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Cocker-Weber:
*Quality,
Craftsmanship
Keys To Success*



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For More Than A Century...

Craftsmanship, Quality: Keys To Success At Cocker-Weber



By Rick Mullen
Broom, Brush & Mop
Associate Editor

Now in its 117th year in business, **Cocker-Weber Brush Company, of Telford, PA**, began by employing skilled craftsmen dedicated to making high quality products. That same dedication to quality and craftsmanship has been the red thread throughout the company's successful history.

The company's origins go back to 1892. In 1917, **Ludwig Weber** joined **Frederick Cocker** in the business, which was originally located in nearby Philadelphia, incorporating as Cocker-Weber Brush Company, according to the company's current **president, Lewis A. Daniels**. Cocker resigned in 1920.

"Following Weber, the company went to my father, **Lewis Daniels Sr.**, and my uncle, **Paul Daniels** (Weber's grandsons), and they ran the business for the next 50 years," Lewis A. Daniels (Weber's great-grandson) said during a recent interview with ***Broom, Brush & Mop***. "I have been here nearly 20 years and have managed the business for the past 15 years."

During the early years, as Philadelphia was a major textile center, a significant portion of Cocker-Weber's business was with the textile industry. By the end of World War II, Philadelphia's hey-day as a textile center had passed and Cocker-Weber shifted its emphasis to manufacturing polishing brushes, including those used in the manufacture of jewelry and in dental laboratories, according to Daniels.

"This has been a major portion of the business for the past 50

years," Daniels said. "We have always had an industrial component as well. We make special cylinder, technical engineered brushes and other types of brushes for industry, typically in small lots. We have the flexibility and the capability to do small production runs that much larger companies cannot do economically."

"For our polishing brush lines, we deal with wholesalers that have worldwide distribution and marketing capabilities. These wholesalers have a sales presence in many countries. We support

them in their marketing, because they have far larger sales forces than what we would be able to field. In the industrial brush end of the business, we primarily sell direct to end-users.

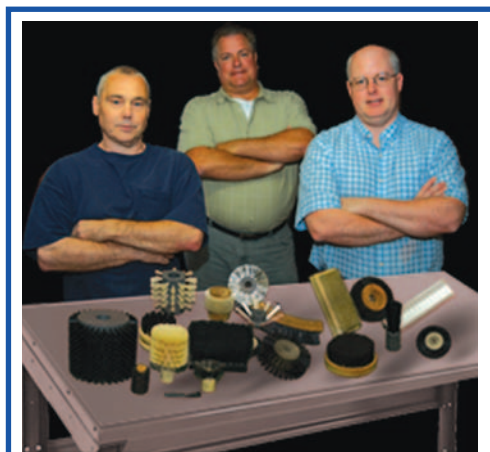
"Also, for the industrial portion of our business, marketing is done through trade journals, the Thomas Register®, Global Spec and the Internet. In addition, word of mouth still brings in a fair amount of business."

Daniels also reported the company's expanded Internet presence has been successful in garnering more inquiries for Cocker-Weber products.

In the early 1960s, when Cocker-Weber moved to Telford, located between Philadelphia and Allentown, PA, the area was still relatively rural. Although urban

sprawl has made inroads into the area from Philadelphia to the south, Telford retains its small-town ambiance.

In 1985, Cocker-Weber moved to its current facility, which is about three times larger than its original Telford facility. The company's historical one-story, brick building — with hardwood floors, no less — was once, in keeping with the area's historical industrial roots, a clothing mill.



Production Specialist Jim Devitis, President Lewis Daniels and Facilities Manager Neil Clark (left to right) are shown with some of Cocker-Weber's quality brush products.

"It always intrigues people when they come into our factory and see the hardwood floors," Daniels said. "The facility consists of a combination of warehouse, production and office space, and has suited our needs since the mid-1980s. The town of Telford is a mix of small factories and homes. There is a residential area nearby our facility. There is a school down the street and a railroad right in front. One of the reasons we moved to Telford years ago was because of the railroad."

Cocker-Weber Offers A Wide Variety Of High Quality Brushes

Cocker-Weber's historical roots as craftsmen making high quality brushes runs deep. Even though modern-day automation has made many of the hand processes once associated with brush making obsolete, the company's employees still consider themselves craftsmen, melding modern machinery with the solid traditional principles of making quality products.

"The company's philosophy since the beginning has been to make the highest quality brush that we can make, using the best materials," Daniels said. "Many of the old hand processes have been automated. Fifty years ago we had probably 30 to 35 employees. At this time, we have 10 employees.

"Automation has kept us competitive and in business over these many years. Today, because of automation, one employee can do a job six or seven people performed in the past. Nonetheless, we still maintain the capability, especially when it comes to making prototypes, etc., to make brushes by hand.

"Our employees are experienced skilled craftsmen. The 'new guy' has been here 8 years. Our foreman has been here more than 25 years. We don't have much turnover. Our employees know all the steps in the process of building different types of brushes. Employees also bring ideas to the table when they see opportunity for improvement. Everybody plays a very crucial role in this company."

While taking advantage of advances in automation and other technologies is critical to surviving in the modern business world, a certain amount of old-fashioned personal contact has been lost. Through the years, Cocker-Weber officials have struck a workable balance between personal contact with customers and doing business in cyberspace.

"When I started, most business was conducted by phone and/or by letter. Faxing capabilities were just becoming a factor. There was a lot of personal contact with people 20 to 25 years ago. We have seen a loss of that personal contact over the years," Daniels said. "There are people with whom I communicate frequently person-to-person, but I have many customers with whom I communicate by e-mail and fax."

The loss of some aspects of personal contact in doing business has been mitigated by the advantages that technology brings to the table in staying competitive in today's marketplace.

"With e-mail, we receive inquiries from all over the world

about our products and services," Daniels said. "When business was conducted primarily by letter, it didn't happen that way."

Computer technology has also made the inner workings of the company more efficient and cost-effective.

"I am able to access data and generate reports on a computer with a few keystrokes that used to take an accounting person a day to perform," Daniels said.

He added that whether the company conducts business face-to-face, by e-mail, fax or online, it is the consistency and quality of Cocker-Weber's products and services that keep customers coming back.

The company's wide array of brush styles it offers include:

■ **Jeweler's polishing brushes:** These brushes are used in the manufacture of fine jewelry by goldsmiths, silversmiths, watchmakers, fine hardware manufacturers, artisans and workers of soft metals. Cocker-Weber manufactures two types of jeweler's polishing wheel brushes. The superior line contains high quality, extra stiff Chungking bristle. These durable brushes are favored by



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Lewis A. Daniels, Cocker-Weber Brush Co.

craftsman and artisans. The standard line also uses good quality stiff Chungking bristle;

■ **Dental laboratory polishing brushes:** These brushes are designed to meet stringent requirements of dental laboratory applications; and,

■ **Custom brushes:** As manufacturing methods evolve and change, there is a need for new brush designs, materials and applications. Cocker-Weber can produce new custom brushes built to customers' specifications.

Meanwhile, Cocker-Weber industrial brushes are used in aircraft manufacturing, circuit board production, pill sorting, film coating, ceramics production, trommel screen cleaning, inflatable raft repair, appliance production and many other industrial applications, according to the company's Web site.

Cocker-Weber makes several styles and sizes of industrial brushes that are used to clean, polish, deburr or coat a wide variety of products. The industrial brushes are typically staple set, which allows brush designers a broader range of individual style options than other brush styles. The company's industrial brush lines include:

■ **Cylinder and wheel brushes:** These brushes are used in many industrial applications where continuous brushing action is desired, such as in cleaning conveyors and polishing fruits and vegetables. Cylinder brushes are effective in applying coatings or removing debris from varied surfaces. Special cylinder brushes are used in sorting and moving products;

■ **Industrial disk brushes:** Disk brushes are used when the brushing action is more effectively applied to a flat surface in a circular manner. These brushes are used for activities as diverse as finishing, cleaning, moving materials, polishing pills and applying pressure;

■ **Industrial cup and end brushes:** These brushes are similar to disk brushes, but are smaller. They are used for reaching into

may be higher, they will last much longer, which, in the long run, makes our products more economical. It is getting that message to purchasing people who only see price that is a part of the challenge today.

“Quality is a big factor. Those who know us, or who hear of our reputation, expect a quality product. When we develop a product for a customer, we give the extra attention to make sure it is the



LEFT PHOTO: Cocker-Weber Production Specialist Jim Devitis (left) and Production and Facilities Manager Neil Clark talk shop at the company's facility in Telford, PA. **RIGHT PHOTO:** In addition to modern, state-of-the-art automated brush production machines, Cocker-Weber also uses older equipment, providing the company with more flexibility.



cracks, crevices or odd shaped spaces. Cocker-Weber specializes in softer bristle cup and end brushes for polishing and cleaning;

■ **Industrial flat and handle brushes:** These hand-held brushes are often called “toothbrush” style, welder’s, plater’s or scratch brushes. They are used to reach hard-to-get-areas. Typical uses for flat and handle brushes include cleaning, scraping, deburring, finishing, removing static electricity, washing, spreading, dusting, detailing, prep work and others; and,

■ **Special brushes:** Special brushes are designed for specific openings, slots, shapes and purposes. These brushes are used in a variety of applications including cardboard making, envelope feeders, CD case edge labelers, carpet tufting, molded shoe production, mainframe computer tape drive cleaning, film powdercoating and other industrial applications.

“We have a reputation for the highest quality products, both with our standard lines and our custom industrial brushes. We stand behind every product that we manufacture and that has been a big factor in the longevity of the business,” Daniels said. “We make brushes using high quality materials and we make a polishing brush that will last 8 to 10 times longer than many of the brushes being made in Asia. Although the price of our brushes

best it can be.”

Hand-in-hand with quality is product consistency. Quality and consistency engender customer trust and loyalty. Daniels points out that in an industry where many companies make similar products,

such factors as quality and consistency are ways Cocker-Weber differentiates itself from the competition.

“Our inspection and production techniques ensure our quality and consistency. Customers don’t have to worry about the product they are getting,” Daniels said. “Our customers don’t get complaints and they don’t have returns. This

has been a big help in maintaining a steady, growing business.

“Over the past few years, we have seen a lot of companies disappear, whether by merger, acquisition or ceasing production. There are fewer brush manufacturers out there and it appears those that remain are all quality producers.”

Another important aspect of Cocker-Weber’s longevity has been its ability to continue to develop innovative products. Several new products are currently in the developmental stages.

“We are working with a company in developing a new device for the medical field,” Daniels said. “We are also working with some of our long-term customers, adding to the product lines we already produce for them. Furthermore, we are working to expand

“In the past couple of years, we have had more industrial inquiries. People are frustrated with the long turnaround time of waiting for products to come from other parts of the world, and they are beginning to source here in America again.”



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Maintaining An Even Keel In Choppy Economic Seas

If dealing with the flagging U.S. economy isn’t enough, Cocker-Weber’s widespread international business means the company is also affected by the economies of other countries.

Although company officials have been successfully steering Cocker-Weber through the economic rough seas of the times, Daniels still describes the business lately as “volatile.”

“We have had periods when we have been extremely busy and then times when it has been rather quiet. It has been up and down,” Daniels

“Constant testing, observation and improvement to reduce cycle time and time from order to shipment is one of our most important missions.”

Lewis A. Daniels, Cocker-Weber Brush Co.

said. “I think this year, business is going to slowly rebuild. I think it is going to remain volatile, but as we see improving health standards and dental care in other parts of the world, we are going to see our lines in those areas continue to grow.”

In addition to steady growth in the dental, medical and pharmaceutical industries, Daniels is confident there will also be continued growth in other areas Cocker-Weber serves such as jewelry manufacturing.

“The jewelry polishing business has sustained us for a long time,” Daniels said. “Also, in a positive light, we see more production returning to America. For a couple of decades, a lot of production went overseas. We had those offers ourselves to move to Mexico or to Southeast Asia, but we have remained here in America and have become more competitive through automation and technology.”

As most of Cocker-Weber’s production is industrial-oriented, the company is not as affected by consumer market issues. The trends Cocker-Weber officials primarily keep a close eye on are those related to its industrial customers.

One of the major trends in the industrial sector is the quest to shorten lead times. Cocker-Weber has met this challenge head-on.

“Shortening lead times is more and more a factor as companies try to run tighter. Trying to shorten lead times is an ongoing process,” Daniels said. “In the past couple of years, we have had more industrial inquiries. People are frustrated with the long turnaround time of waiting for products to come from other parts of the world, and they are beginning to source here in America again.”

Cocker-Weber is also continually seeking to make its operation even more efficient by employing some of the principles outlined in such popular managing programs as Six Sigma and the Toyota method.

“We continually work on product development and improvement and on monitoring our own cycles and standards to see where improvement can be made,” Daniels said. “Constant testing, observation and improvement to reduce cycle time and time from order to shipment is one of our most important missions.”



Ludwig Weber (front) works with other employees at the Cocker-Weber Brush Company in Philadelphia. Circa early 1900s.

"Listening to our customers and providing solutions that work for them is our calling. Not every brush company can produce every type of brush. Sometimes we don't have a solution, in which case we will often send a customer to a company that can meet that customer's needs. This lets that customer, and others, know that we will do the right thing to get the need met.

"Likewise, when another company with which we have a relationship is approached to make a brush that they don't build, that company can send the customer to us."

Sustainability — A Long-Term Vision

In the world of sports, it is a compliment when it is said of an athlete that he or she "plays within" him or herself. "Playing within" oneself implies the ability to maximize one's potential and effectiveness while not trying to do more than one is capable.

In its own way, Cocker-Weber has embodied that idea in the business world by not growing or expanding beyond what it can successfully control. The current unpredictable economic times have made this traditional way of doing business at Cocker-Weber even more important.

"One thing that has helped us a great deal, especially as we look at this economic downturn, is not having grown faster than we could sustain," Daniels said. "Keeping the ability to maintain control of our business, our finances, etc., and not over-reaching has been one of the keys to our success throughout our history."

Daniels also feels the current worldwide economic downturn may prompt people to focus more on developing a long-term vision in the operation of their businesses.

"I think many businesses and individuals are looking at what we have been doing as a country in dealing with the stresses brought on by the tough economic times we are experiencing," Daniels said. "Achieving sustainability by way of developing a long-term vision is where we need to go. That is where we started many years ago by not looking only at the current quarter, or the next quarter, but looking years down the road.

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Lewis A. Daniels, Cocker-Weber Brush Co.

"More people seem to be thinking along those lines again. They are projecting beyond whether they will have a job this week or next week to what is down the road when their kids are grown. Having that longer-term focus is one of things that has sustained Cocker-Weber for more than 100 years. There has always been a vision that the company will continue and will be successful. We are very grateful for what we have.

"Bottom line is, for several generations this company has seen the Lord's blessings. The company has been very steady and has provided a number of families with a good living and lifestyle. Hard work, of course, is a big factor, along with paying attention to business and meeting customers' needs."

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