

Choctaw-Kaul

The Power of Partnering

For several years prior to combining their two companies Choctaw Glove and Safety and Kaul Distribution worked in different areas of the same industry. Choctaw was a growing Native American-owned manufacturer of consumable safety products, including several varieties of protective gloves and cut-resistant hand and arm protection, while Kaul was a majority-owned distributor of those same products. When Choctaw purchased 51% of Kaul to create Choctaw-Kaul Distribution Company (www.choctawkaul.com),



their alliance combined a manufacturer with a distributor under the same roof to create one of the top 10 companies in the safety industry.



As a minority-owned business, the Detroit-based Choctaw-Kaul obtained its MBE certification through the Michigan Minority Business Development Council (MMBDC) and began attending the NMSDC trade shows and conferences around the country. It was at these events that company executives had a chance to meet purchasing managers from Toyota and learn more about TEMA's operations and potential needs for safety equipment at their North American

plants. "Through these meetings and informal conversations, Toyota representatives provided guidance about registering as a potential MBE supplier and they also recommended we attend their one-of-a-kind trade show, Opportunity Exchange," said Kenny Tubby, President of Choctaw-Kaul.

"Through these meetings and informal conversations, Toyota representatives provided guidance about registering as a potential MBE supplier and they also recommended we attend their one-of-a-kind trade show, Opportunity Exchange."

Kenny Tubby, President, Choctaw-Kaul

David Shall, Executive Vice President, Choctaw-Kaul reported that after registering, the company has been invited by Toyota to bid on what are called "spot buys," smaller purchasing opportunities outside the scope of a larger supply contract. "We welcome these bidding opportunities because they give us the chance to prove ourselves and demonstrate our value proposition," says Shall. The safety industry is extremely competitive, but Choctaw-Kaul, which has won more than half of their spot buy bids from Toyota, has an advantage because they manufacture many of the items they distribute, giving them a greater degree of control over their costs.

Shall and company CEO, Kenny Tubby, both took heed to Toyota's recommendation to attend Opportunity Exchange, where they've landed Tier II business with direct suppliers to Toyota. "Many Tier I's know us as an established supplier to the automotive industry, and we appreciate this unique opportunity to share our value proposition," says Shall, who also makes a point of crediting the Native American Business Alliance (NABA) for having helped Choctaw and Kaul get together in the first place.

"NABA, led by national executive director, Jackie Gant, does great work and we strongly encourage current or prospective Native American entrepreneurs to contact them," he says. For more information on NABA, please visit their website at www.native-american-bus.org.

Coolant Control

A Textbook Example

Greg Battle's experience is a textbook example of how to identify, pursue and win new business at Toyota's Opportunity Exchange (OE). "Success begins far in advance of the show," explains Battle, CEO of Coolant Control (www.coolantcontrol.com), a certified MBE and Cincinnati-based manufacturer of industrial lubricants. "First, I identified a small number of prospects likely to buy our products; Opportunity Exchange is a large event so MBEs must take a targeted approach to selling."



Battle, CEO of Coolant Control



Battle relied on a handout from last year's event in his research, explaining "that book they give out every year shows what products and services Tier I suppliers need, so it's a great place to start." But it was only a start. As a next step, he visited the websites of the Tier I prospects he identified and conducted other research to confirm their fit as potential customers.

These early steps helped Battle narrow his targeted group of

prospects to 10 companies. "Once I knew who I wanted to talk to I looked for ways to network with them before the show. Some I met at the seminars and some at lunch, but those early connections made our conversations on the trade show floor much more productive."

"Once I knew who I wanted to talk to I looked for ways to network with them before the show. Some I met at the seminars and some at lunch, but those early connections made our conversations on the trade show floor much more productive."

Greg Battle, CEO of Coolant Control

In these on-site exchanges the Coolant Control CEO confirmed his company's ability to meet prospects' basic requirements for capacity, price and quality, while underscoring his value proposition. Overcoming that hurdle at OE set the stage for the necessary post-show follow-up calls and meetings, during which the conversations delve deeper into an MBE's ability to add value.

"A customer only pays for something that adds value," Battle notes, "and I welcome that conversation because as a manufacturer of the lubricants we sell, we can manage our costs more effectively than some of our competitors, allowing us to pass savings on to customers. We've also introduced a whole new line of green products to help customers reduce the environmental impact of their production processes."

Battle, whose firm secured business with at least three Tier I suppliers including AK Steel, Metaldyne and ZF Sachs, says the contracts he landed from last year's OE will add "about \$300,000 to the company's bottom line." He advises other MBEs to "first decide who you want to talk to, then do your due diligence and then bring your 'A game.' "

If that advice isn't already in a textbook, it certainly should be.