be a determining factor, and in most cases we can compete on price, so when all things are equal, customer service becomes the differentiator,” says Freise. “We focus on providing the best customer service possible. Anyone can sell a uniform, but providing the level of service that these counties

and municipalities expect is hard work and requires a hands-on approach.”

It’s a simple mantra, one that has been repeated by uniform retailers for decades: Bigger isn’t better. Better is better.

In the short time that Freise and his partners, Wayne Brown and Brandon Lockridge, have owned T&T – they bought the store in 2013 – business has increased by 50 percent. Their bread-and-butter accounts are in the public safety market, a competitive niche with high expectations where relationships



When it comes to packaging a customer's order, T&T doesn't just place the uniforms all in one box. They bag items for each individual officer, labeling each package with the officer's name, sorting alphabetically so that distribution is a breeze.

and service go hand in hand. Freise and his partners understand this, and it is one of the reasons they've been successful. Eliminating obstacles and going that extra mile is what T&T Uniforms is all about – literally. A customer can't make it to the store to be measured? No problem – T&T will bring the service to them.

When a local sheriff didn't want his deputies traveling to the store for measurements, Lockridge travelled to the department and completed a six month size run for the entire staff. He'll do it again in the spring to accommodate any changes. "They're in the public safety business, not the uniform business," Freise explains. "Our cars work, and we'll use them to go to the customer when they need us."

And when it comes to packaging a customer's order, T&T doesn't just place the uniforms all in one box. They bag items for each individual officer, labeling each package with the officer's name, sorting alphabetically so that distribution is a breeze.

This attention to detail is helping them win large and small accounts throughout Georgia. Freise says their current niche is just below the

selling smart on smaller scales

T&T UNIFORMS

biggest municipalities, but no matter the size, all are valued. “We do really like the big ones though,” he quips.

T&T was able to land one of those big ones recently, when the department in question cancelled after one year its three-year contract with an out-of-area national retailer. “The department had taken the low bid but just wasn’t getting the service it needed,” Freise explained. “When you try to service from a distance, you lose something.”

You also lose tax dollars, a fact Freise likes to use when wooing departments. It’s a message that seems to resonate with some. “They not

only get service when they buy from us, but they keep revenue – and business – in Georgia,” he adds.

Freise, Brown and Lockridge bought the business from Jerry Turkett and Tommy Turpin, who opened the store back in 1983. Their backgrounds are more diverse than what is expected from someone in the industry. Both Brown and Lockridge hail from the decorated apparel business; Freise is a CPA with experience in importing. Each considers himself an entrepreneur.

“Yeah, we’re all over the place in terms of background,” Freise admits, “but we believe it’s the type of know-how that will take this business to the next level.”

Another thing the three new owners have in common is a commitment to public safety in the state of Georgia. All three grew up in metro Atlanta and their families have remained there. “The public safety personnel that we have the opportunity to serve are more than just customers,” said Freise. “They are our friends and the people who make the communities they serve, the communities in which our families and our employees live, better places to live. It is much more than just a business to us. It is a unique opportunity to serve those who serve, which has become our company motto.”

Leveling the Playing Field Through the Website

If service is the established hallmark of their success so far, they’re hoping that technology will take them to that next level. T&T Uniforms launched its first website last year, using it as a complement to its brick-and-mortar business. They expect the website to further grow their public safety business by reaching customers not close to the physical store.

And they’re also looking to tap new markets online. “Right now we don’t do much outside public safety, but we know there are opportunities in hospitality and the industrial sector, and we’re looking to leverage our website to pursue these possibilities,” says Freise. The fact that many of T&T’s suppliers already service these markets is an added plus.

Designed by UniformMarket, the site boasts private stores where customers can shop for items specific to their department at



In effect, its website is the great equalizer, leveling the playing field for T&T Uniforms so it can grow and compete against bigger players with deep pockets. “It legitimized us,” adds Freise.

prices authorized by the contract. The Douglas County Sheriff's Department has already signed on and is considered a test case. Private stores will be built for other departments once the kinks are worked out.

Freise explains the private store shopping experience. "Each department of Douglas County sees only items approved for it, so when the jail staff signs on, they see their items; the patrol staff sees only theirs, and so on."

But what's really got them excited over at the sheriff's office is the ability to store, record and review purchasing history online. "They can look at total expenditures or see what each individual is spending monthly," says Freise.

Aside from the private store feature, the website shows the product lines of each T&T Uniforms' supplier, meaning customers can shop for items at various price points, a plus for cost-conscious public safety departments. "The website makes the customer aware of the lower-price options and shows them they can cut costs and still look good when they buy from us," notes Freise. T&T sets its pricing at MAPP or MSRP, making them competitively priced online. "When an officer needs an item, one of the first things he does is to Google it; we're trying to make sure he can't find it cheaper anywhere else."

In effect, its website is the great equalizer, leveling the playing field for T&T Uniforms so it can grow and compete against bigger players with deep pockets. "It legitimized us," adds Freise.

Home of the Braves

T&T Uniforms has a staff of 13, including three seamstresses who do alterations and other embellishments. An outside sales rep covers Southern Georgia. Lockridge runs the store, and Freise is in charge of sales and customer relations. Its 5,000 square feet is divided up equally between storefront and office space and has the typical public safety store feel, although they're trying to give customers more of a retail experience these days according to Freise. There's coffee and other refreshments on arrival, complete with oversized chairs and television that encourage customers to linger and browse.

A full-service retailer, T&T sells everything from uniforms to footwear to tactical gear. About the only thing they won't sell is guns. "We're just not interested in that," says Freise.

Their best-sellers afford comfort: uniforms with wicking properties, anti-microbial features and expandable waistbands are all the rage. Officers can't seem to get enough pockets these days either, according to Freise.

In terms of suppliers, 5.11 is always in demand, but so too are products from Flying Cross, Elbeco and Southeastern Shirt Company, to name a few. Figuring out ways to become more important to suppliers is a top goal, one that will result in better pricing and, they believe, additional customers. "We value our supplier relationships, and are only interested in representing brands that can deliver product in a timeframe that our customers require," says Freise.

An uptick in opportunities should also come from construction projects underway in the area, including a new home for the Atlanta Braves. Slated to open in 2017, the stadium is located just four miles from T&T Uniforms. New businesses mean jobs, including an anticipated 200 new hires for the local police force.

For the short term, T&T Uniforms plans to leverage its website to reach new markets and better serve existing customers. Long term, Freise anticipates that the company will add additional stores throughout the state. Relationship-building plays a prominent role in their strategy as well. The store has strong ties to the community, sponsoring myriad events to show its support. And it regularly participates in trade shows like the one sponsored by the Georgia Sheriff's Association to generate new leads and strengthen ties.

"I get to see all my current customers and talk with prospects," says Freise. "Nothing beats one-on-one face time for developing relationships in this business." **M**

T&T Uniforms
2279 South Cobb Dr.
Smyrna, GA 30080
770-433-3211
www.ttuniforms.com