



COMMERCIAL BUSINESS

Advance Tire Corners Market with Own Private Brand

Mike Manges

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“We wanted to be in control of our own destiny,” says Jerry Bruner, owner of Millstone, N.J.-based Advance Tire Inc. (pictured, middle of back row.)

Jerry Bruner had been selling other companies’ industrial and OTR tires for years —

investing a significant amount of money promoting their brands.

As Bruner's business, Millstone, N.J.-based Advance Tire Inc., continued to expand its customer base, the second-generation tire dealer eventually asked, "Why am I building a following for someone else?"

That question sparked a process that eventually led to the creation of Advance Tire's own private industrial tire brand, Contender — a development that has been a key driver of the dealership's growth.

"We wanted to be in control of our own destiny," says Bruner. "And we wanted the customer to come to us to buy the product."

He says finding reliable manufacturers that could build a private label line to spec was relatively easy thanks to already-established connections with overseas factories.

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"I had built solid relationships with companies that were building these types of tires."

Today, three factories — located in China, Taiwan and Sri Lanka — manufacture Contender brand tires.

Having a high-quality private label helps Advance Tire differentiate itself from its competitors, while navigating the unpredictable ebb and flow of supply.

Bruner says this was particularly beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended logistics for many dealers.

“We had several factories to pull from” when COVID-19 struck and overseas shipping was thrown into turmoil. “We weren’t just another fish in the sea.”

Adapting to customers

“When people think of industrial tires, a lot of times they think of forklift tires,” says Bruner.

While Advance Tire sells plenty of tires for forklift applications, OTR tires for recycling applications are the company’s bread-and-butter. That includes solid aperture tires.

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“We hooked up with an off-shore aperture tire manufacturer around 20 years ago,” says Bruner. “We saw a need for their product” and added the manufacturer’s line to Advance Tire’s portfolio.

“Around that time, we also were doing a lot of urethane tire fill work. That’s how we originally grew our business. My father was filling tires before it became popular.”

As time went on, “we talked an initial group of dealers into letting us do (tire filling) for them,” says Bruner.

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“We started covering New Jersey and grew that to where we were going into Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Md.

“We piggybacked our aperture tire business onto that same model,” he adds. “As aperture tires became more accepted and customers began asking for them, we had more dealers reaching out to us and placing orders.”

Advance Tire already had developed a lucrative sideline selling aperture tires directly to steel mills, demolition contractors, waste transfer stations and other end users.

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“They knew they could reach out to us and we’d have the product in stock. And some of these companies don’t have OTR presses, which are massive and expensive. You (also) need to have the right tooling,” as well as skilled operators.

“Anytime you’re changing a solid OTR tire, it’s a fairly in-depth process,” says Bruner. “Large solids have to be put together with a press, which sometimes cannot be done on-site.

“It’s very inconvenient for a customer to have to shut down his machine for two or three days, especially when you’re talking about a front-end loader he might have spent a half-million dollars on.”

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Bruner developed a wheel exchange program for Advance Tire’s solid OTR tires customers, which proved to be another game-changing service for the dealership.

“Having rims that we can put together and then putting tires on those rims and shipping them to customers is huge. That allows us to send those tires anywhere.

“I don’t have to block a guy’s machine up, bring his rims all the way back from Michigan, press them in my facility and then ship them back,” says Bruner.

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The wheel exchange program has turned out to be “a much more economical,



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to a much bigger market.”

Never one to rest on his laurels, Bruner says that anticipating — and responding to — the ever-changing needs of customers will continue to contribute to Advance Tire’s ongoing success. “We’ll continue to adapt.”

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About the Author

Mike Manges | Editor

Mike Manges is *Modern Tire Dealer's* editor. A 25-year tire industry veteran, he is a three-time International Automotive Media Association award winner and holds a Gold Award from the Association of Automotive Publication Editors. Mike has traveled the world in pursuit of stories that will help independent tire dealers move their businesses forward. Before rejoining *MTD* in September 2019, he held corporate communications positions at two Fortune 500 companies and served as *MTD's* senior editor from 2000 to 2010.

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