Reliable Electronics
Can a company be high touch in a high-tech world? At Reliable Electronics (RE) in Mount Vernon, N.Y., owner and president Jay Friedman certainly thinks so. Enthusiastic and outgoing, he is an avowed and self-described people person, and he defines his company by the relationships built and maintained by him and everyone on the staff.

Friedman’s business model for RE is what he remembers as mom-and-pop grocery stores in Mount Vernon neighborhoods when he was growing up in the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s. “You knew the people running the shops, and they knew you,” said Friedman, 79. “I want to emulate that work ethic and get to know our customers, give good service and be supportive. Relationships guide me, and I enjoy being associated with people and talking to them,” Friedman said. “I’m the same as my dad, who was a people person. People here at Reliable are people persons, too. I train them to have the personal touch and be hands on.

Such attentiveness to current and prospective RE customers serves to differentiate the company from others in the wiring harness industry, particularly large firms, according to Friedman. He has no intention of growing substantially because it would jeopardize the emphasis on close relationships.

“I do what the big guys don’t do,” Friedman said. “I don’t want to become a big manufacturer. I can’t compete with big companies and their big numbers and their offshore facilities. I want to stay small and do what they can’t do.

“Reps today can’t get to know people because of e-mail, faxes and all the automated stuff,” Friedman said. “Communications today are so different. Reps don’t even go out to lunch with customers anymore.”

RE is a low-volume, high-mix manufacturer of wiring harnesses, cable assemblies, printed circuit boards (surface mount and through-hole) and electromechanical assemblies on a consigned, turnkey or mixed basis. One piece or hundreds or thousands of pieces will be produced over assorted time-frames.

“Our typical order is in the hundreds or smaller, usually one that needs a quick turnaround,” Friedman said. “Doing quick turnarounds, being hands on and having almost zero failures are our strengths. We will be competitive on cost.

“We have gained customers and kept customers by our quick turnaround times and lead times,” Friedman said, adding that often partial orders are filled ahead of due dates at customer request. “We’re very sensitive to our customers. We do everything in our power to get the job out, but we don’t compromise quality.”

Customer relationships at any company could be diminished by weak product quality. Therefore, Friedman emphasized that quality is the No. 1 concern at RE. Two final inspections are done, including continuity testing of harnesses, and a final audit completes the quality-assurance process.

Often military specs are followed, and Friedman expects RE to gain ISO 9001:2000 later this year. Much of the high quality is due to harness builders having worked at RE over 30 years, he stated.
Twenty people are on the RE staff – 12 in production and eight in management. Key people are Eddie Josephs, sales manager; Tony DiDomenico, operations manager; Anita Kissoon, PCB department supervisor; and Tekaram Sahadeo, harness and cable assembly department supervisor.

Work is done on one shift. All the production staffers are cross-trained to do PCBs, harnesses and cables.

Many of the employees have been with RE since it was founded in 1984 in Mount Vernon, a community of 68,000 residents in Westchester County next to the New York City borough of The Bronx. Friedman often has coffee with employees, whom he calls “a big family” because “they are nice people who work hard and do the job. I have never fired anybody, and nobody has left unless a family move required it.”

Production meetings led by Josephs and DiDomenico are held on a weekly basis. “Everybody is kept involved, and they know our customers,” Friedman said. “They make suggestions for equipment, and if it is something new that is going to help us, I will get it. We are looking at various machines now, especially for surface mount PCBs as they become more popular.”

Josephs and DiDomenico operate the day-to-day business of RE, while Friedman provides oversight and concentrates on the finances. He has known Josephs since the 1960s, and DiDomenico has been at RE shortly after its start 31 years ago.

“They have been with me so long, and I have absolute faith in them,” Friedman said. “I am so comfortable with them.”

Friedman seeks to add 4-5 new customers this year. To that end, RE is being more proactive with its marketing. One aspect includes a new listing on ThomasNet.com. Other aspects include trade show participation and direct mail with testimonial letters.

In managing the sales effort, Josephs oversees three outside sales reps who cover the Northeast U.S. and are paid commission on the accounts they develop. They are not franchised according to territories, and Friedman has no contracts with the reps. “My word is my bond,” he said, noting he would like to add more salespeople.

Because the RE trade area includes New York City, overseas companies with offices there have products made by RE. Friedman related that his firm has done work for an Italian company and an Israeli company, whose project required reworking 2,000 items made overseas.
Another long-time customer in Connecticut was purchased by a global manufacturer and moved to Florida. However, RE continues to supply products to the Florida location, an indication to Friedman of the attractiveness of RE products and pricing.

In turn, the appeal of such a relationship can be attributed partly to how RE staff relate with suppliers, most of which are franchised distributors, according to Friedman. “We look at them for the same things we provide to our customers – price, quality and delivery,” he said. “I’m pleased with our vendors, and our relationships have not changed much over the years.”

Friedman expects relationships with vendors and customers to grow this year and into the future. Growth will be based on furthering his mom-and-pop business concept.

“I have not saturated my mom-and-pop theory yet, so I’m going to continue with that approach,” Friedman said. “I’m going back to the good old days where there was rapport with people. That’s where the value is.

“The best thing is the way people respond the way they do,” Friedman said. “We’re not just another vendor to them. We’re part of their company, and that’s very fulfilling. I’m most proud of my people at Reliable and the things customers say about them.”

RE also has been recognized by the U.S. Local Business Association with its Best of Mount Vernon Business Award. RE earned the honor in 2014 – and the six previous years – for outstanding quality and excellent customer service.

RE was founded in Mount Vernon in 1984 by Bob Ryuck and John Punziano. A year later they moved RE into a building Friedman owned.

The 15,000-square-foot brick building, which was constructed in the early 1900s, was bought by Friedman’s father Adolph in 1952 to house his electronics manufacturers rep firm called Adolph Friedman Co. It later became Friedman Smith Electronic Sales with the addition of partner Bob Smith.

Jay Friedman joined the company in 1960, a year after graduating from Ohio State University. He sold electronic parts in a territory of Long Island, northern New Jersey, Connecticut and Westchester County. In the 1970s the company changed from repping manufacturers to distributing parts, which were shipped all over the United States.

Currently on the second floor of Friedman’s building is his other company, ASAP Electronics, which he founded in 1977. The firm, with a staff of seven, some shared with RE, is a franchised stocking distributor for major electronic parts manufacturers and specializes in RF and microwave components.

In 2001 Ryuck and Punziano were going to close RE but first offered it to Friedman, who has sole ownership of RE. “I was not seeking another company, but I saw it as a way to increase my business,” he said. “Everything was going offshore because of the high cost of manufacturing, but I had been successful with ASAP competing against the big distributors, so maybe it would work for Reliable.”

Since its founding RE only did consignment work, but within six months of acquisition Friedman added turnkey with bills of material to customers’ options. He stated the building, which is distinctive with wooden paneling, high ceilings and marble floors, has adequate space to accommodate more production as sales increase.

For more information, call 914-668-4440, e-mail sales@reliableelectronics.net, visit www.reliableelectronics.net, fax 914-668-4972 or write 519 S. 5th Ave., Mount Vernon, NY 10550.

PCB Hand Solder Assembly