



Leading by Example

PCT's first-ever "Companies to Watch" recognition was established to honor companies that are emerging as industry leaders. Being a leader means many things. It means being profitable. It means being stable. It means leading by example. And as the companies profiled here show, the foundation of business success is a strong philosophy or set of values that is unique to that company.

The business side of business is serious — meeting customer expectations, employee payrolls and overhead costs. But business also should be as fun as it is challenging. That is why most people get into pest control. It's still an entrepreneurial market where a person can start a company from scratch, where a small company can become large, and where a large company can become a major national player.

A common denominator to growth, success and leadership is finding out what you don't know, and then learning what you need to know. As someone who has been involved in the pest control business for more than 25 years, one observation I will make is that companies that are active do better than those that are not involved. You can learn what you don't know at trade shows, at association meetings, by contact

with distributors and manufacturers, and even by talking to competitors. That also is where you learn what you need to know. Put simply, companies open to sharing their ideas and talents with others tend to gain at least as much as they give.

The same business principles hold true for a manufacturer. Our formula for success is based on three things: being true to our company values; investing in business solutions; and being involved in the industry. Being true to our corporate values and investing in technologies and support are the serious business side of our business. Most of the fun is in our industry involvement with state associations, NPMA, trade shows, RISE and other industry gatherings. It is in such meetings that we learn what we don't know and what we need to know to be successful. It's also where we can give back to the industry that we are a part of for our mutual success.

With that in mind, our congratulations to the companies named to the 2010 Companies to Watch list by PCT magazine. **PCT**



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Check 'Em Out

Growth, innovation and passion for the industry make these 25 firms ones to watch.

By Anne Nagro



Editor's note: In compiling its list of "Companies to Watch," PCT contacted state and national association officials, prominent PMPs, industry consultants and others affiliated with the industry, as well as monitored news reports of up-and-coming firms. After reading the following company profiles, we'd appreciate your feedback. Did we miss a company that's on the rise? Know of a firm that has developed an innovative marketing program; enviable community service record; or differentiated itself in the marketplace in some other way? If so, we would love to hear about them. Let us know! E-mail jdorsch@giemedia.com with the subject line "Company to Watch" and we'll take some time to learn more about the firm and possibly include them in a future issue of PCT magazine.

We love our jobs! Every day we talk to some of the most brilliant minds in the business world and learn about the innovative ways companies are making their mark on the pest management industry.

Over the past year, 25 firms have caught our attention. Some have been around for generations; others are new players. A few have made our Top 100 list, which ranks annual revenue. We think it's just a matter of time before more make the roll, while others prefer not to share this data with us.

These companies and the people who make them stand out share some traits: an infectious passion for the industry, serious sales skills, persistence in the face of adversity, a commitment to employees, and an ability to adapt to ever-changing market conditions.

So...drum roll, please. Here they are in alphabetical order: PCT's 25 Companies to Watch:

EYES ON THE PRIZE: A-Active Termite & Pest Control Company, Virginia Beach, Va.

Everything at A-Active "comes down to customer retention," said President Kevin Kordek. Employees are drilled monthly on the firm's customer-focused business model, which stresses connections between branding, marketing, advertising, sales and service. The result? "Boots on the street" marketing; meaningful, face-to-face customer communications; and the Gold Medallion service, a program "customers love" that combines termite and pest control. Revenues in 2009 were up 10 percent. Not a gambler, Kordek prefers calculated outcomes. He can take this winning formula to the bank.



ASKING FOR THE BUSINESS: **Ace Exterminators, Belington, W.Va.**

"We're aggressive," said President Nick Raschella, who started his career at Ace after high school. Employees don't wait for the phone to ring. "We follow up on every lead until it's dead or we sell it." This played a major role in diversifying the company's account mix. Before 2002, commercial work was nearly 100 percent of the business. Today, residential work makes up 40 percent, and is bolstered by a strong referral program. Networking with professionals at national meetings also has helped grow the business. "This is a great industry," he said.

DOING WHAT THEY LIKE BEST: **Advanced Pest Services, Augusta, Ga.**

"We like to do residential," said President Jeff Annis, and that suits his 44 employees — 19 of them certified in Georgia — just fine. "We're great at it." The company stays clear of oddly regulated schools, day cares and restaurants, instead attending to the needs of homeowners with pest and termite control, mosquito reduction, wildlife management, T.A.P. insulation and Leaf Defier gutter systems. He credits General Manager Pat VanHooser and Marketing Director Dena Thomas — self-proclaimed "Bug Babes" — for creating an environment where highly trained employees can excel at doing what they like best.

FIRST RESPONDERS: **Alexandria Pest Services, Alexandria, Va.**

When commercial, residential and government clients in greater Washington, D.C. need service, they know Alexandria Pest Services personnel will be on site within two hours. "We respond," said President Richard Diggs Sr. "We're very proactive" and technicians are cross-trained to handle any pest situation. Customers obviously like this: Revenue was up 30 percent in 2009 from the previous year. Diggs attributes the success to having "a great group of people" and treating customers the

way you want to be treated. "Especially in this area, everybody's important," he said. "When you can deliver like that, it makes you so much more valuable."

CONSISTENCY IS KING: **Arrow Environmental Services, Morganville, N.J.**

Consistency, said President Stewart Lenner, "goes a long way." It was a founding principle nearly 40 years ago at Arrow Environmental Services, and remains one today. Technicians always are going to be on the same page, providing the same level of service, the same attitude, and the same attention to detail, he explained. His customers expect this and reward a job well done with referrals, which is a "tremendous part of our business." Lenner raised the bar last year when he implemented a significant quality assurance program. The result? It's shown customers even more value, he said.

TRAIN — ADVERTISE — EXECUTE: **Buffalo Exterminating Co., Orchard Park, N.Y.**

Buffalo Exterminating is on a roll: 2009 revenue was up 20 percent over 2008, which was up 25 percent from 2007, reported President Garry Tank. The company grossed about \$4.6 million in 2009, a long way from the three-man, \$62,000 firm he bought in 1982. Being profitable always has been the goal, and is the culmination of an "awesome marketing program," involvement in national associations, good systems that can be duplicated, and a knowledgeable team. "Everyone's ladders are up against the same wall," Tank said. Simply put, "train, advertise and execute."

TECHNOLOGY — TRAINING — TENURE: **Bug Busters USA, Atlanta, Ga.**

Bug Busters USA celebrated its 25th anniversary in October 2009 and President

Court Parker credits technology, training and tenured employees for its success. Technology helped the firm go paperless as technicians rely on fully integrated handhelds. Functions like payment processing were outsourced, letting others run them more efficiently and cheaper. Strong training, good benefits and counseling employees through personally challenging times contribute to very low turnover. It's all contributed to a smooth-running operation fixed on building recurring revenue, Parker said.

AGGRESSION ISN'T SUCH A BAD THING: **Bug Doctor, Paramus, N.J.**

Bug Doctor President Stuart Aust is "passionate about our industry." He also knows "how aggressive we've got to be" in sales, especially when targeting upper-end commercial accounts. Bug Doctor inspectors cold-call high-end clients in person, and it pays off: Yankee Stadium, Rockefeller Center, the United Nations, Quest Diagnostics and Merck Pharmaceuticals are clients. To boost residential revenue — "the icing on the cake"— Aust's teenage sons hung 600 door hangers a day on homes this summer. The results were "unbelievable." 2009 revenues were more than \$5 million for the Paramus, N.J.-based company.

BY THE NUMBERS: **Bulwark Exterminating, Mesa, Ariz.**

At 10 years old, Bulwark Exterminating is built differently than most firms. More than half of employees' compensation is determined through statistical analyses, said President Adam Seever. They typically make 30 percent more than the industry average, according to Seever, due to higher productivity and the company only promotes from within, giving them "lots of reasons to stick around." Employees must feel financially and emotionally respected or they can't respect your customers, explained Seever. The company has 250 employees at 11 offices in seven states, including five programmers to manage its proprietary software.



Companies to Watch



2010
THE YEAR AHEAD

HOMETOWN FAVORITE: **DA Exterminating Co., New Orleans, La.**

Celebrating 50 years in 2009, DA Exterminating had its “biggest growth ever,” said President Jed D’Arensbourg. Areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina are being rebuilt: People are coming back, homes are being purchased and businesses are opening. It pays to be a hometown provider. New Orleans is a “small, big town,” and “people down here like to use the local guys.” Name recognition and supporting local charities are huge. So are referrals from word of mouth. While “outsiders” have a hard time getting started and smaller firms were “wiped out” by Katrina, “we’re rocking and rolling,” he reported.

FORTITUDE TO FAIL: **Dial Pest Control, Roseland, N.J.**

Starting out 25 years ago, “we failed at a lot of things,” said co-owner Jerry Smith. Learning from their mistakes has made the difference. Take bed bugs, a “real test of strength.” You need the mindset “you’re going to win,” while having the fortitude to fail, he said. Dial’s bed bug expertise now is opening doors to lucrative pest accounts at colleges and apartment complexes. More leads — 15 percent and growing — come from the company’s new, panel-wrapped service vehicles, which Smith funded by cutting \$20,000 from phone directory ads. A willingness to fail is paying big dividends for this New Jersey firm.

THE GO-TO EXPERTS: **Dayton’s Pest Control Services, Knoxville, Tenn.**

Dayton’s Pest Control isn’t “pushy” when it comes to sales, but neither is it laid back, said President Dayton Hylton. The 25-year-old company spends 10 percent of revenue “keeping our name out there” year long. This commitment has paid off: Dayton Pest Control is the local media go-to for pest issues. It’s often featured on talk radio and TV programs, which helps

create word-of-mouth. A robust referral program, local networking and support of community and charitable groups build relationships with potential customers. “We treat our customers right and deliver what we promise.”

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY: **EnviroPest, Loveland, Colo.**

When President Marc Dykstra joined the family business eight years ago, it had 10 employees. Now, it boasts 47. Besides “a lot of marketing,” technology helped it grow. First, Dykstra dumped DOS for Windows-based scheduling and brought in handhelds. Though expensive, “we made it back in the first three or four months.” EnviroPest also went from billing monthly to daily. These changes increased cash flow, decreased costs, and boosted productivity. Some technicians went from \$8,000 to more than \$20,000 in monthly revenue. Adapt to what’s working, what’s not and make changes, Dykstra advised.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE: **Eradico Services, Novi, Mich.**

With a culture that stresses others before self, Eradico Services has seen profit go “through the roof” despite Michigan’s non-existent economy, said President Chuck Russell. He credits loyal employees, managers who lead first, and “open book” meetings that allayed employee fears and made clear that what they do “every moment of every day matters.” The firm increased productivity, cut costs and rolled out a new Mission and Values statement. Employees committed to “living our values” by signing their names on the large poster. “It did a lot to unify our organization during a difficult time,” Russell said.

KEEP IT SIMPLE: **Good Earth Pest Co., Corvallis, Ore.**

President Rich Kesecker prefers to keep things simple. An uncluttered logo is easy

to recognize. “Extremely simple” advertising has a clear call to action. To create neighborhood awareness, technicians post easy-to-read signs in customers’ yards. Wife Renee writes “Ask a Pro” columns for local media to drive customers to the Web site. When the firm’s new handyman division proved successful, the next step was, well, simple: buy another truck and hire more people. Even raising prices is clear-cut for Kesecker. “Every time I raise my prices I literally get more business,” he said.

FOR EVER AND EVER: **ISOTECH Pest Management, Covina, Calif.**

Success, said CEO Mike Masterson, depends on lifelong customers and employees. “Spoil them to death,” he advised. “It’s no different than a marriage.” His 59 employees get the right communications, tools and support needed to treat clients like “they’re the only clients on the face of the earth.” A two-year training program helps them attain state licensing in all fields, and they get full medical coverage, which shows “we want a long-term relationship.” You can “hire for a career or fire frequently,” he said. The formula works: Inc. magazine ranked ISOTECH the 974th fastest-growing company in America.

WORK SMART: **Johnson Pest Control, Sevierville, Tenn.**

Johnson Pest Control employees work hard. They also work smart. Where services once were sold by phone, now inspectors go to customers’ homes. “We get better results that way,” said Ray Johnson, president of the family owned and operated company that opened its doors in 1984. Proposals feature house diagrams that spotlight problem areas and serve as road maps for service technicians. This smartly conveys Johnson Pest Control as a company that communicates. Consumers’ first impressions are of spotless service vehicles and professional employees, who aren’t afraid to ask for the sale. It is one more way to stay ahead of the competition and the economy, said Johnson.



IT'S ALL ABOUT RETENTION: **J.P. Pest Services, Milford, N.H.**

Recruiting and retaining the right employees makes it “far easier to grow” than investing in expensive, hard-to-track marketing campaigns, said General Manager Chris Pestana. It’s the best way to retain customers, gain referrals and sell more services to existing customers — a “strategy that’s working well for us.” The third-generation firm, which has a 50-50 residential-commercial account mix, began offering wildlife and mosquito services a few years ago. Customers will pay for consistent, fast service and to have continuity in their relationships with technicians and supervisors, he said.

STICK TO THE BASICS: **Lindsey Pest Services, Jacksonville, Fla.**

A solid advertising program, a tight rein on expenses, robust employee training and a rock-solid reputation that “we guard jealously,” are the hallmarks of Lindsey Pest Services, said President Jennifer Leggett. Although she’s acquired some small firms, it’s “mostly through existing customers that we grow.” Clients want the same technicians to service their homes and get “fed up” with big-company policies. Thanks to her “great crew,” customers are spoiled rotten. Even the economic crunch has benefits: It “wakes you up” and forces you to evaluate every part of your business and make it better, she said.

GETTING THE WORD OUT LOUD: **Nader’s Pest Raiders, Ponte Vedra, Fla.**

Few create name recognition better than Nader’s Pest Raiders. “We’re loud the way we do business,” said President Randy Nader. Among other activities, the firm sponsors golf tournaments, participates in fishing competitions, and is involved in a wide array of community outreach programs. Community involvement is “a great way to make relationships” that can result in new business. Plus, the firm gets “lots of

local attention” from media. To promote its mosquito, wildlife and irrigation services, Nader’s is blasting the airwaves with more than 200 free radio ads a month — a reward for loyalty.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE: **Northwest Exterminating, Atlanta, Ga.**

Being progressive and innovative drives decision-making at Northwest Exterminating, said sales leader Jeff Dunn. Add-ons like T.A.P. insulation and wildlife control have “been a good marriage” with existing services. Many customers have upgraded to its premium NorPest Green service, and going “universal” — training technicians in both termite and pest control — has increased productivity, reduced fuel costs and made it easier to sell more services. “That’s been a big one for us.” The third-generation firm offers variety, advancement and compensates well, which attracts and keeps good people, Dunn said.

LOYALTY RULES: **Poulin’s Pest Control, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

Poulin’s Pest Control owes its success to hard-working, loyal employees. “That’s proven itself more times than enough for me,” said President Don Poulin. Just don’t be in a rush to hire tomorrow, he advised. Screen thoroughly, review frequently and keep someone on staff who can cover for sick co-workers, handle emergencies, or immediately replace a bad hire. That way, “you’re never stuck,” said Poulin, whose father started the business in 1946. The growing company now boasts 85 employees at 13 offices in four provinces, a new distribution warehouse, and retail and on-line stores for dedicated do-it-yourselfers.

CONTROLLING PROFITABILITY: **Sandwich Isle Pest Solutions, Pearl City, Hawaii**

President Michael Botha, who grew up in his family’s South African pest business,

has one goal: provide quality service at a price that’s profitable. He’ll “walk away from a job” if he can’t make a seven to 10 percent profit. Yet, business is booming. Besides general pest, termite and fumigation work, employees are tackling bed bug infestations 24/7 using heat, infrared cameras and termite-sniffing dogs, which proof every job. The company keeps true to its price structure and defines next steps for customers — not vice versa.

DIVERSIFICATION PAYS: **Senske Lawn & Tree Care, Kennewick, Wash.**

Pest and termite control, lawn and tree care, weed control, snow removal and de-icing, and holiday lighting: Senske is one diversified company, and has been since it opened as a lawn care and pest control company in 1947. Not only is it easier to sell existing customers, but diverse services help “stabilize the work force” through winter months, said General Manager Gene Chafe. The firm markets these services aggressively year-round through newspaper inserts and ads, direct mail, and outbound call campaigns. Pest control, Chafe said, has seen the most significant increase in revenue.

ADAPT OR DIE: **Skyline Pest Solutions, McDonough, Ga.**

Skyline Pest Solutions was formed five years ago as a builder pretreat and real estate relations business. But with building stalled and termite clearance letters no longer required in Georgia, “we just had to adapt” to continue moving forward, said CEO David King. Residential and commercial pest control — especially for bed bugs — is now the firm’s focus. With an eye to profitability, changes improved client communication and retention, collections and cross-selling. “We’ll be a much better company” when the economy turns around, King said. “We’re working harder than we’ve ever worked.” **PCT**

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