

## **Osborn: A World Leader in Power Brushes & Maintenance Products Celebrates 125 Years**

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Celebrating its 125th anniversary this past October, Osborn, of Cleveland, OH, a unit of Jason, Inc., is a world leader in the manufacture of power brushes and maintenance products. The company has manufacturing operations in 15 countries, servicing customers in more than 100 countries.

“Osborn is the world’s leading supplier of surface treatment solutions and high-quality finishing tools for hundreds of industrial and commercial applications, including metal finishing, honing and surface polishing,” said Osborn Marketing Manager Jeff Naymik, during a recent interview with Broom, Brush & Mop Magazine at the company’s Richmond, IN, facility. “Osborn carries more than 10,000 standard products and 100,000-plus customized solutions to serve our diversity of customers and industries.”

Osborn manufactures stock and specialty brushes, ranging in length from less than an inch up to 18 feet. The company’s product lineup includes abrasives, chemical products, machines, equipment, maintenance brushes, polishing buffs and compounds, composite power brushes, internal power brushes, heavy-duty idler-rollers, metal power brushes, punched/staple set brushes, road sweeping brushes, strip brushes, wide-face rollers, mops, brooms, squeegees and more.

While Osborn sells mainly to distributors, several categories of end-users purchase the company’s products including maintenance facility staffs and facility management companies.

“Other end-users include those in the welding, automotive and aerospace segments,” said Osborn Business Development Manager Robin Lang. “We consider it an opportunity for additional sales each time we go into a facility with our wire brushes or chemical products. Businesses need such items as brooms and mops, no matter the industry.”

In addition to the Richmond facility, Osborn’s U.S. locations include its North American headquarters in Cleveland, a manufacturing facility in Hamilton, OH, and a manufacturing and distribution center in Santa Fe Springs, CA.

“In Richmond, we make wire type products, power brushes and buffing wheels,” Naymik said. “We also make wide format brushes that are used in steel mills. These brushes are actually used for moving stainless steel material to the furnaces. It is not a brush that is brushing.

“In Hamilton, which is near Cincinnati, we make many of our buffing compounds, and in Santa Fe Springs, we also make some buffing products. A customer service center is also located in Santa Fe Springs.”

Elsewhere, Osborn has facilities in Brazil, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Mexico, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Spain, Sweden and Taiwan.

Osborn has also developed a solid supply network for raw materials that Naymik said eliminates major disruptions in the supply chain. Raw materials the company uses include wire, abrasive filament, stainless steel and Tampico fiber.

“We have some great relationships with our suppliers,” Lang said. “We have been able to maintain stable pricing and they stock product for us.” Naymik added: “We pat ourselves on the back because we have a really solid supply chain. We haven’t seen any major disruptions in raw materials.”

Naymik described business during the past year as “better than expected.” He reported Osborn has increased sales to pre-recession levels. Looking ahead for the remainder of 2013, Naymik projects the company will perform at higher levels than the United States Gross Domestic Product (GDP). “Many economists are predicting a flat to slightly growing economy in the near term,” Naymik said. “They are not painting a rosy picture, but we still feel we are going to grow more than the GDP.” Lang added: “We grew so much last year because people felt safe with the economy and began to order heavy again. Now, that economists are saying this coming year is going to be slow, we are expecting sales to back down a little, while still experiencing an increase.”

“Many of our products are used in gas exploration,” Naymik said. “Where there is a pipeline being built, our products are there. If it is a project in the Gulf of Mexico, or somewhere like that, our products will be on a ship going out to supply the job site.”

One positive trend Naymik is seeing is the return of a significant amount of business to the United States that had relocated overseas in past years. This is due, in part, by the need for better quality and sourcing, he said. “We are seeing many of the fabrication type shops that supply the automotive industry bringing a lot of jobs back, partly because they need to be closer to the assembly point,” Naymik said. “The tsunami overseas and other events that happened a couple of years ago left many automotive companies with no parts; therefore they are bringing a lot of business back.”

### Living The Mission

Osborn’s mission statement says, “Through competence, customer focus, continuous improvement and innovation, we will meet or exceed customer expectations by consistently supplying quality products with world class service.”

“It is easy to have a sentence that says we are going to do what the customer needs us to do to take care of them,” Lang said. “However, we really enforce our mission statement by living it every day at all of our facilities.” Lang said the company is constantly working to improve how its facilities operate. “We look at a floor plan or a cell of manufacturing, for

example, and we say, ‘How can we make this operation faster, more smooth and with less expense?’” Lang said.

“We look at situations such as, if we place that cabinet over there, we wouldn’t have to walk as far, thus saving time — if we try a different material type, maybe it would run through the machine a little bit better. If a person visited this facility (Richmond) in a month from now, things would be rearranged. Literally, once a quarter it seems like machines and other items are being moved to make things run more smoothly and economically in order to keep costs down. “It is this effort that keeps us in line with our mission statement, because we do want to be a world-class provider. We work at this every day by living it and not just making a statement.”

As Osborn’s distributors are a key component to the company’s growth, much hard work goes into establishing and maintaining strong relationships. “Our distributor relationships are the foundation of how we go to market,” Naymik said. “We are always striving to be the best partner we can with our distributors, while making sure we are offering the right product and the right price. “Our message to distributors is, ‘With Osborn, you, your customers and your customers’ customers finish first.’

We aspire to give our distributors an advantage by offering value, quality, delivery and technical support. “Osborn recognizes the ‘four Ps’ that distributors need for the best value. They are product performance, programs, people and price. However, offering products with optimal performance at the right prices, but without the programs and knowledgeable people in place, isn’t enough. “The people and technical support, along with the products and prices are what create our advantage.

Osborn’s objective is to make a quality product that is safe for customers to use and that distributors are proud to offer.” In its effort to be the best partner it can be with customers, Osborn is known for its field support, according to Naymik. “We have not only direct sales people who are dedicated to certain customers and regions, but we also have a group of technical people,” Lang said. “All they do is call on end-users and help them find the right products. Sometimes it might not be our product, but we offer them the best solution.”

Naymik added that Osborn’s level of support is also helping promote the trend of companies bringing business back onshore. “We are able to feed the on-shoring trend, because our customers trust us and say, ‘We are bringing this back for this automotive company. Send one of your technical guys over and help us with this deburring operation,’ or whatever they need to do to get the part at the quality level they require.” Lang added: “Furthermore, as I mentioned before, by helping a customer with an application, it opens the door to sell other products. We might say to a customer, ‘By the way, where do you buy your brooms?’ Or the customer might say, “While I have you here, come look at this.”

Another project underway to further solidify Osborn’s partnership with its distributors

involves online training sessions. “It is like an online webinar to train our distributors and even their end-users on how to use our brushes and other items,” Naymik said. “It will be something that will be live and totally interactive. In addition, the training sessions will be archived for distributors to show when they bring on a new sales person. It won’t be hours of video, but short snippets.” Lang added: “The success of Osborn’s customer service and sales efforts is centered upon the direct sales manager spending 100 percent of his or her time calling on distributors, as well as the field service people.

Our customer service team is one of the things of which we are most proud.” Lang explained the company’s customer service teams focus their expertise on specific markets in four locations from coast to coast. “The person selling a broom is not the same person selling a wide roll,” Naymik said. “For example, a customer service team member who deals with steel mills will have expertise in knowing what their needs are to steer them to the products that they need. Our customer service people are not just order-takers.”

Osborn boasts 2,000 total employees, many of whom have been with the company many years and have gained a high level of knowledge and expertise. “We have always supplied training and education for our employees, but there are many who have been with the company so long that they have gained a level of understanding beyond what can typically be taught otherwise,” Naymik said. “They know the products and the customers. With the bank of knowledge these veteran employees have acquired, they are able to take good care of customers.” Lang agreed that having customer service and sales reps concentrating on specific markets are a good way to gain knowledge, and, just as importantly, a path to building lasting relationships. “It makes it a lot easier to do business when our people establish relationships and knowledge based on years of phone calls, visits, etc.,” Lang said.

In 2012, Osborn re-branded the company, while making an investment in research and development and investing in its people, according to Naymik. “Re-branding the company involved a whole culture change,” Naymik said. “This effort was a major thing for us last year. We introduced a couple of new products, and there are many more new products that will be coming out soon. We have made a major investment in R&D. “With our new Osborn brand comes a new vision and a new way of doing business – one that brings our customers the global strengths of Osborn and JacksonLea.

JacksonLea is also part of Jason Inc., and is a world leading buff and compound manufacturer. JacksonLea provides quality products and technical support to the metal finishing industry. The company has manufacturing operations located throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico, with additional operations in China, Taiwan, Thailand, Europe, and Latin America.

Osborn’s investment in its employees includes training, hiring additional people and continuing education for people who want to go to school. “We seek to make people want to stay and do great for the company,” Lang said.

Another aspect of investing in people is the company's effort to inspire and attract younger generations to pursue careers in the industry called the Goldfish Program. "All the organizations that fall under the Jason Inc. umbrella participate in the Goldfish Program," Naymik said. "The program involves bringing in interns to work at Osborn. Hopefully, some of them will become full-time employees. We are trying to attract some younger people by way of this initiative."

Osborn Marketing Specialist Chris Cooper, who has been with the company a short time, began as an intern at Osborn headquarters in Cleveland. Cooper described his experience as an intern: "It was not a 'go get my coffee' sort of situation — none of that. When I had a question or didn't understand something, people in the office would say, 'Come in and sit down' and they would show me how to perform a task, or what to use. They were always eager to help. "It is nice to have people who bring you in and teach you about the industry. When I was offered a job, of course I accepted, because I was comfortable here and I trusted everyone and their experience in the industry."

Lang added: "It is great for those of us who have been in the business a long time to be exposed to a younger, fresher perspective. I really think it is a win for both the interns and the company. "We take pride in the fact that Osborn is 125 years old, but we also realize that we want to keep on top of the game. We are always seeking to modernize without sacrificing the traditional commitments and values that have taken the company to this point." In the near future, Osborn plans to release a coffee-table style book commemorating its 125 years in the industry.

### Looking After The Environment

Like many modern-day manufacturers, Osborn is concerned about doing its part in safeguarding the environment and promoting sustainability. Both Lang and Naymik spoke of two important projects the company undertook during the past year along these lines. Many of our products on the industrial side were packaged in plastic clam shells, which are expensive and very hard to dispose," Lang said. "What we have done is convert the plastic clam shell packaging to a recyclable box, which will make disposal a lot easier and is much less expensive."

A second project was the introduction of Osborn's FlexSweep push broom brace. The FlexSweep brace is designed to prevent the common problem of the handle breaking where it meets the broom head. The FlexSweep eliminates the need for metal braces and is designed to flex on impact, working as a shock absorber for the broom.

"One of the challenges with push brooms is the handles continually break, so people are constantly ordering new handles," Lang said. "The FlexSweep's connector will flex with the broom and keep it from breaking." The FlexSweep also comes with a thicker handle, which is more difficult to break, thus cutting down on the amount of wood the company uses. The

product is also assembled with wing nuts, eliminating the need for screws to put it together. Naymik explained that many automotive plant customers, especially those with labor unions, would require a millwright to assemble the broom if it came with screws.

With the wing nuts, the maintenance people who initially receive the brooms can put them together without causing conflict with union rules. Osborn's eco-friendly practices also involve the use of chemicals. "On the compound side of the business, we have done away with some of the chemicals we were using that were not as environmentally friendly, or question - able," Lang said. "What we will continue to do on that side is look for other ingredients to use to cut down on some of the chemicals."

### From Humble Beginnings

When Osborn was founded in 1887, Grover Cleveland was president. It all began when an engineer, John J. Osborn, left his job as superintendent at the National Carbon Company in Cleveland and started making products ranging from horse and butcher block brushes to street cleaning brooms. Three years later, the young company was taken over by F. Wayland Brown. In 1892, Brown was considering selling the company when he discovered his friend, Franklin G. Smith, was interested in buying Osborn. Upon completing a deal, Brown and his brother, Milton, owned 50 percent of the Osborn Manufacturing Company, while Smith owned 48 percent. Smith bought his share of the company with \$2,100 borrowed from his uncle Henry Sherwin, founder of Sherwin-Williams Company. Sherwin and a secretary in the office owned the remaining 2 percent.

In 1894, the Brown brothers decided to sell their Osborn shares to Smith. When the deal closed in 1895, Smith owned 97 percent of the business. Smith would continue to be actively involved in Osborn's operations until his death in 1968 – making his tenure with Osborn an astounding 76 years.

In May 1968, Smith passed away, and soon after his son, Norman, who had been president since 1951, decided to retire. On September 3, 1968, the Sherwin-Williams Company of Cleveland acquired Osborn as a wholly owned subsidiary. A significant change in Sherwin-Williams' long-term growth objectives shifted the focus to their retail presence rather than their industrial operations. As a result, in October 1975, Osborn became a wholly owned subsidiary and later a division of Giddings & Lewis, Inc., a machine tool manufacturer headquartered in Fond du Lac, WI.

In June 1979, Osborn acquired its own subsidiary, the Jackson Buff Company of Conover, NC, which today is known as JacksonLea. When Giddings & Lewis restructured in 1982, Jackson Buff became a separate division of G & L. In July 1982, AMCA International acquired Giddings & Lewis and Osborn Manufacturing. Soon Osborn and Jackson Buff were both included in AMCA's Aerospace Division. AMCA International decided to divest itself of several companies in 1985, including Osborn Manufacturing, Jackson Buff and Janesville

Products, a Norwalk, OH, maker of automotive trim products.

Two AMCA executives, Vincent Martin and Mark Train, resigned from AMCA and joined with the three division presidents to form a new company to acquire these three businesses. They named their new company Jason Incorporated. In November 1985, Jason purchased the operating assets of Osborn, Jackson Buff and Janesville Products, effective January 1, 1986.

### Success

In discussing the future of Osborn, Lang and Naymik said the company's wide array of products and markets, along with a tradition of strong leadership, will continue to pave the way for a bright future. "We are very heavy in the automotive and aerospace segments; however, we do business in many other areas," Lang said. "As markets change, so will our products. Considering how long we have been in business and all the good things that we are doing, I think we are looking at a strong future." Naymik added: "We've been fortunate. When we researched the history of the company for our 125th anniversary book, we looked back at the people who have been at Osborn all these years. Their commitment to the company has been strong since the 1800s, which is amazing. "Franklin Smith is the person who had the longest tenure at Osborn, and really built the company into what it is today – a successful global player."