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NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2021

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# 30 HOW TO CONVERT EXISTING CUSTOMERS INTO REPEAT CUSTOMERS BY UTILIZING A CUSTOMER LOYALTY PROGRAM

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## A Return to In-Person Events

BY SCOTT STECKEL, PLUNKETT'S PEST CONTROL, INC.

As I write this message, I'm looking forward to attending PestWorld in Las Vegas and seeing many of you in person for the most anticipated industry event of the year. The 2021 PestWorld will be something special—a much-needed return to normalcy, set against the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas. We'll have the usual top-notch line up, with insightful keynote speakers and helpful education sessions, as well as ample networking opportunities—which, to me, will be the highlight of the show. It will be fantastic to see our industry gather together once again and make beneficial connections.

After PestWorld, there are two more NPMA events taking place before we close out 2021. The Women's Forum, to be held on November 29-December 1 in San Diego, will promote the advancement of women in the pest management industry. The goal is to empower female leaders and their male counterparts while also inspiring our businesses. This three-day event will focus on networking and leadership development, providing an open dialogue for discussion.

Then, on December 6-8, BIZTECH will be held in Championsgate, Florida. BIZTECH will get you up-to-speed on the latest technology and business trends, including the changing business landscape, project management tools, marketing on social media, digital scorecards, recruitment and retention, automation and more. The show will also feature a product showcase and a vendor showcase in speed-dating format, as well as more networking opportunities—you won't want to miss it.

Be sure to stay tuned to [nmpapestworld.org](http://nmpapestworld.org) for more information on these events and the winter meetings coming up quickly in early 2022. We have exciting things planned for 2022!

As we close out the year, I would like to give thanks to our Strategic Partners for their continued support and commitment to NPMA and the industry in 2021. The continual efforts of these companies, and the membership as a whole, will help us navigate the new business landscape we're all facing. 2022 looks bright for the pest management industry! •

“Be sure to stay tuned to [nmpapestworld.org](http://nmpapestworld.org) for more information on these events and the winter meetings coming up quickly in early 2022. We have exciting things planned for 2022!”

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# EXCELLENT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IS A TEAM GOAL



Every employee interaction  
with customers is critical

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

## KEY TAKEAWAYS



- There is more to a great experience than just eliminating pests—also ensure you have fast response times, pleasant interactions with employees and a consistent experience at all contacts with the company.
- When customer reviews are included in metrics, don't just stop at reporting the number of positive versus negative reviews.
- Pretend you're a customer—go to your website and see how easily you can find information or schedule services.
- A key to identifying opportunities to improve is to understand each step of the customer's journey, from the initial call to the completion of service.
- Encourage employees to go the extra mile to provide incredible customer service.

## "HOW IS TINKERBELL DOING?"

This one question—asked of a customer when a Rottler Pest Solutions employee called to schedule service—made the customer's day. The pest control company was asking about the wellbeing of the customer's 50-pound Rottweiler—but it also showcases the type of customer experience the company strives to provide.

The family-owned, soon-to-be third generation business has 220 employees, of which 130 are field technicians. The company's definition of an excellent customer experience is



“We celebrate our accolades and evaluate our negative feedback to discover how we could have made the customer’s experience better.”

—ASHLEY HEAVRIN, DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, ROTTLER PEST SOLUTIONS

simple, says Ashley Heavrin, director of customer experience. “They call us because they have a problem, and we are the experts who can solve that problem,” she says. “When we are at their home that day or the next, and we take care of the problem, they are happy with their experience.”

But there is more to a great experience than just eliminating pests, admits Heavrin. Making sure they deliver the value they promise—fast response, pleasant interactions with employees and a consistent experience with all contacts at the company—are

important, she adds. “We are big on metrics and measure all aspects of our customer interactions,” she says. The data is displayed in scorecards that are reviewed by the executive team and shared with mid-level managers in all weekly meetings. Managers take the information back to their techs in their meetings.

“We celebrate our accolades and evaluate our negative feedback to discover how we could have made the customer’s experience better,” says Heavrin. Some of the key metrics for Rottler are:

- Time to answer phone calls—the goal is within 30 seconds
- Time to service after initial call—the goal is within 24 hours
- Number of callbacks
- Customer reviews

When customer reviews are included in metrics, don’t just stop at reporting the number of positive versus negative reviews, recommends Heavrin. “I take about 45 minutes each day to read every customer review because sometimes a positive review also mentions something that would have further improved the experience,” she says.

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Throughout 2020, customers were not meeting technicians in person when they arrived onsite, so Heavrin noticed a trend within positive comments that indicated a desire to see what the tech found. “Based on these trends, we are starting to have techs take photos and share them with customers,” she says. The company is also making some database changes to support storage of the photos for a period of time so techs can review them at subsequent visits.

Just sharing photos with customers is already having a positive effect, says Heavrin. A recent review from a customer with a wasp problem: “Chad made the whole experience worth it even when I’m all the way in Minnesota and my wife was at work. He sniffed out the issue we were having with the wasp, identified where they were coming from and went to work. Sending pictures of confirmation and his communication was with the upmost respect. I recommend this company to anyone having any insect issue. Very professional and yet makes you feel comfortable that things will be ok.”

In addition to carefully reading customer reviews and tracking trends, become a customer, suggests Heavrin. “Go to your website and see how easily you can find information on services or scheduling,” she says. “Also, ask your employees for feedback because they know what customers are asking for and what they need in order to help customers.”

Heavrin has found that Rottler customers “love their techs.” Every effort is made to keep technicians with the same customers and to make sure that customers know the name and receive a photo of the tech before their arrival. “We also encourage our techs to go above and beyond when possible, which strengthens our relationship with the customer and improves their experience,” she says. Examples of excellent service include changing a light bulb when the tech notices a burned-out light in a basement they are inspecting or bringing a trash can up to the house. “We also ask techs to include notes in the customer file that help every Rottler employee personalize our interactions with the customers,” she adds. “That’s how we know one of our customers has a very large dog named Tinkerbell!”

### **CUSTOMERS ARE THE REASON FOR THE BUSINESS**

When Andrew Richardson started Edge Pest Control 13 years ago, it was easy to evaluate a customer’s experience and take steps to



ensure that it was an excellent experience.

“It was just me and my truck,” explains Richardson, founder and CEO of Edge. “The challenge is maintaining an excellent, consistent experience as a company grows,” he says. Edge has grown from one person and one truck in Colorado to 19 locations as far west as Portland, Oregon and as far east as Chicago, Illinois. The company serves 110,000 customers with nearly 600 employees.

His company’s growth and continued success is a simple philosophy that “the customer is the reason for the business.” Richardson explains, “We are here to take care of the customer, not complete a set of tasks, provide a product or make a sale.” While every department interacts with customers differently and has a different perspective on the customer experience, everyone’s role affects our ability to take care of the customer’s needs, he adds.

“A couple of years ago, we had some new vehicles delivered, but there was a delay in getting the vehicles registered and licensed,” says



Smith. “We were able to use this situation as a real-life example of how the delay impacted our service specialists who needed the vehicles and customers who needed services.”

“We meet weekly with leaders at all levels to review our customers’ experience,” says Mitch Smith, COO of Edge. “When a customer has a bad experience, we look at our processes to find out what we could have done to prevent the bad experience.”

A key to identifying opportunities to improve is to understand each step of the customer’s journey, from the initial call to the completion of service. One of the more



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-John, Facility Manager

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common errors made in customer service relationships is the transfer of a customer from one department to another to resolve a problem. Smith says that they want customers to know that if they are talking with an employee in the billing department and mention that they still have a problem, they will finish the call with the reassurance that “Edge will take care of this.” In this example, the billing department employee has the authority to reach out to service to schedule the follow-up visit—requiring no transfer of the customer from one department to another.

Training, CEO talks and regular meetings always discuss the importance of everyone owning responsibility for customer service, says Richardson. “Because the goal is to provide an excellent customer experience, we pay attention to handoffs from one area to another,” he says. “For that reason, we have overlapping responsibilities for different roles.” For example, sales personnel are not just evaluated on sales but also on whether or not the service was completed. “The service specialists are also responsible for completion of service, but we want our sales staff to understand their responsibility as well.”

An excellent example of an Edge employee taking responsibility for the customer is the story of one service specialist who showed up to perform a service at a customer’s home. It was a rural area in the midst of snow country after a significant snowfall. “He was able to get his truck to within one mile of the customer’s home and could go no further,” says Richardson. “He grabbed his equipment and walked to the house.” Needless to say, this employee won employee of the month, he adds. “The employee said he did not want to have to call and tell the customer to reschedule because a delay was not what was promised to them.” ●

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# HITTING SALES TARGETS



## The pandemic shifted sales tactics, particularly in the commercial market

BY CATHY LANDRY

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Employing technology to generate sales is increasingly important—but so is knowing your market.
- Adding a “preferred method of notification” option allows you to customize your communication to clients.
- It’s more important than ever to establish a strong digital preference.
- While digital marketing is on the rise, don’t abandon traditional types of marketing.
- Embracing technology communication methods is key—look for innovative tools to reach customers.



**COVID-19 PRESENTED CHALLENGES TO ALL INDUSTRIES IN** the past year and a half, and the pest management industry was no exception. But while commercial sales dropped and the costs of goods and services rose, the residential sales market grew, according to two pest control executives.

“Residential sales have been excellent,” said Jeff King, president of The Pest Rangers, a family-owned pest control company serving northeast Pennsylvania. “On the other side, the commercial business has presented quite a challenge.”

King noted that it seemed like “everyone locked their doors and restricted visitors” during the pandemic, making sales calls an uphill

struggle. “We got used to the term gatekeepers. If customers had a provider in place, they wouldn’t even take a meeting.”

Bug Busters Chief Executive Officer Court Parker agreed. “Managers weren’t on property during the height of the pandemic, so it was almost impossible to reach them. There was nobody there to talk to,” he said.

The lack of access to commercial decision-makers caused The Pest Rangers to shift strategies and move more toward email sales pitches. “Before the pandemic, commercial sales were all about phone calls,” he said. “It was unusual to have someone respond to an email. Perhaps because many were working from home, clients were more apt and quicker to reply to emails.”

Both Bug Busters, which serves the Georgia and Tennessee market, and The Pest Rangers saw residential sales grow during the pandemic period. “It could be that people are home all the time and noticed pests more or because they wanted to spend more time outside, and desired a more pleasant environment, with fewer mosquitos and other bugs, but it’s been very easy to sell services,” King said.

“The way clients purchase and seek services was changing before the pandemic, and that change solidified during COVID,” Parker said. “Maybe it was because they were at home on their computers all day, but we saw a lot more electronic activity during the period—people using the chat function or simply exploring the website,” he said.

King agreed, adding, “Today, there is far more activity online or by text. I think some of this is generational. Younger people don’t like to

“Today, there is far more activity online or by text. I think some of this is generational. Younger people don’t like to pick up the phone. For many of them, they don’t want to interact at all, except with the technician.”

—JEFF KING, PRESIDENT,  
THE PEST RANGERS



pick up the phone. For many of them, they don’t want to interact at all, except with the technician.”

Both companies said employing technology to generate sales is increasingly important. “We use every tool we can,” Parker said. “Even before COVID, we accepted all forms of communications, including emails, chats and text. The company even had a shopping cart on its website for a while. “That didn’t work so well for us,” he said. Still, when Bug Busters unveils its revamped website early next year, the shopping cart will return. “Seven years ago, customers weren’t ready for the shopping cart. It wasn’t a good return on investment then,” Parker said. “But a lot has changed in the past years, and it may be now.”

Still, knowing your market is important, Parker said. “I still think a high percentage of customers want to talk to us,” he said. But some of that depends on where you live. “Our customers in Atlanta are probably going to have a greater comfort level going to our website and using the chat function,” he said. “Some of our other markets are not as online and not as comfortable.”

Bug Busters routinely calls customers to close sales. “While we may get initial contact via email or through the chat function, we will call them to talk about their specific needs,” he said.

The Pest Rangers recently added a “preferred method of notification” option to its website and in its emails, and “it’s clear that our clients want a text or email,” King said. The company has also added additional payment options, allowing customers more options for contactless

payments. “The easier it is for customers to pay, the quicker you get your payments,” he added.

Even before COVID, both companies shifted their strategy to incorporate more digital marketing to spur sales. “We are constantly branding and marketing ourselves,” Bug Buster’s Parker said, noting that the company is active on most social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn and YouTube. “We also have a major referral program. Budgets for marketing are certainly going up. We are always looking for ways to differentiate ourselves, and make the phone ring,” Parker added.

King said The Pest Rangers also has established a strong digital presence. “In the past decade, we realized that people were spending a lot more time online, we wanted to find new ways to reach them,” he said. The trend has accelerated during the pandemic, with The Pest Rangers using some innovative marketing to reach customers.

During COVID-19, the company focused its digital marketing to target customers of products like hair coloring and tanning solutions—services that were difficult to access during lockdown, King said. The Pest Rangers also added video to its digital advertising offerings. “We made a big push on YouTube,” with videos explaining services, answering common questions and explaining how to sign contracts digitally, he said. Videos were also included on the website and other landing pages, King added.

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That doesn't mean that The Pest Rangers abandoned more traditional types of advertising. The company still relies on one of the simplest and cheapest methods to potential clients—the billboard. But the company does it with a twist. "Our billboard ads aren't pest control related," King explained. "Instead, we do more community ads." For example, The Pest Rangers ran a billboard advertisement asking drivers not to litter. "Don't be a litterbug," the billboard said, adding a #keep309clean hashtag. Route 309 traverses the company's service area. The company also will use emojis on billboards to intrigue potential customers enough to research the company.

"I really believe in ads with lots of white space or ads that draw people in," King said. "We don't put our website or telephone number, just our company name. We do short, sweet and bold." While some question the strategy, King says it works, adding that he got the idea after visiting Yankee Stadium. "I'd find myself Googling ads that didn't include phone numbers. That tells me that the company got what it paid for."

While digital is the primary marketing push for Bug Busters, Parker said the company also continues to use tried-and-true, traditional methods. "We were always one for community

**“Do customers have more access to technology? Sure. Do we use that? Absolutely. But when it comes right down to it, it's about customer relations and providing top-notch service.”**

—COURT PARKER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, BUG BUSTERS

participation—sponsoring youth organizations, community events, car shows or showing up at a local farmers' market," he said. "Of course, we couldn't do as much of that this past year, but we still think it's incredibly important."

Technology is vital, they agree. "If companies hadn't embraced technology, if they didn't use updated CRMs [customer relationship management technology] or try digital advertising and new technologies, they probably struggled this past year," King said. "COVID-19 made clear that technology is necessary. You can't just use a pen and paper anymore. You must make it easy for people to do business. We always must look for innovative tools to reach customers."

Parker added: "It doesn't matter if it's for advertising and customer outreach or

for operations, like using drones and cameras, technology is part of the industry." Still, in many ways, the pest management industry hasn't changed all that much in the past 50 years. "It's always been about having a great team, hiring the best people and making sure you have a strong company culture," Parker said. "Do customers have more access to technology? Sure. Do we use that? Absolutely. But when it comes right down to it, it's about customer relations and providing top-notch service. That's what it's always been, and I believe it's what's most important today and will be in the future." ●



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# MANDATORY VACCINATIONS

Should you require your employees to get a COVID-19 vaccination?

BY SANDY SMITH

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**LET'S GET THE BIG QUESTION OUT OF** the way first: Can an employer mandate that employees be vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus?

Sandy Seay, who is retained by NPMA to provide human resources management for member companies, offers an unequivocal “yes.”

“It is perfectly permissible to require employees to be vaccinated,” Seay said. “The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has already issued a position statement on that.”

Seay is quick to point out that there are exemptions, such as a religious objection or a physical condition that prohibits the vaccine, though some states may have removed one or both exclusions. It is best to check with local authorities.

But with that big question answered, many more remain. Just because a company can, doesn't mean they should—at least not with a hammer, Seay said.

“Most of my clients would like to have all of their employees vaccinated. That's the goal and what most of them wanted to do,” he said. “Some have made it mandatory. Nobody's called me and said, ‘Someone quit today because they don't want to take the vaccine.’”

But there is a step before the mandates come. “It would seem better to use powers of persuasion,” Seay said. “You can tell them, ‘It's healthy for you and the people around you.’ Or, ‘Customers are requiring it or demanding it.’ That will take you a long way.”

In the early days of the vaccine push, some companies—as well as states—used the “carrot” approach and those incentives should not be shelved, Seay believes. “I'm seeing more and more employers who are giving bonuses or extra incentives like an extra day or two of paid time off. Those are the two that I'm seeing the most. A gift card to dinner out doesn't seem to work as well.”

Using an incentive instead of a requirement can be far more successful—both in the short and long term—as mandates. Some employers have offered a “disincentive,” such as higher costs for health insurance. Seay warns against those, however.

“Incentives like that will get you a long way down the road, and it will identify those who are pushing back,” Seay said. “Meet with them individually; that will get you further. If you have a handful of employees who still won't take the vaccine, you can make the vaccine a condition of employment if you so choose, but that's probably not the best alternative. What I'm seeing in most cases is an employer requiring a mask if you're not vaccinated, along with a weekly COVID test.”

So, what's an employer's responsibility on that last point? “If you require an employee to be tested, you have to pay for the time spent taking the test, but not the test itself,” Seay said. “It would be better if you did pay for the test, but companies are not required to. If an employee has to go home to await the test results, or they have to quarantine, that is not compensable work time. But the time waiting in line for the test and for the test to be conducted is paid time.”

While Seay believes some customers have come to expect that their technician is vaccinated, it shouldn't be a marketing tool. “That gets into privacy issues and HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) issues. If the customer asks to have a vaccinated employee come, you can send a vaccinated employee.”

Customer comfort can also be used to convince hesitant employees to get the vaccine, he said.

But ultimately, Seay believes the most persuasive tactic will be an open and honest conversation.

“Most of my clients would like to **have all of their employees vaccinated.** That's the goal and what most of them wanted to do. **Some have made it mandatory.** Nobody's called me and said, ‘Someone quit today because they don't want to take the vaccine.’”

—SANDY SEAY, PRESIDENT, SEAY MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

“Whenever there is a void, people tend to fill that with negative thoughts. Most pest companies are small and family owned. You can easily gather your employees and have a conversation.”

He recommends bringing all the team members together to discuss the vaccine well before it's mandated. “Explain that it's something we're all facing and that customers are asking for it. Then tell them, ‘We'd like you to be vaccinated. How do you feel about that?’ Just have an informal conversation about it. That projects good faith and gives employees the chance to look you square in the eye and ask any questions or offer any concerns.”

Asking employees how they feel about the company requiring vaccinations will generate some discussions. “But it also will put some peer pressure on. If you've got 25 employees and 23 are vaccinated, they're going to put some pressure on the other two.”

Once a company has decided to mandate vaccines, Seay suggests writing a formal policy, tacking it to the bulletin board and sending a notice out to each employee informing them of the new policy. Be sure to include an effective date.

Seay said a company can ask—but not require—that an employee show documentation of vaccination status. But don't save a copy of that anywhere, he said, since personal health information must be guarded carefully.

The decision to require vaccines is not an easy one, but it is one that many company owners are facing. Seay believes there are many more successful tactics to try first. ●

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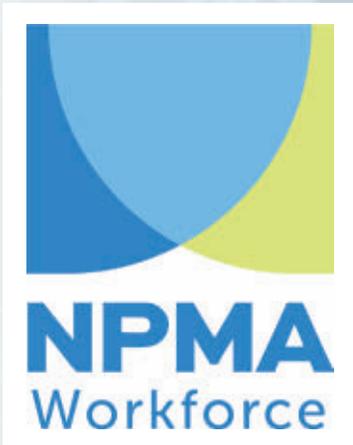
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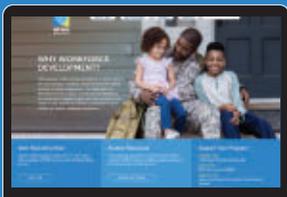
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# PEST CONTROL RISK MANAGEMENT: REDUCE COSTS BY PREVENTING SLIP AND FALLS

BY GARY SHAPIRO, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, WEISBURGER INSURANCE BROKERAGE

**MAINTAINING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IS AN ESSENTIAL** element of pest control risk management. In addition to pesticide exposure, reckless driving and other serious breaches of company safety standards, an often-overlooked on-the-job injury among pest control technicians is inadvertent slip and falls. In fact, these are among the costliest and most common workplace accidents across all industries, accounting for 35% of incidents and 65% of lost workdays, according to the National Safety Council. The good news is that most slip and falls in the workplace (or on jobsites) are preventable.

### SLIP AND FALL INJURIES ARE COSTLY

Investing in employee education on preventing slip and fall hazards and ingraining safety best practices into your workplace's culture can lead to substantial long-term cost savings. Consider that the average cost of a typical slip and fall injury is \$20,000, while the cost to defend a slip and fall claim is \$50,000.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, an employee misses an average of 38 work days<sup>2</sup> with a slip-related injury, costing your organization in lost productivity while driving up your insurance costs.

### PREVENTION BEST PRACTICES

**Off-premise technician risks**—Training your technicians to do a quick assessment of the worksite upon arrival can prevent many slip

or trip hazards. Uneven ground, obstacles that are in the path of travel, slippery footing areas, inclines or level changes are all top hazards to be identified during the assessment upon arrival.

**Workplace and work process design**—Designing your space and processes to prevent potential exposure to hazards will keep your employees safe while reducing your potential liability and costs.

**Good housekeeping**—Maintaining work areas free of clutter and obstacles will greatly reduce hazards and exposure to accidents. Good housekeeping should start at the top and filter throughout the organization. Safeguarding cleanliness and organization in your company will ensure accountability and send a message to your employees that management is committed to a secure environment. Instilling this behavior within the culture of your business will allow it to become second nature to your employees.

**Detailed incident reporting**—If an accident does occur despite your best efforts, an immediate response is necessary. Document exactly what occurred, including who was involved and where, why and how it happened. Learning the details of an incident is useful for detecting trends and can be used to put measures into place to prevent recurrences. Additionally, taking a detailed account of the accident will reduce the likelihood of fraud, which can save you and your business additional dollars and headaches.

“Investing in employee education on preventing slip and fall hazards and ingraining safety best practices into your workplace’s culture can lead to substantial long-term cost savings.”

Slip and falls are a serious issue that can cause substantial financial damage to your pest control operation. Effective inspection, maintenance and housekeeping policies and procedures are critical elements of prevention. Embedding safety training and education efforts into your culture, setting a positive example and holding employees accountable can make a significant impact. •

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1-2: Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, “Preventing Slips, Trips and Falls in the Workplace,” accessed at <https://carleton.ca/ehs/wp-content/uploads/slip-preventionWSIB2130A.pdf>

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# A HOT TOPIC

## Among BAKERS



### NPMA Commercial Committee delivers a presentation to AIB International on electronic pest monitoring

BY NICK FORTUNA

Food manufacturers and the pest-management companies they rely upon have a new tool for ensuring food safety as part of an integrated pest-management strategy. That was the message delivered in June by the NPMA Commercial Committee, which was invited to give a presentation on electronic pest monitoring to AIB International.

AIB International, formerly known as the American Institute of Baking, held a training seminar for food-safety auditors at its Manhattan, Kan., headquarters in June, and members of the NPMA Commercial Committee attended to represent the industry.

More than 50 food-safety auditors from the United States, India, China, England and the European Union attended the NPMA presentation, which featured a one-hour overview of electronic-monitoring systems followed by a 30-minute question-and-answer session.

"It was an excellent meeting," said Dusana Bondy, quality assurance auditor for Abell Pest Control and chair of the NPMA Commercial Committee. "It's an emerging technology and an incredible tool that can track and trace pest activity and trigger early detection, but it doesn't replace the inspection process."

Bondy said it's important for the NPMA to conduct outreach and educate third-party auditing groups like AIB International, British Retail Consortium and Safe Quality Food Program. Those entities set the standards by which food manufacturers and pest-management companies are audited, so it's vital for the NPMA to represent the industry in front of those groups, she said.

"For food manufacturers and processing facilities, passing these food-safety audits is paramount, so we need to make sure that these auditors understand electronic

“For food manufacturers and processing facilities, passing these food-safety audits is paramount, so we need to make sure that these auditors understand electronic monitoring, because they’re the ones who will be writing standards for the industry.”

—DUSANA BONDY, QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDITOR, ABELL PEST CONTROL

monitoring, because they're the ones who will be writing standards for the industry," Bondy said. "As pest-control providers, we report data in the format we do to satisfy these external auditors, so this is another excellent way to do just that."

The presentation featured an in-depth overview of the current status and future capabilities of electronic-monitoring systems, including online dashboards that track ant, fly, roach and rodent activity. Electronic monitoring can help food manufacturers track the frequency and location of pest activity, providing detailed information such as the direction in which pests entered traps, so that they can take corrective action right away.

By combining improved root-cause analysis with predictive analytics, food manufacturers can target their pest-management efforts to the highest-priority areas in and around their facilities.

One of the main concerns surrounding electronic monitoring is cybersecurity. A breach by hackers could expose a brand to embarrassment and reputational loss if customers come to believe that its food is unsafe. Bondy said the NPMA Commercial Committee emphasized to attendees that providers of electronic-monitoring systems take this risk

seriously and have built cybersecurity measures into their platforms.

Tom Jarzynka, senior director of pest prevention quality assurance for Massey Services Inc. and an NPMA Commercial Committee member, said attendees seemed to have a good working knowledge of technological advances in the pest-control industry, and they were grateful to have a partnership with the NPMA.

"As an industry, we will continue to offer new tools and educate customers and auditors on how they work," he said. "As these new tools come online, we'll instill confidence and awareness that we're moving forward with the established expectations for these audited accounts. We'll actually be in a position to provide a higher level of service and better information.

"The pest-control provider is being measured by these third-party auditors as an extension of the food-manufacturing facility and their ability to provide safe, sound food. Using data collection such as electronic monitoring can enhance the performance of the pest-control industry and our ability to support the customer in meeting their goal, which is providing safe food, so our interests are aligned." ●

# How to Convert Existing Customers into Repeat Customers by Utilizing a Customer Loyalty Program

BY CINDY MANNES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PPMA



In today's competitive business environment, companies large and small are all working to determine ways they can effectively acquire and retain loyal customers who will continue to choose their products and services over the long haul. But, why does loyalty matter? For starters, they tend to spend more. According to Forbes.com, 57% of consumers will spend more money with companies to which they are loyal—and this can include pest control companies. But capturing customer

loyalty can be easier said than done. Businesses must first prove they are trustworthy and demonstrate that they genuinely care about their customers. They also need to communicate appreciation and that loyalty will ultimately be rewarded.

A customer loyalty program is a marketing approach many businesses use to reward customers who purchase or engage with their brand on a frequent and recurring basis. In fact, Forbes.com also reports that as many as

90% of companies have some type of loyalty program in place and that 75% of consumers say they are likely to make another purchase after receiving an incentive. Some examples of the benefits offered by such a program include free merchandise, discounted services, rewards and coupons.

#### **BENEFITS ABOUND**

While you may be wary at first at the prospect of giving away complimentary or discounted



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“While you may be wary at first at the prospect of giving away complimentary or discounted services, remember that **loyalty programs come with a multitude of benefits** for your pest control company.”

for a reliable pest control partner and positive online reviews. And we know through 2021 consumer research commissioned by the Professional Pest Management Alliance that word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most effective ways people make decisions about purchasing pest control services.

A loyalty program will also help with customer retention. Today's customers are more likely to purchase from a company that they believe has similarly shared values or one that they have had a positive experience with over a company that simply offers the lowest price.

While a loyalty program will help you retain customers, it can also serve as an enticing benefit for new prospects. If you are trying to attract a new customer that will sign up for recurring routine service, a loyalty program that offers a discount on every fourth quarterly visit can appeal to and attract committed customers.

#### READY TO LAUNCH

Launching a customer loyalty program may at first seem like a daunting task, but rest assured that you are not alone. In fact, Entrepreneur.com reports nearly seven in 10 out of all small businesses (66%) don't have one in place; however, there are simple and easy ways to get started.

While your mind may immediately go to those “buy nine get the tenth free” frozen yogurt punch cards when you think of loyalty programs, it is actually quite possible to implement and track your loyalty program in a more sophisticated way through most digital payment processing systems. They often have the ability to create a digital rewards program that will apply loyalty points to an account for each purchase made. Contacting your current payment processing partner to learn more is a great place to start when launching your loyalty program.

#### ENHANCE YOUR LOYALTY PROGRAM WITH DIGITAL

In this day and age, it is imperative that your loyalty program has a digital component. Email marketing is an excellent way for small

businesses to contact their customers about their loyalty program rewards. According to HubSpot.com, 99% of email users check their inbox every day, with some checking 20 times a day. You can implement an email campaign by sending a message to loyalty program members at the start of peak pest season to remind them to schedule their next treatment and offer a small discount if they schedule within the next 72 hours. Additionally, you can send reminder emails to customers when they have points or a reward to use.

#### SPREADING THE NEWS

Once your loyalty program is up and running, it is time to share the exciting news with your pest control customers. To start, ensure all your employees, from customer service reps to technicians, are briefed on the loyalty program and its benefits so they can encourage customers to join during their regular pest inspections and treatments. Be sure your website is up-to-date by adding a page detailing the new loyalty program and encouraging customers to call and ask how to sign up. As mentioned above, email marketing is a great way to reach your audience. Set up an email campaign to announce the new program and detail how customers can get started and begin accruing rewards. And of course, post the news on social media. Your engaged customers can share your post with friends in their networks for that excellent word-of-mouth marketing.

While loyalty programs are a tried-and-true way to cost effectively attract and retain customers by offering benefits in return for their purchases, it is important to remember that nothing beats top-notch customer service and effective treatments. Be sure your company's loyalty program is complimented by exceptional service as satisfied customers will be more inclined to sign up for the loyalty program and encourage their friends to do so as well. Implementing a loyalty program model will certainly require some work to get started, but your business will reap the benefits in time. ●

services, remember that loyalty programs come with a multitude of benefits for your pest control company. According to Salesforce, members of customer loyalty programs typically spend up to 18% more than other customers. It is also more cost-effective for businesses to retain happy customers than it is to acquire new ones. Happy, repeat customers are also excellent brand ambassadors, helping you to reach new prospects through recommendations to friends who are looking

# CUSTOMER SERVICE at the Core

BY GRIFFIN VOLTSMANN, CERTIFICATION MANAGER, QUALITYPRO



**W**ant your company to stand out from the rest? Ensure customer service is part of the foundation of every role in your company. In a service industry like ours, the only thing that matters is that we've made our customer's life easier. As we remind all QualityPro technicians in the first chapter of the training manual, two-thirds of customers who quit doing business with a company do so because of an attitude of indifference from a company representative. Every employee is at the front lines, actively determining whether customers will continue or quit doing business with your company. At

QualityPro, we help set companies apart. In addition to HR support, we give companies the tools necessary to give their customers the best experience possible. We sat down recently with Garrett Thrasher, vice president and general manager of Thrasher Termite & Pest Control of So Cal, Inc., to discuss how QualityPro accreditation influenced their customer service program.

## **BUILD CUSTOMER SERVICE FROM THE INSIDE OUT**

"There is a direct line between a well-run company and satisfied customers," Garrett

said, "There is even a stronger connection between a well-managed workforce and customers who become advocates for your business."

The first thing Garrett impressed upon us was the role that a systematic, consistent approach to every aspect of business operations had on positive customer service outcomes. "Chaos in the office breeds chaos in the field," said Garrett. Ensuring business operations follow best-practices and that all processes are documented, including how to escalate customer issues, the Thrasher team



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“Our advice is always to ensure constant, clear and accurate communication between your company and each customer at all stages of providing service.”

want them to treat others. It’s that simple,” said Garrett.

Focusing on quality in customer service is a process that touches every other aspect of operations, and focusing on quality in every aspect of business will ensure a better outcome for customers. Garrett emphasized how easily the QualityPro’s standards helped plug gaps in Thrasher’s processes and ensure that consistent level of quality, and that the customer service chapter of the QualityPro training manual has been made required reading for all employees, not just technicians. Rather than simply studying to pass the QualityPro training exam, Thrasher’s safety and training department incorporates QualityPro training materials into all their modules, including their phone etiquette training for CSRs, making sure that service practices are standardized across the board.

#### MAINTAINING STANDARDS

“We find that you can’t just give the customer service message once, in one format, and expect traction. Build a culture of customer service and then work it.”

It’s not enough simply to train employees for customer service once and hope that company culture will keep standards up on its own, and Thrasher has taken proactive steps to ensure the standards they set are kept up in the long term. Garrett described a pattern of continuous reiteration of customer service principles—bringing up customer service in department meetings, playing out roleplay scenarios where participants must demonstrate customer service principles to pass the challenge, and routine public citation of employees who’ve gone above and beyond. He told about a customer who mentioned that a technician had brought their garbage can up to the house from the street. Garrett sent a company-wide message praising the technician by name. “Other staff responded with ‘I pick up the newspaper too!’ Because of our culture of customer service, our team happily tried to one-up each other with how they went above and beyond for customers. As a manager, you can’t ask for better proof that what you are doing is working.”

#### CUSTOMER SERVICE AND QUALITYPRO

QualityPro dedicates the first chapter of its study materials purely to customer service best practices, and acknowledges the foundational role customer service plays in a business’ success. Staff that pass our national exam have had to answer questions related to customer service—one thing that sets the QualityPro exam apart from state licensing exams. In addition, companies must detail their customer communication process for a service as part of the QualityPro application.

Our advice is always to ensure constant, clear and accurate communication between your company and each customer at all stages of providing service. Thrasher’s policy, as a QualityPro accredited company, is to allow staff “the time to clearly set expectations and document any promises made to the customer,” and Garrett continued to emphasize how important “consistent communication” is to the perception of a business. The majority of customer service issues result from miscommunication, or the misalignment of a company’s offered services and how those services are explained to customers in the field.

Customer service is a skill that must be practiced and perfected at every level of a company, at every stage of an employee’s development. QualityPro’s training materials and management resources offer guidance and structure every step of the way, and the proof is in the way customers report positive interactions with QualityPro companies. Take time to review your company’s policies and determine if QualityPro’s resources might be a better way to ensure consistency and professionalism. ●

*QualityPro is administered by the Foundation for Professional Pest Management, an independent organization that has been developing good business practices and standards since 2004. Designed specifically for pest management companies in the U.S. and Canada, we are proud to certify over 500 of the best companies in the pest management industry. QualityPro is endorsed by the National Pest Management Association (NPMA). For more information, contact us at [QualityPro@pestworld.org](mailto:QualityPro@pestworld.org).*

has the stability to get things right even in the hectic world of pest control.

The other essential of customer service is spending as much focus on “people operations as on business operations.” Thrasher’s explicit philosophy is that customer service starts with how management treats employees. Staff who are treated with dignity, respect and an attitude of seeking solutions take that same energy and direct it outward. “We expect our staff to treat all customers like a neighbor, with friendliness and courtesy. We treat our staff the way we

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BY BRITTANY CAMPBELL, PH.D., BCE, DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES, NPMA

**Q** I have a customer at a residential home who is finding a lot of what I think are stored product pest beetles around the exterior brick wall. The customer lives right next door to poultry houses. I'm not used to encountering this pest outdoors—do you have any recommendations?

**A** You may be dealing with lesser mealworm beetles, *Alphitobius diaperinus*, which is a common pest in poultry houses. These beetles are reddish brown in color and about 6-7 mm in length. They feed on grain and also will feed on animal protein sources and fungus. The beetles are often found in large numbers in manure and litter inside poultry houses. The larvae can bore into wood and insulation to pupate but are not known to cause significant damage to structures.

Often, when the beetles become a huge nuisance around a home, it is a product of the chicken houses doing a cleanout and spreading the manure around fields, which causes the beetles to disperse. The adult beetles are nocturnal and are attracted to lights at night, so I would recommend that the homeowners keep their lights off when possible. You may also suggest a perimeter application of an appropriately labeled insecticide around the foundation of the home to prevent the beetles from entering.

**Q** I found a very large wasp with a long tail in a basement that was near a wood pile. Any idea what it could be?

**A** The description of a long-tailed wasp instantly makes me think it's probably a wood wasp, also referred to as a horntail. Additionally, since the wasp was found near a woodpile, this would make sense because these wasps bore into wood of dead or dying trees. While the "tail" seems intimidating to many people because they think it's a stinger, on the female, it's actually the appendage they use to bore into wood to lay their eggs. These wasps do not sting and are not harmful to humans. The wasp was probably brought into the home in the



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woodpile, but the customer doesn't need to worry because they won't reinfest any furniture or wood inside the home. Wood wasps do not bore into finished or treated lumber. My only recommendation would be to keep the wood pile outdoors instead of inside the basement to prevent bringing in any other unwanted insects into the home. Also, encourage the wood pile to be stacked several feet from the home so the wood doesn't act as an access point for termites or other wood-boring insects.

**Q** I have a customer that is very paranoid about powder post beetles. We are going to do a treatment using borates but he feels that he will need yearly or bi-annual treatments. I suggested that treating multiple times might be overkill and to do an inspection instead. Is that a good recommendation?

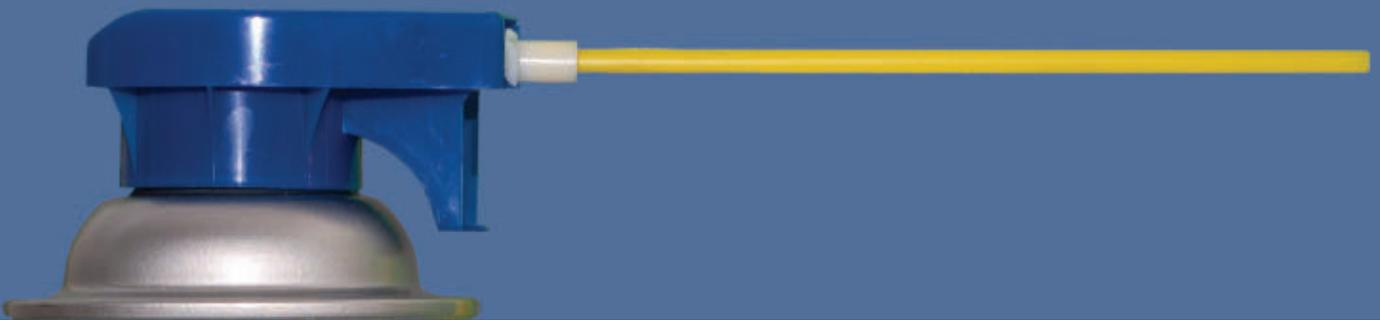
**A** I agree with your assessment. A follow up treatment for powder post beetles should only be conducted if the infestation is active. Prior to your treatment, I would vacuum and clean up any dust and seal the holes already present to make an inspection later on much easier. If there is no new damage or sawdust seen (these beetles emerge in spring and summer, so the inspection should be the next year at this time) then there is no need for another treatment and the homeowners should be at ease. Powder post beetles don't do a lot of damage quickly, so they rarely are extremely concerning as far as structural integrity of the building. Most of the time, powder post beetle damage is more of a cosmetic issue from the beetle exit holes and structural damage occurs slowly, so you can also communicate to the customer that allowing for an inspection will not give the beetles time to cause significant damage with a relatively limited infestation. It's also important to note that these beetles also only lay their eggs in bare, unfinished wood so they will not infest anything that has been stained or painted. •



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