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Q&A with Regis Saragosti, North America CEO, SFA SANIFLO

A look back at 2020, plus what the PHCP industry can expect from SANIFLO this year.

BY STEVE SMITH

Last year was certainly a strange year, or as Regis Saragosti, North America CEO, SFA SANIFLO, puts it, a “very, very weird year.”

However, that doesn’t mean it was a bad year for Saniflo’s operations in the US. We don’t think we can summarize too much in our introduction without letting readers discover what they can learn from hearing what Regis says directly about SANIFLO – and not just what happened in 2020, but what he expects for 2021:

PHC News: Let’s recap 2020. While it was an odd year to say the least, tell us what happened with SANIFLO.

Regis: It was actually a very, very weird year. In particular, we started 2020 completely off in sales because we had such a strong December in 2019. In January, sales were below average. And nothing too exciting happened for February either. But then, when the pandemic started in March, our business began to explode.

PHC News: I wasn’t expecting to hear that. What do you attribute the growth to?

Regis: I think remodeling is the key. People are stuck at home. They can’t plan a vacation, go out to restaurants or even take a weekend trip.

So the only way you have to spend money is through your own house. As a result, many people are doing some type of remodeling. In addition to this, there are also trends of working from home, younger people moving back in from the cities, and spending more time at home in general.

For one reason or another, that means people are putting in an extra bathroom, and we have products that allow you to add a new bathroom or laundry room that can be installed in various places, such as a basement, garage or attic. Our products are so simple to install, and they are a



Regis Saragosti, North America CEO, SFA SANIFLO

perfect solution for these projects.

PHC News: Last year wasn’t a recession in the traditional sense, but did SANIFLO experience a sales surge like this in the last recession?

Regis: I was with SANIFLO in 2008, and that was a difficult year, too, but sales did increase. As a CEO, I routinely have to complete forecasts for our operations, and I really think this gives us proof that we have a product that is recession-proof. What’s more, everything that we as a company have done in the past 25 years in the US market is paying off. And the growth we experienced in 2020 is further proof that the market in the US will get much larger for SANIFLO products.

PHC News: What can you tell us about the performance of your wholesale channels?

Regis: Most of our wholesalers are showing growth or experiencing a flat year. It really varies on the state they are in. However, like a lot of other manufacturers, we have seen a huge increase in sales for our business online. The importance of having an online presence and the capacity for our customers to embrace this way of buying products is now very clear.

When I started 13 years ago with SFA SANIFLO US, we were only selling to wholesalers, and there wasn’t much in terms of online sales

at that point in time. If we still had the same exact model during 2020, we would not have succeeded as much.

Most buying groups, such as Affiliated Distributors or AD, which we are involved with, are now helping this transition. AD is making a big push when it comes to online distribution with its wholesaler members, because they understand the market. They understand the challenges that we have in front of us, and we are working very closely with AD members to help them build their business online.

And there are other distributors who are not part of a buying group also embracing online business, too. There is a huge demand for our products when marketed effectively, and the margins are very good.

Take, for example, Economy Plumbing Supply, one of our wholesaler customers based in Indianapolis. I remember looking at their sales at some point in 2020, and they were going through the roof. So, I contacted our reps and asked, “I have a feeling that Economy Supply just created a website.” And they said, yes, they did and wondered how I knew.

I should also add that COVID-19 also brought a necessity to adapt and quickly increase medical response worldwide. As a result,

SANIFLO products have been key to the modular building market that constructed temporary hospitals worldwide. Also, portable hand wash stations were another new market. SANIFLO was there, too.

PHC News: So, just how much of a sales increase did SANIFLO experience in the US in 2020?

Regis: I would say that business overall in the US increased 30 percent.

PHC News: I'm curious with that increase, did you experience any problems filling orders? You must have had problems, at least initially, with factory output when news of Covid first hit?

Regis: Like many manufacturers, we certainly did experience a slowdown in production. We did have to shut down our factory outside of Paris for two or three weeks. Plus, we also experienced some problems getting all the parts we needed from our OEMs, some of whom are very small businesses. So, of course, the month of March was complicated for production.

We experienced back orders, but were able to handle it the best we could. Overall, I would say our factory managed the situation very well. And keep in mind the factory in France is probably doubled in size since we last took our US wholesalers there for a tour two years ago.

In addition, our business in Europe was slowing down compared to the US, China, Canada and Japan – four countries that we saw growth in sales during the pandemic. So that did help with getting product to where it was being sold.

PHC News: Where does all this put SANIFLO for 2021?

Regis: If you asked me that question a few months ago, I may have thought negatively about the year. But with talk of an economic stimulus package for the US becoming a reality along with the great news about more than just one vaccine, I think 2021 will be fantastic.

I am concerned that a lot of companies, not just SANIFLO, may encounter supply chain problems in the first quarter of 2021. If this happens, however, it will be because suppliers were completely overwhelmed with a tremendous demand in 2020 for certain product categories.

PHC News: What about new SANIFLO products for 2021?

Regis: The big deal for me is the

launch of the Saniswift Pro. This one is so new you won't find any information on it yet. (EDITOR'S NOTE: We do have some more information on the Saniswift Pro and two other products in our sidebar.)

We launched the first generation of the Saniswift about eight years ago. The competition is a sump pump in a bucket. We are the only manufacturer to develop a drain pump that is a drain pump, and we wanted it to be compact with multiple inlets all at a lower price than our competitors.

Still, we always heard objections about it over other competing products. For example, customers would say it's too small or it's white and that makes it look like it's cheaply made. So, OK, we increased the size, although it's still smaller than the competition, plus we gave it a more industrial gray color. It's also UPC-listed, which our original Saniswift did not have.

We'll be launching this in April. The Saniswift Pro is going to be the

best drain pump available in North America.

PHC News: Good. What other products are new in 2021?

Regis: The Sanicom 2 is the big brother of the Sanicom 1. This will basically be the first and only duplex drain pump in the US. So, whereas the Sanicom 1 has one motor, the Sanicom 2 has two. In some cases, the second motor will serve as a backup or both pumps could activate together to be able to discharge more effluent.

This product will cut down on time and installation expense. For example, in California, if a contractor wants to install a new sink or industrial dishwasher in a restaurant, code requires the contractor to install a duplex. What that means with other products is that the restaurateur also has the added expense of busting up concrete to put in a sewage ejector with two pumps.

This is absolutely ridiculous, so by

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launching this product we're going to solve this expensive problem.

This type of product also is well suited for hydroponic applications, such as the cultivation of cannabis. Our pumps can really help when it comes to a lot of water pumped a large distance that also contains some kinds of particles in the water.

One other important feature of the Sanicom 1 and 2, for that matter, is that we use an air pressure switch instead of the float switch used by competitors. An air pressure switch can better handle hotter water and water that contains chemicals.

The Sanicom 2 will also be launched in April.

And, finally, while this isn't brand new, we did launch in 2020 the Sanicondens Best Flat. We are still pushing it in 2021 very hard, and it's basically a low profile version of the Sanicondens Best, but with twice the neutralization capacity – 500,000 BTU vs. 250,000 BTU for the Sanicondens Best.

PHC News: Anything else you'd like to add about SANIFLO for 2021?

Regis: We're hiring two new business development managers, one for the West Coast and the other for the East Coast. And we're planning on announcing a number of staff promotions as well.

So, we are moving in the right direction. Business is booming. We are investing. We are supporting our customers as much as we can, and that will make for a great 2021.

The biggest frustration that I have for SANIFLO in the US is that we have fantastic products. The plumbing industry needs them, but a lot of contractors don't know about them.

I understand that. Contractors have been doing their jobs for decades without us, and it's very hard to make the switch.

Wholesalers, however, embrace manufacturers who come to them with ideas to help them to sell more products to contractors. In 2020, for example, since our wholesalers couldn't hold their usual counter days or contractor cookouts, we worked with wholesalers who have a social media presence, created an ad for them and provided money to promote it on their social media channels.

That's a new way of marketing, but we also are aggressive with using traditional methods and advertise in print to introduce our new products, and also send out post cards and eblasts to contractors, too.

We promote our products using old and new school methods on every media platform available.

And we are the leaders in the

US when it comes to this. We will always support and help our customers to sell more. Always, always, always. ●

SANIFLO Product Update

Saniswift Pro

Saniswift Pro features 2-inch low side inlets with non-return valves. Size increased from 1.5 inches to 2 inches as this size is mainly used for drain fixtures and passes most plumbing codes. The product features easy access with a top cover that can be removed without disconnecting any pipes. All electrical controls can be accessed by removing only a couple of screws. The complete motor can also be removed from the top in order to have easy access to the impeller in case anything is caught and needs to be removed. The external case is made of a heavy-duty HDPE. This system is meant for residential and commercial applications. As opposed to the current Saniswift, this new Saniswift Pro will have the UPC logo for acceptance in the Western states where the Uniform Plumbing Code is a must.



Sanicom 2

The Sanicom 2 is ideal for use in public or commercial environments. A powerful lift station can handle gray water from a sink, washing machine, dishwasher, shower, bath, sink and bidet. The Sanicom 2 is similar to the Sanicom 1 except it features two powerful motors where the second motor is a failsafe backup to ensure you have continuity of service. It has two inlets and it discharges through 1.5-inch pipework. Similar to the Sanicom 1, this duplex drain system can handle water temperatures up to 194 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Sanicom 2 turns on automatically and alternates between each motor when in operation. The Sanicom 2 comes with an external hard-wired alarm for additional peace of mind.



Sanicondens Best Flat

The Sanicondens Best Flat is a 2-in-1 condensate pump used to neutralize and pump condensate from condensing boilers, HVAC systems, water heater systems, etc. It is one of the most powerful and quiet condensate pumps on the market with standard features that no competitor can match. The Sanicondens Best Flat will pump condensate waste up to 15 feet in height and/or 150 feet away from a soil stack. A 2-quart capacity condensate pump comes equipped with all the necessary hardware for easy installation. It can be installed on top of flat surface or mounted on a wall. New technology allows for the neutralizer and condensate pump to be built into one system creating a less expensive and space saving solution. The Sanicondens Best Flat does this by raising the pH levels from condensate being produced by appliances up to 500,000 BTU/hour input.

