

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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## Diverse Companies Link Growth to Collaborative Relationship by Adele Yorde

*syn•er•gism: n. the combined action of two or more which has a greater total effect than the sum of their individual efforts...*



No one word more aptly summarizes this grassroots success story. It is an account of three entrepreneurial central Wisconsin business owners, all of whom established strongholds in very diverse commercial enterprises—then flourished in the structural building components, transportation and heavy equipment industries, respectively, for decades prior to forging the relationship that improved profit margins across the board.

Automated Products Inc. (API) had begun manufacturing mobile home trusses in 1964 and quickly expanded into the residential, commercial and agricultural arenas. Roehl Transport first started working with API in the mid-1980s, making Wisconsin intrastate deliveries and handling inbound shipments of lumber and metal plates. In 1993, API approached Roehl with another business opportunity—to dedicate a fleet of trucks for jobsite deliveries of its roof and floor systems. Roehl started with three crane trucks equipped with stick booms, expanding truck by truck to meet API's growing delivery demands. Years later, when API launched a separate division to manufacture wall and floor panels, Roehl responded by adding two tractor-trailers to its dedicated fleet and reconfiguring trucks with knuckleboom cranes for greater operator efficiency and safety.

Today, API ships 12-14 trucks every day from its four plants in Marshfield, each loaded with custom-made floor trusses, roof trusses and wall panels headed for construction sites in the Upper Midwest. Ninety percent of those loads are delivered by Roehl drivers.

"Part of our business enterprise is tied to API's growth," notes Chuck Hayes, Roehl's dedicated fleet manager. "We keep adding trucks to meet API's expanding production capacity; just last summer, we added a sixth knuckleboom crane to the fleet."

Roehl also has firsthand experience with phenomenal growth. Starting with one truck and driver in 1962, Roehl Transport now provides curtainside, flatbed, dry van and specialized trailer services for over 7500 customers across the U.S. and Canada. With its national and regional fleet of 1300 trucks and 2500 trailers—plus a workforce of more than 1500 drivers, mechanics and administrative personnel—Roehl is the nation's 94th largest motor carrier.

"API knows structural components; Roehl Transport knows trucking," says Wayne Bixby, API production manager. "With their proven track record, new rules on driver training and testing, plus ever-changing DOT codes for over-dimensional loads, creating a dedicated fleet with Roehl was a mutually beneficial move. We've been able to minimize expenditures by not having to maintain our own rigs and train drivers. So, while we focus on production quality and efficiency, Roehl concentrates on streamlining delivery services to meet our customers' needs."

Loading and offloading with knucklebooms has translated into greater production capacity per unit per week. Bixby and Hayes talk on the phone several times each day trying to gauge how to best match trucking/driver capacity to production capacity/load size for the following day. Trucks are pre-loaded at API plants each evening; Roehl drivers report in at daylight to head out on the road. Depending on mileage to and from key destinations, one truck may do three separate loads in a day, each load having anywhere from one to five stops.

"Roehl drivers are highly skilled, maneuvering mostly over-dimensional loads into tight jobsites," adds Bixby. "They deal with our customers every day in a professional, helpful manner, which is important to API's success. Often, Roehl drivers may be the only ones who meet our customers from the time a job is ordered until it arrives at the jobsite."

Across town, a third Marshfield-based company has anchored the equipment supply side of this triple-win equation. V & H, Inc., a local heavy truck and equipment distributor, also happens to be the nation's largest material handling equipment source. V&H customized all six trucks in Roehls' dedicated fleet with knuckleboom cranes. Fully extended, the telescoping stick has a reach of almost 47' with a load capacity of 1800 lbs. Incidentally, API recently purchased a similar unit to augment Roehl's delivery capacity in the immediate service area. At last report, all seven trucks were operating at full capacity five days a week.

API is now one of the top five structural building component manufacturers in Wisconsin. "Being vertically integrated makes this company unique in the industry," notes John Bujalski, Vice President of Operations. "We have nearly 200 employees involved in production during peak seasons, including our own architect, professional engineers, design team, accountants and legal counsel. We outsource only for wood, metal connector plates...and delivery services."

Automated Products, Inc., Roehl Transport and V&H, Inc.: although unquestionably independent, these three companies share common economic and industry objectives. Working together to move structural building components faster, farther and most expediently has increased productivity, revenues and customer satisfaction for all three companies. By utilizing new technology, implementing complementary systems and sharing a common sense approach to business, each has become more competitive and improved its respective market share and profits, and become even more competitive...hallmarks of synergism.

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For additional information, please contact any of the individuals or companies mentioned in this article: Automated Products, 800/686-3426, [api@tznet.com](mailto:api@tznet.com); Roehl Transport, 800/393-8480, [www.roehl.net](http://www.roehl.net); V&H, Inc., 800/826-2308, [www.vhtrucks.com](http://www.vhtrucks.com).

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