

PROFILE

ALIGNMENT SUPPLIES, INC.

By Russ Willcutt



With decades of experience providing shaft alignment devices to various industries, this company is becoming a trusted name in the wind-energy market.

JUST AS THE NORTH AMERICAN WIND industry benefits from the expertise of companies that have been active in the more-mature European market for many years, vendors long established in related industries make an important contribution as well. Such is the case with Alignment Supplies, Inc., which amassed decades of experience servicing a wide variety of manufacturing activities before entering the wind-energy arena.

“We are heavily involved in markets such as shipping, power generation, pulp and paper, diesel engines and gearboxes, and plastics,” according to Paul Berberian, national sales manager, “but wind has definitely become our fastest-growing sector in recent years. It’s really exciting to be part of what’s happening in the United States wind market right now.”

Alignment Supplies was established 26 years ago, in 1985, when Greg Knitz was regional sales manager for the manufacturer of a dial indicator-based shaft alignment system that was headquartered in Chicago. “The product was so popular, and our sales efforts were so successful, that I was asked to move to Chicago,” he recalls. “I wanted to stay in Ohio, though, so I decided to start my own company and become a distributor for the manufacturer rather than a direct employee.”

In 1998 Alignment Supplies became one of the first U.S. distributors of the Easy-Laser shaft alignment device, manufactured by Damalini AB. Sales were so solid in Ohio that Knitz found himself invited to visit Damalini’s president, Nils Andersson, at the company’s headquarters in Sweden. This resulted in Alignment Systems being awarded half of the United States as its territory in 2001, becoming a master distributor for the entire country in 2005. The relationship remains deep, with Alignment Supplies providing Damalini with input from the field that can then be incorporated into future equipment designs.

Over the years Alignment Supplies has developed a reputation for hands-on involvement in helping its customer’s maintain their rotating equipment, which is especially true for those operating in the wind industry. “The fact of the matter is, the answers wind companies are

seeking are usually found uptower,” Berberian observes, “so that’s where I find myself spending most of my time when I’m on the road, in addition to conducting training seminars at our customer’s facilities or jobsites. You really can’t be afraid of getting your hands dirty in this business, because most of the time you’re not going to be able to provide a solution over the phone.”

It’s all about making sure that rotating equipment meets its expected lifespan, he says, pointing out that alignment is a preventive rather than a predictive tool, such as vibration monitoring. “We’re more interested in helping our customers avoid a breakdown than figuring out why one occurred.”

Doing so often requires Berberian to climb into the nacelle, photograph potential mounting points, and provide a detailed report to the client. Beyond inspiring confidence, this also leads to a great deal of knowledge acquired about specific turbine designs. This has allowed Alignment Supplies to develop manufacturer-specific “kits” so that a customer interested in purchasing a shaft alignment device in a Vestas nacelle, as an example, can simply provide the model number and rest assured that they’ll receive the correct mounting hardware. “We have also worked directly with the OEMs to make sure our equipment matches up with theirs perfectly,” he says, “and in some cases we’ve gone so far as to develop custom solutions for those manufacturers.”

In addition to shaft alignment devices, the company also provides equipment to measure flange flatness and to provide geometric measurements. Its alignment and measurement systems address straightness, flatness, squareness, parallelism, spindle direction, and plumb line, and most models come in both wired and wireless versions. Alignment Supplies also provides calibration and repair services at its technical center in Maumee, Ohio. The goal, according to Berberian, is to become much more than a vendor to its customers.

“We want to be an information resource, where we’re providing our clients with solutions, not just the equipment they need,” he says. “We want to be known in the wind industry as the go-to guys.” ↵