



# Interview with **John Thalenfeld**, President of Trion Industries

*Creating the fixtures that make retail store operations efficient and profitable*

**VIEWPOINT • Q & A**



**B**ack in the early 1960s, David Thalenfeld owned a small chain of retail stores in New York City. One day, determined to find a more efficient way to display items on a pegboard, he developed a hook that didn't have to be tilted upwards to be put in or removed.

Little did he know that this flash of ingenuity, the industry's first straight-entry hook, would lead to today's Trion Industries, Inc., which now produces more than 25,000 products designed to make retail store operations more efficient. In fact, the company still makes that same hook—the original Spacemaker 100/200 series.

Trion Industries' president is now John Thalenfeld, David's son, who as a young man worked in his father's chain of retail stores, and then joined Trion in 1975, first working in the warehouse and shipping department. Now he and his father, now chairman, lead one of the world's leading manufacturers of display and scanning hooks, point-of-purchase, and in-store merchandising fixtures.

To learn more about Trion's plans and service to retailers, Progressive Grocer interviewed John Thalenfeld:

**Q. How does your hands on experience translate to both the products offered by Trion and your approach to customer service?**

**A.** That experience has given us a good view of the majority of problems that supermarket and retail store operators face today. We understand their problems for merchandising, stocking, working with customers; what sells and what doesn't sell and why; and what customers like and don't like when it comes to merchandising and displays.

Every retailer has different needs, and we recognize that. We have regional sales staffs and specific people dedicated to each account. So retailers know who to work with—people who understand their particular needs. They can steer customers through the thicket of our 25,000 different products and suggest solutions. Perhaps the item that is requested isn't really the best item available to meet a particular need. We can help with that.

**Q. What role does the retailer play in helping Trion improve its products and develop new ones?**

**A.** Trion takes a "consultative" approach to its business. We are all about learning and helping our customers learn as well. It's very rare that a retailer comes to us with

a design need that we don't tweak to make it better, more efficient to manufacture, or to serve more than one purpose. Our engineering staff is right here in Pennsylvania and consults with our sales people to make sure the best product possible is developed for a client. With an in-house tool and die making department, we can literally create the machinery to manufacture a new product or custom solution for a retailer - often at a stock solution price. We have a European partnership, too, and so can provide solutions with a European 'flavor' if that is needed.

**Q. Why does Trion continue manufacturing operations in the U.S. when so many companies are moving offshore to capitalize on lower costs?**

**A.** We have upwards of 400 people working here for us, and if we move their jobs overseas, they are not going to be working for us any more. Those employees are a major difference for us because of the quality and dedication that they bring to their job. Let's face it, the Chinese have to pay the same cost for materials, and while they have a savings on labor, they still have to pay transportation costs and there is a slower response time. Because of our ongoing investment of profits in new equipment and automation, we can compete on price and we can maintain our advantage of customer service and customer relations that can only be provided by a company that's based right here in the U.S.

**Q. What factors have contributed to Trion's success and what does that mean to your retailer customers?**

**A.** It's that combination of innovation and our dedicated workforce. Our employees are the people who actually make the products we sell and they care about producing quality products and then seeing them out in the field. They can go into a store and say, "I made that." That is something to be proud of. We have more than 200 employees who have been with the company 10 years or longer. Our investment in new equipment, combined with an outstanding workforce of loyal, experienced employees and supervisors, are the factors responsible for Trion's success.

**Q. What's ahead for Trion?**

**A.** We have over 58 national and international patents and I am confident of additional product and sales growth for the company. We will soon launch a new catalogue of products dedicated exclusively to solving display problems in freezers and coolers, and we also are very active in the anti-theft area, developing fixtures to help solve these problems.

**In the months ahead, be on the look out for a special series from Trion showcasing custom shelf management solutions in Progressive Grocer.**

**To learn about Trion product offerings visit [www.triononline.com](http://www.triononline.com) or call toll free 800-444-4665.**