

Educating the Masses

Loctite's industrial distributors are using an innovative strategy to teach engineers and MRO professionals the value of anaerobic adhesives in the manufacturing process

As featured in *Industrial Distribution* magazine

By Bridget McCrea, Contributing Editor

The typical industrial engineer assumes that Loctite threadlockers are a long-term solution to the problem of vibrational loosening of fasteners. They think that once the stuff goes on, it doesn't come off without the application of heat, elbow grease or force.

But they're wrong, and Rocky Hill, Conn. – based Loctite, a specialty chemical company that produces high-performance adhesives, sealants and coatings, is out to prove it through a new campaign aimed at educating both existing and potential users about its line of products. Known as threadlockers, they come in a variety of strengths and are designed to work on different application. When used properly, threadlockers can alleviate a major cause of mechanical failure.

“Threaded fasteners are one of the major causes of industrial equipment failure. In environments of vibration, they vibrate loose and assemblies come apart,” says Jerry Perkins, vice president, U.S. Industrial Marketing for Loctite, which has a solution to the age-old problem. “Filling those thread roots with a liquid anaerobic ensure that the threaded fastener stays in place and does what it's supposed to do: hold two components of an assembly together.”

According to Perkins, threadlocking involves filling and sealing the voids in threaded assemblies with anaerobic adhesives to hold fasteners solidly in place, even where expensive mechanical methods fail. And, retaining is the bonding of cylindrical assemblies, such as bearings on shafts. Retaining compounds augment and even eliminate press fits, shrink fits and other mechanical methods.

But Loctite has been spreading the word about its threadlockers since the company was founded in the early '50s, and equipment manufacturers still haven't caught on. “Fifty years later, we're still just introducing customers around the world to the value of liquid threadlockers,” says Perkins. “In fact, less than 20 percent of the world's manufacturers – those who are consuming billions of threaded fasteners annually – are using threadlockers.”

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Seeing enormous potential in that remaining 80 percent, in May 2000 Loctite launched a consumer-awareness campaign. The cornerstone of the company's education effort are two adhesive training kits called Solution Paks, each of which focuses on one of two fundamental adhesive functions in manufacturing: threadlocking and bonding cylindrical assemblies (commonly known as retaining).

Both of Loctite's kits contain a 24-page guide on selecting and applying the adhesives, as well as an interacting CD-ROM complete with performance information and formulas to demonstrate how to design reliability into manufactured products and maintain reliability in manufacturing equipment.

To encourage participation from as many companies as possible, Loctite priced the Solution Paks at under \$25, below half of their retail value. The Threadlocking Solution Pak contains samples of adjustable, removable, penetrating and high-strength threadlockers, while the Retaining Solution Pak includes retaining compounds for general purpose, high temperature, fast cure and high strength.

The program is a new approach for Loctite, which has been using consumer awareness programs and seminars for years. The company, which claims to control over 85 percent of the world's market for liquid anaerobics, hopes that the Solution Paks – through the reach of its industrial distribution base – will hit a large percentage of the world's manufacturing decision makers.

“For years, we've educated customers on the cost benefits of using liquid threadlockers over other mechanical methods,” says Perkins, adding that it's still quite common today to go into a manufacturing plant and see the manufacture of assemblies in which one of the components on the bill of materials is a lock washer or a split-ring washer. Or maybe the company is using serrated head fasteners or deformed thread fasteners. “In both of those cases, mechanical locking methods come at a premium cost,” says Perkins.

So for decades, Loctite has been demonstrating how just a few drops of its product on a fastener prior to assembly will keep that fastener torqued down in that assembly until the user wants it to come apart. According to Perkins, the new campaign took about six months to develop. The ultimate goal, he says, is to reach engineers who make the assembly decisions on the products.

“Most graduate engineers come out of school very well educated on the use of traditional fasteners and other joining methods – welding, riveting and other similar methods,” says Perkins. “However, most engineers aren't very well versed on adhesive and sealant technology. Most of that is really learned on the job.”

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With over 300 billion fasteners being consumed in the U.S every year, Perkins says the “vast majority” of those don’t even have a drop of Loctite machinery adhesive on them – or any adhesive for that matter. “In a critical environment, those fasteners are guaranteed to come loose,” he says. “Our distributors recognize that enormous opportunity in the industrial market” – and the potential of it. So they applaud Loctite for spending the money to go out and educate the marketplace on what these liquid threadlockers can do.”

According to Richard Nighswonger, a Loctite industrial distributor specialist, the company is essentially going up against mechanical locking methods – those lock washers and nylon inserts that are supposed to stop nuts and other fasteners from breaking. However, he says Loctite’s own internal testing has shown that such solutions aren’t “nearly as effective” as using anaerobic adhesives. Through the Solution Paks, he hopes his distributors will help spread that word and attract new customers who want to try the products.

“We need to get out and compete against those other methods, which have been around a lot longer than Loctite,” says Nighswonger. “And we’re doing it by educating people about Loctite’s products, through the Solution Paks.”

For example, Nighswonger says there’s a real misconception in the industry when it comes to the use of Loctite. Some users, he says, think the product works “too well,” and that disassembling fasteners bonded with the adhesive is nearly impossible, and leads to breakage and other problems.

But they’re wrong, he says. They’re just using the incorrect Loctite product. “They’re obviously using one of our permanent or high-strength grades when they should probably be using a lower strength grade,” he adds. Enter the Solution Paks – which contain a variety of products: low strength, medium strength, high strength, penetrating and high-temperature resistant. When it comes to incorrect applications of the Loctite products, Nighswonger says “that’s where we find that we need to education the end user more,” Namely, they need to know that their choices are many, and that there is an anaerobic adhesive developed specifically for the application at hand. “That’s what these Solution Paks are all about,” he adds.

Mark Almaraz, operations manager at R.S. Hughes Co., Inc, a general line industrial distributor in Carson, Calif., knows firsthand the importance of educating customer about the various grades of Loctite. He’s come across more than one end user who was confused about how to use Loctite. For this reason, he says the Solution Paks are going to be an effective way to spread the correct information.

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Despite what many engineers may think, Almaraz says Loctite's solutions are all application-specific, and go way beyond the "one size fits all" mentality that many users assume. "There are a variety of different products that do a variety of different things," says Almaraz, "but end users still think they have to hit a fastener with heat or break the nut and bolt connection because they are not aware that there are other grades that allow for easier removal."

R.S. Hughes worked with one engineer who was confused about which Loctite product to buy for his particular application. He wanted a retaining compound kit, but wasn't sure which one matched up with the type of material he was working with. "He bought the Solution Pak and used the tools in it to figure out which retaining compounds would work best for that particular substrate," says Almaraz.

Samples Anyone?

From the time that Loctite first introduced its distributors to the idea of the Solution Paks, Almaraz says his company has recognized them as a valuable selling tool. With a CD-ROM, handbook and samples of the various threadlockers included, he says the pack gives his customer "the whole package for problem solving." And, it also helps the distributor better answer the common question: "Do you have any Loctite samples?" Instead of just tossing a single bottle over the counter, Almaraz can point that customer to a complete kit of not only samples, but the accompanying resources that can help them choose the right product for their particular application. "The materials save the customer time because they can find out which one will really work, rather than just trying sample after sample and relying on trial and error," he says.

Originally, Almaraz says his distributorship planned to target its maintenance and repair customers with the Loctite Solution Paks. Knowing how these individuals frequently need assistance with their equipment repairs, it seemed like a natural fit. However, a different group has emerged as R.S. Hughes' target audience: engineers. "We had a bit of success with the MRO group," he explains, "but our biggest success has been with the engineering folks."

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