MARKETING MAGNATE
DYNAMIC DRAIN'S TARGETED APPROACH FUELS RAPID REVENUE GROWTH

PUMPER & CLEANER EXPO SHOW ISSUE
TOUGH JOB
CIPP maintains the splendor of Yosemite

MONEY MACHINES
Tube-lancer system improves safety and efficiency

BETTER BUSINESS
Set clear expectations from the start
March 2013

features

16 Marketing Magnate
By Scottie Dayton

On the cover: The Dynamic Drain team includes CEO Nick Santoni (foreground), certified CIPP installer Donald Libby, left, and Director of Operations Wes Fogleman. The company’s aggressive marketing approach has helped drive revenue growth and establish a long list of high-profile clients in the Washington, D.C., area. (Photography by Joe Mahoney)

30 Tech Perspective: Save the Data
Proper management of CCTV files is important for you and your customers.
By Jim Aanderud

38 Profile: Double Down on Diversity
Colorado contractor expands into pipe bursting and provides additional services to meet customer needs in a high-end market.
By Marian Bond

departments

10 From the Editor:
Big Changes at Cleaner.com
We’ve redesigned our website so you can find all the information you need, quick and easy.
By Luke Lagally

44 Money Machines:
High Pressure With Less Risk
Tube-launcher system increases efficiency and takes the danger out of operators’ hands.
By Ken Wysocky

58 Better Business: Your End of the Bargain
Make customers happy and avoid unnecessary conflict by setting clear expectations and then meeting or exceeding them.
By Matthew Sutton

90 Product News
Product Spotlight: Vacuum excavator combines cleaning with valve exerciser
By Ed Wodalski

96 Industry News

78 Money Manager: Planning for Tomorrow
Establishing a retirement benefits program can help your employees and your business.
By Erik Gunn

COMING IN APRIL

Special issue:
Pipe Bursting Methods and Projects

- Tough Job: Sliplining in a quarry
- Money Manager: Choosing the right computers
- Profile: ABEI RECON thrives with franchise technology
- Tech Perspective: Asset lifecycle management

4
Cleaner • March 2013
Nick Santoni operates in a niche filled with famous names and famous places. Technicians from his company, Dynamic Drain Technologies in Virginia Beach, Va., have lined small-diameter pipes at the National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, U.S. Capitol Building, Postal Service buildings, University of Virginia and Theodore Roosevelt Island. Military bases, including Quantico, also populate the list.

While doing market research on the feasibility of opening his new business, Santoni found many civil engineers, utility site contractors and defense contractors were either unaware of trenchless technologies or were hiring out-of-state pipe lining firms. He located only two small-diameter pipe lining businesses within 200 miles of Virginia Beach.

Dynamic Drain opened its doors in 2008, just as the economy softened. Santoni, 28, undertook a guerilla marketing campaign that generated $500,000 in annual revenue within four years. In June 2012, he hired Marketing Director Mark Kolodziej to facilitate search engine optimization marketing — winning new business through advertising. The strategy doubled the company’s revenue within six months.

IN THE BLOOD
Marketing and sales are Santoni’s heartbeat. After graduating from Johnson and Wales University with a degree in management, he spent two and a half years developing clients for Perma-Liner Industries. He networked with plumbers, pipe cleaners, and sewer and drain contractors, managing 65 accounts.

(continued)
Once he made the decision to branch out on his own, Santoni purchased a Perma-Liner trailer from a client who was going out of business, and rented a 3,000-square-foot shop with offices, a conference room and two service bays in an industrial strip mall. As more former clients sold off equipment or closed their doors, they forwarded job leads to Santoni. They also subcontracted projects to him throughout the mid-Atlantic region.

"My team’s attention to detail contributed greatly to our success. We did a lot of earlier projects together and earned each other’s trust. I can send them into any building now without worry, and concentrate on selling the next job."

Nick Santoni

"I strategized to meet these people at national trade shows, for dinner, or at their offices,” he says. “Even if contractors had lining equipment, I marketed the ability to do jobs with which they were uncomfortable.”

Initially, Santoni made 200 phone calls per week until contractors felt confident he wouldn’t steal their clients and began referring them to him. Three full-time and two part-time employees cleaned, inspected and rehabilitated pipes using the ambient cure Perma-Liner lateral system or hot-water cure MaxLiner system.

Workers inspected 2- to 8-Inch piping with four Vivax-Metrotech V push cameras, and cleaned them using two Spartan 300 cable machines or a trailer-mounted Mongoose 184XL sewer jetter with an 18 gpm/4,000 psi pump and nozzles from StoneAge. Reinstatements were done with pneumatic cutters from RS Technik.

“My team’s attention to detail contributed greatly to our success,” says Santoni. “We did a lot of earlier projects together and earned each other’s trust. I can send them into any building now without worry, and concentrate on selling the next job.”

High-profile government or military projects require certain conduct. Workers must be incredibly safe, take their time, and avoid ramming equipment into door jams or tracking epoxy on the floors. “Everything we walk on and all the infrastructure is beyond monetary value,” says Santoni. “It’s our nation’s history.”

**STRATEGIC ALLIANCES**

Six months after opening the company, Santoni published a website and began using Google AdWords where advertisers pay when people click their ads. “Companies choose keywords related to their business,” says Santoni. “When people search on Google using them, ads pop up next to the search results based on how much companies bid to pay per click. We were popping up first.”

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Whenever crews weren’t on projects, Santoni had them visit property management companies and plumbers to enhance Dynamic Drain’s subcontracting presence. The effort worked. The company expanded from commercial to industrial to residential customers, but the latter had logistical problems. “We couldn’t respond fast enough,” says Santoni. “Four or five calls came in a week from across the state. Based on location, we were 30 minutes to six hours away.”

“Pipe lining does not sell itself. The more we work live in front of people, the more business it generates.”
Nick Santoni

Santoni began searching for plumbers wishing to expand their customer base. He offered leads if they promised to promote lateral lining and subcontract the work to him. Plumbers then cleaned and televised the pipe and excavated an entry pit. With the job prepped, Santoni’s crews lined two 50-foot laterals per day instead of one.

“We taught their technicians about the lining process and how to sell it, gave them brochures for the homeowners, and helped them advertise the service on their websites,” says Santoni. “Since rolling out the program in 2009, we have 24 plumbers between Maryland and Virginia working with us.”

In 2011, the company generated $400,000 commercial annual revenue and $150,000 each in the industrial and residential segments. Adding another dozen plumbers to his network by the end of 2013 is one of Santoni’s major marketing objectives. “Increasing residential pipe lining projects through our plumbing partners should generate another $75,000 to $100,000 annually,” he says.

INTERNET GOALS
As the company moved from networking to Internet marketing, Santoni could not keep up with coding and website designs. Hiring Mark Kolodziej solved the problem. He added a second website, five blogs, and Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages. He also edits inspection camera videos, adds sound and posts them.

“Last July through September, Mark increased our Internet-based service calls from 10 to 15 per month to 45 to 65 per month, and we’re closing on five to six jobs per month,” says Santoni.

Potential clients captured off the Internet receive MailerMailer and Constant Contact email campaigns that promote ways Dynamic Drain can work with them to make money. Mailings include new technologies, project profiles with references, and industry news or government press releases about the company. “We call everyone each month just to keep our brand, our name and our services in their
heads,” says Santoni. “When a general contractor or federal government entity needs something, they know to call us because we’ve already won their business through advertising.”

GOING LIVE

The architect of the U.S. Capitol, Smithsonian Institution, National Gallery of Art and several Virginia military bases found the company through Internet advertising. Many projects are in-slab—pipes buried in thick slabs of concrete with tons of rebar. They are the most challenging and costly pipes to excavate.

A recent in-slab project involved lining a 150-foot cast iron drain at the new Marine One helicopter hangar at Marine Corps Base Quantico. After the team went through intense background checks and security clearance, they subcontracts to pipe lining, reinstating and hydrojetting demonstrations.

“Pipe lining does not sell itself,” says Santoni. “The more we work live in front of people, the more business it generates. Finding those opportunities has been a huge obstacle to growing sales.” The open-house strategy has improved his sale closure ratio by 40 percent.

HISTORIC PLACES

Dynamic Drain has worked with the University of Virginia in Charlottesville for four years, averaging $100,000 in projects annually. The entire university is on the National Register of Historic Places. “Everything is brick and dates to Thomas Jefferson,” says Santoni. “Any excavation requires an archaeologist on site. Hit something hard while digging and everything stops as the archaeologist and his little brushes make sure we’re not disturbing artifacts.”

(continued)
A recent project involved lining a 4-inch terra cotta dormitory lateral running 150 feet from manhole to manhole under sidewalks, easements and buildings. The pipe was cracked, offset, separated, infiltrated with roots, and had multiple 45- and 90-degree bends. Santoni’s team had eight hours to work each day before turning the water back on as students returned from classes.

“Being guarded happens a lot, but we like working with government firms. Everything is organized and runs according to plan. There are no surprises.”

Nick Santoni

Using the Mongoose jetter, they cut a path through the roots with a Warthog nozzle (StoneAge), then went back with a KEG nozzle and cleaned slowly to prevent damaging the pipe further. Where root balls formed at joints, they hit the area 10 or more times with 18 gpm/2,000 psi. It took a day to remove the roots.

The team used the Maxliner system because water still infiltrated the pipe. Reinstalling the wye connections and tie-ins with multiple bends was especially challenging. “Had something gone wrong, we would not be having this conversation,” says Santoni.

ISLAND LIFE

One pleasant project involved rehabilitating 2,000 feet of water fountain lines on Theodore Roosevelt Island, a 91-acre nature preserve on the Potomac River. A 4-inch pipe suctioned water from the river to feed 3- and 4-inch pipes filling a 3,000-foot-long moat, two fountains and statues. “The setting was beautiful with wildlife all around us, says Santoni.

Another high-profile job involved the Washington (D.C.) Visitor Center, built 40 feet underground and 100 yards from the U.S. Capitol. Shortly after installing the vault housing and 11 galvanized electrical conduits, groundwater infiltrated the vault roof, seeped through joints, and threatened to short out the security system and essential equipment. No excavation was possible with the Capitol nearby.

“Because the risk of electrical failure was high, we had less than three days to complete the job,” says Santoni. “We lined four 114-foot-long conduits per day. As soon as a liner cured, the electrical contractor was stringing new wires. We both met our deadlines.”

In 2012, the company generated $1 million from Internet leads, but the marketing strategy has yet to reach its full potential. Within 10 years, Santoni projects tripling annual sales or even hitting the $5 million mark. “That goal is within our capacity if we increase what we’re doing while becoming better at it and refining our methods.”
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seems some job site hazards are just impossible to anticipate. But then again, are they? Take the case of a Dallas convenience store cited recently by OSHA after an employee was killed during a robbery.

As covered in *EHS Today* and in local media, the robber poured a flammable liquid on the 76-year-old clerk and set her on fire. She was able to identify her attacker and he was arrested, but she died from her burns within a week.

While a dramatic and tragic example, the incident prompted an investigation of the company's four stores and a citation under the General Duties Clause of OSHA's regulations for failing to protect workers from a recognized hazard. While the specific act of using a flammable liquid is difficult to predict, the risk of violence in such a setting is easy to anticipate. OSHA apparently felt the company hadn't done enough in analyzing the risk, taking appropriate countermeasures, and training employees against the risk of such violence.

Just as every industry has its own risks, every job site has unique characteristics. Some, such as entry into a confined space, are easy to anticipate. Others can require a little more detective work: underground electric lines, chemical interactions, weather, etc.

A good job hazard analysis (OSHA has sample forms) can aid in the process of both identifying and responding to the hazards. Response can range from the preferred action of eliminating the hazard altogether, to taking steps to reduce the possibility of serious consequences through other means such as protective bracing, environmental monitoring, personal protective equipment and operating procedures.

Looking for hazards, though, isn't enough. An employer is also expected to inspect the workplace and equipment periodically, interview employees to help identify risks (including work practices), document safety information, investigate incidents, review documentation and incidents, analyze data, and take action to reduce risks.

Of course, the hazards must be clearly communicated to the workers. In fact, employees can be a key to identifying both the hazards and the actions that will best protect them. That's why they should be included during the entire process of hazard analysis, not just in a pre-job brief. Not only will inclusion get you a better analysis, it will help get workers to buy into the safety culture you are trying to create.

*COMMUNICATIONS*

What you say can have a big impact on how workers respond to a hazard. If your safety talks continually mention the importance of staying on schedule, workers will take those messages to heart; they may feel that staying on schedule is more important than staying safe. Or, worse yet, they may get the impression that you are more concerned about your schedule than you are about their safety, and feel hesitant about bringing up safety issues or stopping work when faced with a new hazard or changing conditions.

We all get comfortable in our jobs and think we know the risks. But conditions change, things go wrong, there are human errors, people get lazy, or they get rushed. Thoughts like, “That will never happen,” are sometimes followed by words such as, “Who ever thought that could happen?” By then it's too late, so be proactive, get your employees involved, and identify risks before they lead to accidents.