

Pro-Link, Inc. 25th Anniversary

Although Pro-Link, Inc., the jansan marketing and buying group based in Canton, MA, currently has more than 75 U.S. members, its beginnings can be traced to a single phone call—a conversation between jansan distributors Richard Casey of Casey EMI, Foxboro, MA, and Daniel Mirto of Rheil Supply Co., Youngstown, OH.



*Pro-Link president
Paul Lemieux*

In the call, the two businessmen discussed the idea of organizing a group of independent jansan distributors, a move that would enable them to achieve buying power beyond that of an individual company. By July 1984, Casey and Mirto had been joined by five others, at which point they formed the buying group, calling it Preferred Distributors.

The company was incorporated later that year. A board of directors was appointed, and Preferred Distributors quickly grew to nearly 20 members. Before long, it had nine functioning committees and had created four districts, one for each U.S. region. In 1985, the company joined ISSA.

By 1989, with the goal of establishing a nationally recognized trade name, the group introduced the Pro-Link brand of products. The brand's recognition in the market paved the way for a change in the organization's name in the '90s, when Preferred Distributors became Pro-Link, Inc.

"In the first few years, a code of regulations was adopted," says Paul Lemieux, Pro-Link president. "The code, which served as our mission statement, has served us well for all these years."

According to Lemieux, key elements of the Pro-Link code include (1) providing members with a vehicle that will offer

additional profits—either from buying more economically, marketing together, or sharing services that can be more economical collectively than individually; (2) encouraging an interchange of ideas and ideals and disseminating scientific and technical information; and (3) obtaining a return on investment from two areas: cooperative buying and marketing services.



Celebrating Pro-Link's quarter-century mark, from left: founders Bernard Casey, Phil Consolino, J.D. Mirto, Lynne Kirsner, and Richard Casey.

"I think the reason Pro-Link has lasted 25 years and has been so successful is because we place our members first," states Lemieux. "What is best for our members is always foremost in our thoughts and actions."

LEMIEUX ADDS that the organization continues to plan for its future growth. For example, in addition to continually enhancing its members-only Web site, the group is expanding its regional warehousing program coverage area, increasing building-service-

contractor tools and training programs, and enlarging its "green" programs.

And speaking of green, Pro-Link worked with a leading green cleaning expert in 2006 to develop a suite of green cleaning solutions for its members and their customers.

The company also analyzes its own operations, looking for ways to operate in a more sustainable, environmentally responsible manner. Just recently, for instance, Pro-Link began purchasing electricity from wind-power sources instead of conventional petroleum-based electricity plants.

"I realize the industry and world economies are experiencing some tough times right now," says Lemieux. "However, overall, we are excited about the future. We see our industry as a leader in helping to make the environment greener and healthier. And for Pro-Link specifically, I truly believe we have just scratched the surface. Many exciting things are already planned, which we believe will benefit our members and make [us] a stronger, more viable organization." **LT**

Pro-Link Highlights

- 1984** Pro-Link founded as Preferred Distributors, a not-for-profit distributor-owner organization.
- 1985** Pro-Link joins ISSA.
- 1989** Pro-Link brand name created.
- 1998** First Pro-Link catalog offered.
- 2006** Pro-Link green program introduced, with Green Seal®-approved chemicals, paper, and soap.
- 2006** Pro-Link honored with award from The Ashkin Group for leadership role in green cleaning.
- 2006** New Pro-Link Web site launched, including a members-only section.
- 2007** BSC resource book developed.
- 2008** Pro-Link joins U.S. Green Building Council.
- 2009** Pro-Link offices become wind powered.