

BSA

IS THE FORUM THAT KEEPS BEARING COMPANIES ROLLING

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In today's increasingly competitive global economy, industries and the companies that serve them are always looking for an edge. Price and quality being routinely accepted as a given, businesses—large and small—are always looking for a little help.

For the worldwide bearing industry, that help exists in the form of the Bearing Specialists of America (BSA), a collective of 48 dues paying member companies with more than 2,000 branches and 45 bearing manufacturers. The association's scope reaches from North America to Europe, Japan, Brazil and New Zealand. In essence, the BSA exists to serve and represent authorized distributors who stock and sell warranted ball, roller and other anti-friction bearings for any number of applications. It's a perfect example of strength through numbers.

"Any (bearing) manufacturer, large or small, that participates in BSA can have access to a well-trained sales force unequaled in size to that which BSA member companies provide," says Douglas Savage, president of BSA member com-

pany Bearing Service Inc. "Recent international expansion of members and participating manufacturers reaches all over the world. The amount of inventory carried by all BSA members combined is more than any manufacturer has or could afford."

Indeed, the not-for-profit BSA provides synergy between its manufacturing members and distributor companies. Founded in 1966 by a merger of the Anti-Friction Bearing Distributors Association and the Association of Bearing Specialists, the group serves to provide a forum for networking to share ideas, to offer interactive educational activities and to meld the disparate mix of companies into one unified industry voice. And that voice speaks for a \$33 billion industry, with 30 million bearings made daily, according to BSA figures.

"The BSA provides a highly efficient forum to communicate and share information with our manufacturers' most important distributor customers," says William C. Moore, senior vice president of sales development and channel management for SKF Service Division USA. "Nowhere else do we have access to the number of distributor executives and the time to discuss issues and ideas in a sustained fashion."

The networking and knowledge sharing that the BSA prides itself for happens in various ways. There is an annual convention, as well as Fall and Winter meetings of BSA committees. They include the Educational Services, Information Technology & Supply Chain and the Distribution-Manufacturer Relations committees.

As for governance, BSA has a board of officers and directors who serve at no pay.

Perhaps BSA's greatest contribution is in its sales training activities open to all member companies. Some examples:

- *The Certified Bearing Specialist (CBS) program.*

The only program of its kind in the industry, the CBS qualifies the specific skill sets necessary to certify as a bearing industry professional and specialist. Much like an ISO quality program certification, having BSA-certified employees provides a company



Annual conference provide valuable networking opportunities for BSA members.

with credibility in the eyes of its customers.

- *Employee training aids.* These include the BSA In-House Training Guide, a detailed primer for industry education. It is used widely for new and remedial training.
- *Bearing Briefs.* A bulletin that provides members with up-to-date information on specific topics of note, both technical and otherwise.
- *Online sales training.* Sales programs developed and presented by noted online sales guru Joe Ellers, tailored specifically for the bearing industry.

Also of note, BSA in 2005 published a white paper, "Value of Distribution: 2005; Critical Resources for Bearings Consumers." The paper provided insights on how leading edge bearing customers measure distribution value and how to leverage it to the utmost in doing business.

How does a company gain membership? Applicant distributor companies must for at least two years be involved in the "stocking, selling and distributing as an authorized distributor of a full range of basic types and sizes of new, factory-warranted bearings for replacement or maintenance purposes," according to BSA bylaws. The product offerings must be diverse enough to enable the applicant company to "serve and, in fact, the applicant must serve, on an effective and timely basis, the industrial replacement and maintenance requirements of its accounts or potential accounts." Other requirements include maintaining a full-time sales force; an adequately equipped and staffed office including shipping and warehouse facilities; having a warehouse inventory of new bearings large enough to effectively service its customers; having personnel capable of drawing specifications and recommending changeover applications; and to generally assist its customers regarding other technical, bearing-related issues.

With those factors in place, BSA's sales training efforts dovetail nicely with a member company's revenue goals. As mentioned, BSA enlisted the Ellers method of web-based sales training programs. They address both inside and direct sales needs, as well as those of sales managers. The training modules are completely self-paced for incremental progress, with each one taking up to 10 months to complete. Each module contains:

- Content and pre-assignment materials
- Audio training lectures which can also be downloaded as MP3 selections
- PowerPoint presentation notes for each audio presentation
- Corresponding action items to begin implementing
- Module tests
- Sales manager companion for each module

There are also occasional live Q&A teleconferences.


As is the case with most professional associations, BSA works at partnering with other groups to its own members' benefit. Possibly most notable, it partnered with the Power Transmission Distributors Association (PTDA) in 1998 to develop an electronic format for uploading product info

and price quotes to member companies of both groups. The single-format, single-system program is now used by manufacturers, distributors and OEMs. It allows manufacturers and distributors to interface regarding inventories, pricing and the like; streamlines operating efficiencies and improves accuracy by eliminating manual keyboarding; and reduces now-costly transportation charges and simply the general cost of doing business.

In addition, BSA is a sponsor of the Association Education Alliance (AEA), whose stated mission is "to identify, evaluate and develop, at an affordable cost, educational programs for use by member associations." The centerpiece of the program is the annual University of Industrial Distribution, a program devoted to the special needs of wholesale distributors, "along with a number of webinars and live training programs covering topics of interest to BSA member distributors," according to the BSA website.

On the political side of the street, BSA is a member of the lobbying trade group The National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors (NAW). NAW pursues government relations issues, educational efforts and a number of other industry-related initiatives.

Lastly, BSA also has partnered with the National Association of Manufacturers and the Coalition for the Future of Manufacturing.

"Bearings are a critical component in industry and vital to the success of the bearing and power transmission distributor," says Chuck Kitchen, vice president of Interstate Bearing Systems and vice chairman of the BSA Distribution-Manufacturer Relations Committee. "Technology and practices are ever changing, and so, too, must we. Members of BSA are among the elite in the bearing industry and are serious about the business. While yes, we do compete, we all have a common goal—to be the best. And BSA provides that forum." 

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