



By Jim Schneider

Teams win championships

Morris Group International concludes its MGI 360 anniversary celebration

Recently, Morris Group International President and CEO Don Morris was invited to a CEO dinner event at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles. There, he had the opportunity to meet basketball great, Earvin “Magic” Johnson.

“I always loved basketball and watched Magic play from the time he was a young man,” Morris recalled. “I got a picture of Magic and me and had a chance to talk to him.”

That photo and conversation inspired Morris as he worked on his opening comments for the MGI 360 event. This event, which took place in late October, brought reps from around the world together with Morris Group executives and staff for two days of new product presentations, tours and networking. It also included celebrations of Acorn Engineering Company’s 60th anniversary, Elmco Group’s 65th anniversary, Potter-Roemer’s 75th anniversary and Murdock Manufacturing’s 160th anniversary. So many people came to the event that it was broken into two segments. In essence, the same two-day program was put on twice, with the addition of the first group also participating in a tour of Morris Group’s F&M Mexico plant.

As Morris prepared and collected his thoughts about the event, something from his meeting with Johnson caught his attention.

“I liked the quote that is on the picture he gave me: ‘Players win games. Teams win championships.’ That became the theme of my MGI 360 speech,” Morris said.

“We’re a team and we’ve been around for a long time, but we’re really collaborative and have an innovative team spirit. All of that is what really makes up our company, more than any individual. The ability to work together is important to what we do.”

“Our team went into MGI360 with a focus on celebrating the anniversaries of the four divisions, but also to showcase new leadership, new products and an increased focus on being easier to do business with and being the company of choice with our representative partners,” explained Tom Duddy, President and COO of Acorn Engineering. “We know they have a choice every time they make a sales call and we feel that our commitment to remain privately held with strong leadership in place and a continued focus on product development to enhance their earning opportunities will keep us in a strong position in the market.”

“The whole meeting came off without a hitch and everyone had a great time,” said Bob Murdock, President of Murdock Manufacturing. “We received numerous comments from the reps, saying they couldn’t believe how much effort went into the event, the presentations and all the new products. They were amazed that even in this economy, we are spending money to develop new ideas, new products and talented people.”

While the theme centered on anniversaries celebrated within the Morris Group this year, the meeting schedule was packed with content to give attendees the best bang for their buck.



“The meeting was fast because I don’t like to tie up reps too much. I’ve always committed to reps that if you’re going to come in and spend your time, and your time is money, I’m going to make sure we maximize that time and give them their money’s worth,” Morris explained. “They can study materials later, but I wanted to give them an introduction of where we’re going in the future. It’s kind of like unveiling a new car at an auto show. You can see the new cars at the show and then see them in the dealership months later. That helps build the anticipation, so a lot of the products shown will be introduced in 2014.”

An aggressive approach to new product development is a cornerstone of the Morris Group International philosophy, no matter the economic conditions.

“I never cut R&D budgets in a recession,” Morris said. “We usually increase them because that is what our lifeblood is. Morris Group has 75 engineers on staff. That goes back to our core name, Acorn Engineering, and our core philosophy. We drive our business with new products, engineering and uniqueness. If there are no new products, sales are going to suffer in the future.”

Being able to tour some of the manufacturing facilities and get their hands on the product made a big impression to those who attended.

“Reps love it when they can touch something brand new in a hands-on way,” Murdock said. “A large number of them made the comment that they can’t believe we are developing so many [new products] going forward, even in the current tough economy. I think the sheer diversity of new offerings under the MGI umbrella caught many off guard and all of these new products and new divisions fired them up. They saw the work that went into all of it and knew that we had crossed our T’s and dotted our I’s. That makes them comfortable when they go to market with a new product knowing that we’ve done our homework.”

Reps seemed to enjoy the mix of business and pleasure.

“The MGI 360 event was a great combination of social time, meeting time and plant tour time,” said Bob Robinson, of RepSouth in Charlotte, N.C. “There were two great dinner events, one informal and one a little more formal. The morning breakout meetings were short

and action-packed, and the afternoon sessions were comprised of three great plant tours. Start to finish, this event was 27 hours long and extremely respectful of the reps’ time away from the territory.”

“There are not many manufacturers where reps can interact one-on-one with good proactive management teams and owners on day-to-day issues,” said Randy Schaefer, president of WMS Sales in New York. “The meetings were great, enlightening and well planned. There were some great new products, ideas and people.”

“It was great that we were able to spend this time with our reps,” Murdock said. “The good thing about an anniversary party is that you have reps in from all over the world and you get to see many people and firms at one time. It would take you a year or more to do it by yourself. And the best thing about having a tour of all our facilities and being with our people is that our guests could see exactly what we do. You can’t get this experience with a webinar or PowerPoint presentation. This is hands on, and that’s the big difference because you can’t sell anything unless you are comfortable with it. Like most of our representative firms, MGI is family owned and operated, so our every day commitment to people and product is very real.”

An event with this level of activity and content didn’t just happen. It was the result of months of work and preparation.

“The planning for this event started over a year ago and the dedication of our team and the organization of the event was a positive for MGI,” Duddy said. “Our whole team is very excited at the opportunity we have to grow together in 2014.”

“I like the idea of players winning games and teams winning championships,” Morris reiterated. “I really tried to set the tone of the meeting that way. Players come and go and presidents come and go, but it’s the spirit of what you leave behind and how the company is built that is more important. You need to build it properly to last.” ■

New website

In coordination with the MGI 360 event, Morris Group launched a brand new website in October. A slider on the main page displays four rotating phrases that President and CEO Don Morris feel encapsulate the corporate philosophy.

The phrases are:

1. “A Can-do Attitude for Generations.”
2. “Innovation and Engineering: A Standard to Live By.”
3. “Flexibility and Collaboration: A Foundation for Success.”
4. “Built to Last”

Visit the newly redesigned website at www.morrisgroup.co.