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COMMERCIAL BUSINESS

Commercial dealers change with their markets

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The nation's top commercial tire dealers have adjusted their store counts, added equipment, expanded service offerings and emphasized employee training to be better competitors over the last year. All of those strategies are in play in the commercial division of Black's Tire Service Inc. (BTS). The Whiteville, N.C., company is No. 23 on this year's Top 25 Commercial Tire Dealers list.

The company created the BTS Academy, a training center adjacent to its corporate headquarters, in April. The 38,000-square-foot facility houses a classroom, conference room, dealer showroom and a garage outfitted with equipment from Hunter Engineering Co. and other suppliers for hands-on instruction and practice.

"We are making a big push on sales and technician training at BTS in 2014 and 2015 to make sure we stay on top of all sides of the tire business," says Jeremy Benton, vice president of commercial sales and marketing

A formal training program is important to attracting and retaining talent, especially as the company is hiring to staff two new stores. Retail and commercial tire sales and service are provided at a full-service, 12-bay store that opened in Loris, S.C., on Sept. 29. A commercial outlet in Dunn, N.C., is set to open on Dec. 1. Located off Interstate 95, the facility will have two drive-through service bays that provide tire, oil, light truck and trailer repair and truck alignment services as well as OTR services. Both facilities are located in new markets for the company.

In addition, BTS expanded its service offerings with the purchase of a mobile press-on machine and a stationary press-on machine in July 2014, according to Benton. The company is also concentrating on the OTR side of its business. "BTS is working with Goodyear to grow our off-the-road tire market share in North and South Carolina in the third and fourth quarters of 2014 and into 2015."

Growing through acquisition

Bob Sumerel Tire Co. Inc. purchased five facilities from Kauffman Tire Inc. in May 2014 in northeast Ohio. The locations, formerly a part of Kauffman Tire's Commercial Division, include four combination retail/commercial and farm tire service centers located in Wooster, Ravenna, Orwell and Medina. The purchase included a Bandag retread plant, also located at the Wooster facility.

President Todd Sumerel says the Kauffman stores are expected to add \$25 million in revenue in the first 12 months. Bob Sumerel Tire holds the No. 15 spot on the commercial tire dealers list. The Erlanger, Ky., based dealership has 13 commercial stores, six combined commercial/retail outlets and six retread shops in Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Best-One Tire and Service purchased four commercial stores and a Bandag retread plant from American Tire Distributors Inc. (ATD) to establish a presence in the Northeast Ohio market. The former Terry's Tire Town stores in Canton,

Girard, Twinsburg and Alliance became Great Lakes Best-One Tire & Service locations on Aug. 1, 2014. The retread plant is located at the Alliance facility. No. 2-ranked Best-One Tire & Service has 16 retread plants and more than 250 partner locations in 11 states.

Also in August 2014, McCarthy Tire Service Inc. added a retail-commercial store and a retread shop in Albany, N.Y., with the purchase of Terry-Haggerty Tire Co. Inc. McCarthy Tire now has seven Bandag retread plants, one OTR retread plant, and 44 outlets in seven states.

John McCarthy Jr., president of the fourth-generation, family-owned business, says the purchase bolstered service and production capabilities in upstate New York and aligns with the company's long-term strategic plan.

"This acquisition, along with our acquisition of Main Tire in December of 2012, clearly demonstrates our commitment to the New York market and also to the greater northeastern region." The revenue from the Main Tire purchase helped lift McCarthy to No. 6 on this year's top commercial dealers list, up one spot from last year. Neil Horn, vice president, says the company has also increased its offering of mechanical services.

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More services and equipment

Sullivan Tire Co. Inc., which ranks No. 19, is expanding alignments, trailer rehab and other mechanical services as well as adding sales staff, according to John Donovan, vice president. John Snider, CEO and president of Snider Tire Inc., which does business as Snider Fleet Solutions, says his company is also expanding service offerings and investing in training. The company holds the No. 5 spot in the rankings.

The No. 7 ranked dealer, Service Tire Truck Centers Inc., has taken several steps to keep pace with the changing marketplace, according to Scott Bennett, vice president of sales. "We increased our shifts to handle demand. Our mechanical

offerings are expanding rapidly. Finding qualified personnel remains difficult and we are working with different agencies to increase our presence."

Nebraskaland Tire Co. Inc., which does business as Nebraskaland Tire, Kansasland Tire and Coloradoland Tire, invested in its retreading operations in 2014 in response to market conditions.

"We added some new equipment into our retreading business to increase our capacity. Our mix to Tier 3 has increased slightly, but we are holding premium sales pretty well by educating our customers on the entire cost of truck tires through the second retread and casing values," says Nick Phillippi, general manager of the No. 25 ranked dealer.

Graham Tire Co. is emphasizing customer service and reliability to stay competitive, according to Jen McCann, marketing manager.

"Each day we struggle to keep our margins where they need to be while also moving necessary units. This said, we go beyond pricing and make sure retail customers know what they can benefit from when choosing Graham Tire as their commercial tire supplier.

"For any size fleet, we offer fleet surveys and inspections to make sure they are using the correct tire for the specific application and getting the most out of their tires for the budget they have allotted," she says.

"Goodyear Fleet HQ offers great programs to track this information, so we look like the commercial tire experts and are able to address their needs when they are ready to purchase."

Graham Tire has stepped up its activity with OTR tires, says McCann. "For both commercial and OTR customers, minimizing downtime is crucial for their bottom line, so we have worked hard to give them the products and service they need as soon as they need it."

Graham Tire, which is not ranked on this year's top 25 commercial dealer list, operates two retread shops, four commercial and 26 commercial/retail outlets in four states.

Roughly half of the companies on the Top 25 Commercial Tire Dealers list experienced increases in commercial sales (in dollars) [from 2012 to 2013](#), according to Modern Tire Dealer estimates. ■

How the rankings are determined

To make the *MTD* Top 25 U.S. Commercial Tire Dealers list, a dealer has to: 1) sell truck tires, 2) have at least one retreading plant, and 3) offer 24/7 road service. Points are tabulated based on number of outlets. Each commercial-only outlet received two points and each retread plant received one point. The number of combination commercial/retail stores is multiplied by the estimated percentage of commercial sales and then multiplied by two. The highest 25 point totals make up the list, and then the dealers are ranked based on estimated commercial sales.

To see *MTD's* chart of the Top 25 U.S. Commercial Tire Dealers for 2014, click [here](#).

About the Author



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