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A-hunting they will go: Network Tire's new Web service can help locate obscure tires

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By William Schertz

CHALFONT, Pa.—Network Tire Inc. is hunting down hard-to-find tires and sizes, and its weapon of choice is TireHunter.com.

The Chalfont-based wholesale distributor launched the online tire-search service in March as a way to help consumers and tire dealers alike find rare sizes, discontinued brands and models and what Network Tire co-owner Andy Chalofsky called other "oddball" requests.

"We were getting requests through networks—just our normal chain of distribution—and a lot of these requests were for off-the-wall stuff," he said. "...I had the idea of, 'Why not create a site that's focused on discontinued or back-ordered tires?'"

Mr. Chalofsky said he came up with the idea after speaking to several friends in the industry who were having trouble finding products. He added that the tariffs that President Barack Obama imposed on Chinese-made tires in September have driven much of the need for tires that aren't as easy to locate as they were just a few years ago.

"When the tariff happened, a lot of the Chinese brands became unattractive," he said. "You'd have people that have three Ling Longs on their car and they need the fourth because of a collision or irregular wear or something like that, and there's nowhere really to turn for this...type of request.

"We created TireHunter to fix that need."

While websites like Tire-Mon-key.com and TireRack.com focus on helping consumers locate "everyday run-of-the-mill" tires, Mr. Chalofsky said, TireHunter fills a unique niche in the online tire search category.

"I've always had that feeling, like how I was taught by my mentor, if everybody's selling cake you better start selling apple pie," he said. "You don't just start selling cake like everybody else.

"...This is the opposite of a TireMonkey or a TireRack. This is us putting our expertise to work for you instead of, OK, I need one Michelin that everybody has, here's the price, let's try to beat it by a dollar."

According to Mr. Chalofsky, TireHunter.com is not automated. When an order for a tire comes in, the company may call the person who made the request to verify some details before it eventually is passed along to Network Tire's sales department.

"When the request comes in we hand it to one of our salespeople, and from start to finish they search the entire country, the entire globe for these tires," he said.

TireHunter was primarily created to be a retail service targeted directly to consumers, but Mr. Chalofsky said about 40 percent of the requests so far have been from body shops and distributors. Though the service is free, the company has very quickly seen other major benefits.

"It's had a surprising effect for us because although we are getting more customers and we're getting sales—so there is a profit generation there—it actually strengthens us on the wholesale level," he said.

As evidence of this, within the first three weeks after the service launched the company's supplier network sales shot up 25 percent.

"...It's really helped us on the supply side because you're only as good as the suppliers you have, and for us with the growing number of sizes and stuff like that, we need to get new suppliers to do business with us. It's been a positive thing because we've added more suppliers."

Before the company had even developed a marketing plan for the Web site, orders began coming in at a steady rate. As for the future of TireHunter.com, Mr. Chalofsky indicated it eventually could grow to become the core business for Network Tire.

"I sure hope (it does), but at the current stage I see it as an addition that will really help us grow," he said.

"I would love to see that we continue to get more business and it helps us grow and take a leadership role, but we've approached this as something that will help our core business and help us gain suppliers, gain customers and move product. But the possibilities are endless."



Andy Chalofsky and his business partner Lisa Roley have been fielding "off-the-wall" tire requests. Network Tire Inc. photo

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