

# CONTRACTOR<sup>®</sup>

THE NEWSMAGAZINE OF MECHANICAL CONTRACTING

Reprint from March 1997

## European innovation works well with Yankee ingenuity

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WITH THE U.S. hydronics market showing healthy growth rates in recent years, mostly due to the fast growth of floor heating, one can ask what role the European hydronic manufacturers have played.

Since my firm has been one of the pioneers in introducing European hydronic product and techniques to the U.S. market since 1978, I feel fairly well qualified to analyze this subject.

Most European export marketing gurus say:

Explore and try every market in the world to sell your product before you even think of getting involved in the United States. This is probably most applicable to our industry.

Dozens of European hydronic component manufacturers have had a very expensive U.S.-venture experience over the past 20 years. Small to large companies, all successful and well-established in other markets all over the world, have had their hopes daunted. Boiler manufacturers such as Hoval, CTC, HS Tarm, Vaillant, and giants like Bosch, Stiebel, Zentra-Buerkle and Wilo, have tried to make inroads here to no avail. Others came, persevered and have become success-

ful. Why have some European companies been able to thrive when others failed so miserably?

One of the most successful companies in the United States has been the Grundfos Co., which started marketing its pumps here in the mid-'70s. Grundfos, a Danish firm, started its U.S. operation small, pioneered then by one of the company's early and long-forgotten New England reps, Tom Casey.

Also doing well here are the Braukmann Co. (a Honeywell subsidiary from Germany), Danfoss Co. from Denmark, Viessmann from Germany, Riello from Italy, Runtal from Switzerland and Wirsbo from Sweden. Dozens of smaller Euro-firms represented by United States agents have established a presence as well.

All these companies have one common denominator — they made a long-term commitment — financially and in market research and development — to determine what adaptations had to be made to meet the needs of their new U.S. customers. In many cases the product line had to be completely redesigned even though the product was perfect and well-proven in home markets.

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this market, whether it be out of arrogance or shortsightedness, has not and will never be successful. Europeans, in many cases, feel that the U.S. market, regardless of firms represented by United States agents have established a presence as well.

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Europeans, in many cases, feel that the U.S. market, regardless of the industry, is fast-paced and open to immediate changes. This may be true in our high-tech industries.

When it comes to good old-fashioned hot-water heating, Europeans tend to misjudge our industry's Down East mentality: If ain't broke, then don't fix it!

With the consumer popularity of new age hydronic radiant heating exploding in recent years, it has become significantly easier to introduce new technologies essential to make it work. Just think of how

many people knew what the terms “constant circulation” and “outdoor reset controls” meant just three to five years ago, or PEX or “oxygen diffusion.”

Trying to sell these ideas and concepts 20 years ago during my pioneering days in New England was considered extreme and as exotic as Bungee Jumping and uphill parachute skiing. One really had to be a believer in modern hydronics, with a lot of patience and long-term commitment to develop the market.

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