

MANUFACTURER COMPUTERIZES HVAC SYSTEMS

Air Conditioning Units Now Put on LAN Platforms

BY MYRON LOVE

The way goods and services are delivered has changed radically," says Roger Kane, Trane Canada's Winnipeg District Manager, "and the HVAC industry is no exception."

Trane has had to restructure itself to meet the long-term needs of its customers. Historically, suppliers to the HVAC market have gone to market using an indirect supply model. The product was purchased and installed by a variety of contractors based on a design typically done by a consultant. This method still accounts for approximately 75% of the business, and it works well for the most part, but it does have some weaknesses. Often the lines of responsibility are blurred.

Many customers want to have a greater role in planning the system they get, so there are a wide variety of non-traditional models. The most obvious are the "big box" retail outlets. Regardless of location, the stores must conform to a specific standard and look, including the ability to monitor the space conditions at all times. These businesses require a reliable and immediate response when their HVAC systems need servicing. Trane and its outlets have been restructured to meet these demands.

From a product standpoint, advances in micro-processor controls would make monitoring 24/7 possible. Trane recognized this in the early 90's and ever since has been an industry leader. Everything from a building's lighting to ventilation requirements can be wired together on a LAN network. Trane, through its Building Automation Systems group and other business units, offers a total system including performance contracting and project management, and can facilitate financing packages.

An innovative company since its inception, Trane began as a family-owned plumbing firm in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Founder James Trane, with the help of his son Rueben, went on to develop a low cost alternative for cast iron radiators called a convector. Today, Trane is the largest supplier of commercial HVAC systems in the world. The office in Winnipeg, opened in 1926, is the oldest outlet in Canada outside of Toronto.

A graduate of the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Kane went through the Trane training program in Lacrosse and came here in 1972 as a sales engineer. He has been District Manager since January 1, 1980. "It's a competitive market here," he says, "but we enjoy a fairly strong position. We are solidly entrenched here in the commercial market."

He notes that Trane has supplied and installed the heating and air conditioning systems in both the St. Boniface Hospital and Health Sciences Centre complexes and in many of the major buildings in the downtown area.

"Our biggest challenge has to do with environmental issues," Kane says. "We have to deal with global warming, ozone depletion, energy efficiency and more recently indoor air quality. We have to insure proper ventilation. This is where our integrated approach comes in."

He explains that what Trane tries to do is link a building's chillers, air handling and other HVAC systems all together on one control system rather than have them functioning as separate components. "We try to achieve



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the right balance to realize the optimum performance for the building as a whole."

An example of what Kane is talking about is the work Trane Canada's Winnipeg office did for Inco's refinery in Thompson. In eighteen months, he reports, Trane's heat recovery system has saved Inco over \$2 million in operating costs.

"Our system at Inco has taken 16 mgs of electricity off the line at peak periods," Kane says. "All of the heating and ventilating systems are supplied by recaptured heat from the refining process."

In addition to installations, Kane notes that the Winnipeg district office with its staff of fourteen, including five refrigeration mechanics and two building automated controls specialists, take pride in the quality of their service. The head office on Logan also has a fully stocked parts store.

"We are part of a worldwide network and overall the company's growth has been huge," Kane states. "Here in Winnipeg, business is stable. Our business is driven by the state of the economy and business here is always steady."

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