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USBuildersReview

Quietly improving indoor comfort
and control

The Unico System Inc.



EDITOR'S CHOICE

Quietly improving indoor comfort and control

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From the White House to Lincoln's Cottage, Harry Truman's private library to a range of national monuments, historic buildings and high-end homes, The Unico System Inc. (Unico) is quietly improving indoor comfort and control. Unico's small-duct, high velocity central heating and air conditioning system delivers superior comfort and control over traditional HVAC methods, all at a barely noticeable noise level of 3 decibels.

A perfect fit

At one-third the size of conventional systems, Unico easily fits into tight spaces and meets various design configurations and constraints, seamlessly integrating into new or existing structures.

"Unico can run horizontal or vertical without taking up all of the space traditional mechanical systems demand," explains Scott Intagliata, director of marketing for Unico. "Because of its size and flexibility, our system is used extensively in older architecture and historic buildings built before the advent of modern systems."

According to Intagliata, if someone has seen the TV show, 'This Old House,' chances are they have seen a Unico installation at work. "We've been in 22 'This Old House' projects and we're the only HVAC product endorsed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation," says Intagliata.





Unico's system is a quarter of the size of traditional HVAC ducts, allowing for easy installation in existing ceilings and wall cavities and is also more aesthetically appealing. "We offer wood, metal and other sustainable vents that can be used to match the home's aesthetics and integrated with the design and architectural integrity of any home," adds Intagliata.

Rapid expansion

St. Louis-based Unico has been perfecting its craft for more than 25 years. "The company was formed in 1985 by my parents, Joe and Sharon Intagliata," he continues. "My brother and father were major shareholders in the business, but in 1997 we made a total acquisition. Before the acquisition there were too many shareholders and things were not where they needed to be, but we knew the company had huge potential."

From 1997 to 2002, Unico grew by almost 1,000 percent. "In that five-year period, it was truly unbelievable the rate at which things took off," recalls Intagliata.

Intagliata says sales hit a wall in 2009 with the economy, but fortunately for Unico, a strong niche market kept the company in the game. "2009 was difficult, but there's always interest in high-end, custom and older home restorations," he says.

"People are always interested in great products and I think that never got lost."

Today, Unico has claimed more than 70 percent market share in this particular niche. "We have six competitors in North America, yet we maintain 70 percent market share," says Intagliata.

With 250,000 square feet of manufacturing space in St. Louis, Unico manufactures all components in-house. "We sell through a wholesale distribution network to trained installing contractors," says Intagliata. "We train our installers extensively both online and in person, and not just once but on an ongoing basis."

Unico's distribution network covers a great deal of ground, including all 50 states, Canada and 29 additional countries. "It's evolved over time – we've had some of our biggest sales and projects outside of the U.S.," says Intagliata.

Intagliata says Unico can maintain such standing, because it continuously goes above and beyond expectations. "It's what we do and we're good at bringing in complementary products and components," says Intagliata. "Unico's system is long-lasting, easy to install, highly efficient, aesthetically pleasing –



the list goes on and on, and there's a whole array of comfort and operational efficiency benefits to our product. Name the criteria and we've done what we can to meet and exceed it."

Raising the bar in efficiency

As Unico has proven time and time again, bigger isn't always better. Unico's smaller system – one-third of the size of traditional HVAC – uses high velocity, static pressure to deliver greater efficiency in a more compact unit. "Even though our fans and coils are more compact, they're richer and more tightly finned than other product coils," explains Intagliata.

"It's truly a feat of engineering," he adds. "They're smaller, but there's more surface area of coil." Without compromising comfort, Unico lowers humidity and moisture up to 30 percent by passing air over cooling coils at 24- to 26-degree temperature differential. By comparison, a traditional HVAC system can only reduce the temperature 15 to 17 degrees across the cooling coil.

And Unico does it all through quiet aspiration, generating a total noise level of less than 3 decibels at any outlet. "That's nearly nonexistent," says Intagliata.

A comfortable balance

Traditional HVAC systems "dump" air into the room, causing drafts and unevenly dispersed temperatures. Unico's air aspiration creates a gentle suction that draws the room air into its stream of air, creating an even, draft-free environment. This has the net effect of lowering the effective room temperature by 2 to 3 degrees. From room to room, floor to floor and floor to ceiling, the temperature differential is no greater than 2 degrees from where thermostat is set.

No matter the temperature or humidity outside, Unico delivers balanced indoor comfort. "Our seasonal energy efficiency ratio [SEER] is at 16.5 to 20, which is the highest of any product in the industry," says Intagliata.

Unico's industry-leading technology has drawn serious attention from the building community and the company has been selected as the HVAC choice supplier for the 2014 Greenbuild Living Home. "Our newest product, the iSeries, is going to be showcased at the Greenbuild International Conference and Expo," says Intagliata.

"The iSeries began when we started working with a European manufacturer two years ago on high efficiency outdoor units,"

continues Intagliata. “The single iSeries outdoor unit can support any combination of multiple indoor units. It’s an extremely efficient, high-end solution and there’s nothing like it on the market.”

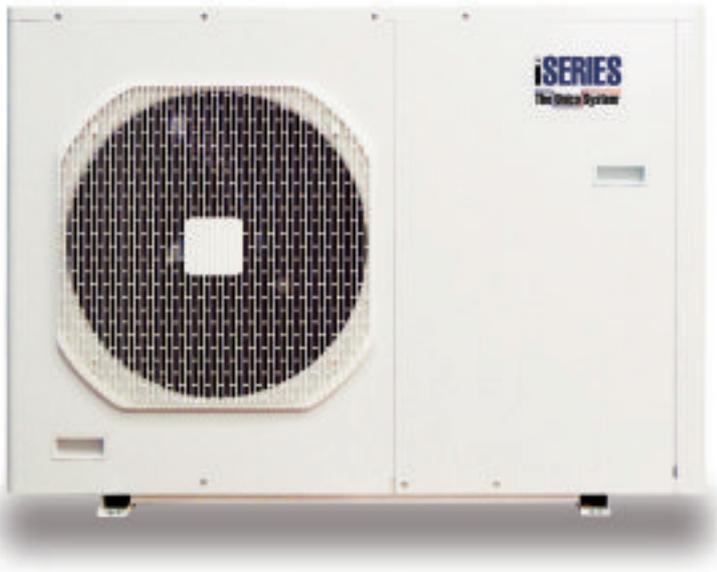
COMPANY AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED : 1985
DIRECTOR OF SALES & MARKETING: SCOTT INTAGLIATA
EMPLOYEES : 110

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Conventional systems always run at 100 percent, explains Intagliata, even if only 10 percent is needed. “The iSeries inverter outdoor unit matches the energy required to attain the desired temperature rather than running full out, using more energy,” he says. “We expect it will assist in obtaining LEED Platinum certifications.”

The Unico System Inc. continues to dominate the marketplace, saving money and energy while increasing comfort, 1 degree at a time.





THE UNICO SYSTEM INC.

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