

Eliminating Downtime To Provide Outstanding Customer Service



Bonfe Plumbing, Heating & Air Service, Inc. in St. Paul, Minnesota, prides itself on expanding the limits of what can be done for its customers, and it has done so since it began in 1993. Bonfe's expertise includes plumbing, HVAC, electrical and appliance service, and has built its business specializing in maintenance agreements. The latest proof of this commitment to innovation is Bonfe's vendor-managed inventory partnership with DSG. This ongoing synergy between the two companies hasn't just reduced the need for Bonfe to inventory products, it has significantly reduced downtime on projects, as well. That's a win-win for everyone involved, especially Bonfe's customers.

Three years ago, Bonfe began to explore the move toward vendor-managed inventory. Basically, this meant that Bonfe would move away from the age-old tradition of stocking products and parts in its warehouse and instead, adopt a process in which products were purchased and placed directly onto Bonfe's

service trucks as they were needed. A positive side effect of this move was that it would reduce downtime for Bonfe customers by eliminating the need for unplanned trips to a warehouse or even to the distributor. In order to put its plan into action, Bonfe needed help from a distributor that shared its commitment to progressive business ideas. DSG immediately came to mind.

"We had been talking about moving toward this type of system for the past three years," says Peter Bonfe, owner of Bonfe. "It was about a year ago that we actually sat down with DSG to discuss the change and how they could help us out with it. They received it really well and started working on a plan right away."

"We knew what we wanted to do, and we knew that we needed to get there a certain way," says Steve France, Bonfe's service and operations

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MECHANICAL DSG

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manager. “DSG was really open with us. Everyone put their questions and concerns on the table, and we worked them out. They took our ideas and expanded on them. They have been incredibly easy to work with throughout the entire process. The fact that we could trust each other helped immensely.”

Each of Bonfe’s technicians now keeps a fully-stocked service truck at their home, allowing them to eliminate trips to a warehouse each day for parts. This, in turn, results in improved service for Bonfe’s customers. Here’s how the system works: In order to keep their trucks stocked, service technicians are met by a Bonfe truck delivery driver every other night – one

night the truck driver will meet those techs who live on the north end of the cities, and the other night he will meet those techs who serve the south end. The driver

restocks the service truck with parts, then collects invoices for all of the parts that were removed from the service trucks since the last meeting. Next, he brings the paperwork back to Bonfe, where a purchase order is created and sent to DSG. The driver then picks up those items from DSG in order to replenish each

service truck the next time he meets them. The cycle repeats every two days.

“We set up a truck with all of the products that we believe our customers will need. Since we



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have maintenance agreements with nearly all of our customers, we already know the products that they use, which makes it easy for us ensure that we have the parts ready on the service truck,” says France. “Then, as parts are removed from the truck, we refill those items based on the invoices. It is an ongoing process, and we are working to become more efficient. Our partnership with DSG has helped us to come a long way.”

“We started out as a service company, and we’ve never wavered from that mission,” adds Bonfe. “We’ve never done a new construction job. We focus purely on service repair and retrofit replacement for our customers.”

It is a philosophy that has served the company well, and it is one that works perfectly with a vendor-managed inventory system. In fact, Bonfe’s commitment to positive change and overall creativity has been very productive. The company has seen significant growth since its beginnings in 1993, and every year it seems to find new ways to improve its service.

“The Bonfe name is pretty well known in the St. Paul community. My grandfather started Bonfe Auto Service, which is now run by my cousins,” says Bonfe. “We are expanding on that positive name recognition every time we go above and beyond to satisfy a customer. We’re involved with this community, and it shows. Our involvement with DSG has only served to strengthen that brand equity.”

Bonfe now works with DSG as its main plumbing distributor. It has eliminated its warehouse of plumbing parts and much of the carrying costs associated with labor and handling materials. So what is the next step for vendor-managed inventory?

“I think the next stage will be one in which an order is sent to DSG automatically as each product is taken off of the service truck,” says Bonfe. It’s the next logical step in a partnership anchored in a simple goal: everyone succeeds when the process improves, everyone wins when the end customer is happy.

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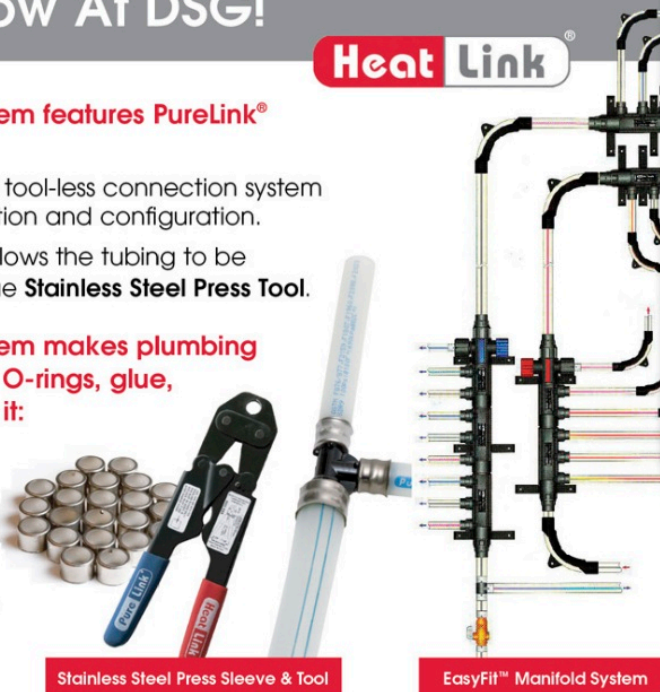
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