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Ben B. Schwartz & Sons adds to its team of produce

professionals

By

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Ben B. Schwartz & Sons has seen a lot of success in recent years, and that has led to it adding to its team with the hiring of Ryan Elflin as the company's controller and AJ Grecco as director of transportation.

"We grew very significantly in the retail sector of our business, and we also landed one of the larger food distributors too," said Bill Loupée, chief operating officer for Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, headquartered in Detroit. "It was predominantly growth-driven and most of the product that we bring in is not delivered to us — we're procuring the truck and handling logistics ourselves. We have to do that because we do a lot of things that other companies don't, especially logistics-wise."

With fall here, the company is finishing its Michigan season and shifting to products from the southwest and Mexico. Among the produce items Ben B. Schwartz & Sons is dealing with this time of year are pomegranates, California grape varieties that Loupée described as "the best of the season," offshore blueberries and blackberries, and classic fall fruits such as apples and pears.

In regard to COVID-19, Loupée said the team at Ben B. Schwartz & Sons is cautiously optimistic, though challenges remain, including in Toronto, where restrictions have affected its ability to do business.

"This year, locally we've seen things start to return to normal as far as how the demand is distributed between retail, independent chains and foodservice," Loupée said. "Now we're seeing many of the national retailers that we sell to are having labor issues."

Labor is also affecting supermarkets, with Loupée observing that many supermarkets are dealing with skeleton crews and determining how to adapt to working with five employees when the workload would typically require 10 staffers.

"That labor shortage issue is causing problems for us because when they're running a skeleton crew, stores need to prioritize roles for their employees," he said. "Cash registers must be staffed and product must get on the shelves — however, efficient and accurate inventory replenishment gets pushed down the priority queue. All of our customers are doing the best they can with the staffing they have and it's a challenge for them."

With a staff that brings a wealth of experience and expertise, Ben B. Schwartz & Sons is dedicated to helping supermarkets dealing with these labor issues.

“One of the biggest things that we pride ourselves on is that we have much more of a partnership with our customers than just simply being a wholesaler that sells them product when they need it,” Loupée said. “That allows us to be a little more proactive with them and say, ‘I know at this time of year, these are items that you use a lot, and these are the volumes that you normally use, and we’re going to have them at a price that works for you, at a quality level that works for you, and deliver it timely.’ I think that helps to an extent because with the labor shortage issues and buyers taking on more duties than they had before, that type of partnership, I think, makes things easier for them and so we try to make it as easy on our customers as much as we can, that’s part of how customers can leverage our expertise.”

The company is also focused on its initiative to grow its business beyond Michigan and the Midwest. Loupée noted that the company is making cons deliveries to Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, Georgia, Arkansas and Texas.

“We have a stable and consistent customer base in Detroit, Cleveland, Columbus, Indiana, and Toronto and what we’ve found is that we can deliver to anybody within 1,000 miles within 24 hours,” he said. “It’s an agility that we have from having 24-hour staffing, from having our own trucks with an experienced logistics department and from having a constant supply of good products that a lot of other wholesaler distributors don’t have.”

All of that allows Ben B. Schwartz & Sons to fulfill the needs of its customers, both its long-term partners and its new customers as it builds on its business.

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