

# Plumber

## Dressed for **SUCCESS**

Calgary plumber uses data-driven, number-crunching strategy to ensure customers get the best service possible – delivered by Canada's best-dressed technicians

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▼ Terry Sweeney's service vehicle marries the cab of a restored 1955 Chevy 3/4-ton pickup with the chassis and drivetrain of a 1997 GMC 3500.



## **n the ROAD** Vintage Chevy Wows Customers

Paired with modern amenities, plumbing truck's accessibility and functionality fuel drive for efficiency.

By Ken Wysocky



### On the Cover

Kale Trim (right) and Taylor Simpson of Action Auger in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, arrive on site, neatly dressed and ready to impress. The company's shirt-and-tie employees are known as The Gentlemen Plumbers by the customers they serve.

Photography by Mike Ridewood

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Cable Ends & Root Cutters



Spartan Model 1065

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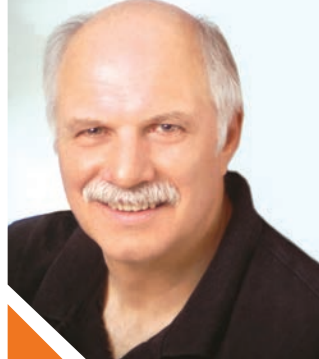
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Ed Wodalski

## Smart Decisions in Real Time

Technology can help you better manage your plumbing business and increase profits

**W**ho can imagine life without computers, cell-phones, CCTV and GPS tracking devices? It wasn't long ago we put pencil to paper, and perhaps still do, but today there are better ways to manage your vehicle fleet, the theme for this month's *Plumber* magazine.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to attend the NTEA Green Truck Summit in Indianapolis, where discussion focused on the use of technology to monitor vehicle and driver behavior for a better bottom line.

Here's how.

Beginning with built-in vehicle intelligence, filtered real-time feedback can help you make smarter decisions on vehicle maintenance. Instead of an arbitrary monthly schedule, service can be based on actual vehicle condition. That means catching small problems before they become big ones, and delaying maintenance when it's not required, which can be a big cost saver, depending on the size of your plumbing fleet.

According to a recent report, preventive maintenance costs have increased about 9 percent since 2008, primarily due to higher oil prices and the shift to synthetics — about an extra \$3 a quart for some models. To offset higher costs, manufacturers such as General Motors and Ford suggest truck owners adopt an oil-life monitoring system rather than changing oil at traditional intervals.

Basing maintenance on actual vehicle condition can also help avoid unexpected downtime — a huge drain on productivity and company profits.

Another way to cut costs and increase profits is through gamification. Primarily used to improve driver behavior,

gamification taps into an individual's inherent desire to succeed.

"Individuals want to win," says Kelly Frey, vice president of product marketing at Telogis. "Ninety-five percent of mobile workers want to do a good job, and if given the right information will do a good job."

The result can dramatically impact driver safety and professionalism.

"Safety is one aspect of professionalism — wanting to do a good job, to have a good relationship with your employer and with your customers," Frey says. "It's self-respect."

Through coaching software, drivers receive in-cab alerts that reinforce good habits and correct those that need improvement, such as speeding, hard braking, harsh acceleration and seat belt use.

Real-time feedback enables drivers to view their scores and compare them to others. The result can be greater economy for your plumbing business, increased productivity and overall improved customer service.

Braham Trim, owner of The Gentlemen Plumbers in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, tracks nearly every facet of his company's operations. The subject of this month's profile, "Dressed for Success," Trim says technology enables him to know in real time how his business is performing.

"To me, business is just a big chess game," he says. "You're always trying to figure out the next move, but unlike chess, the rules in business are always changing. I love being able to make decisions — especially important ones — with all the facts in hand."

We hope this month's issue of *Plumber* helps you do the same. Have a good day. 📧



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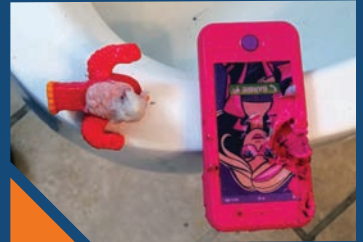
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## Hot Tip Saves Toilet Removal

**Florida plumber uses heated auger to retrieve plastic toys**

Ryan Gomiela hates pulling and resetting toilets. When a customer called to say their daughter tossed toys down the bowl, Ryan tried retrieving them with a closet auger, but without success. Pumping water out of the bowl, he heated the auger head with a torch, carefully put the auger in until it reached the toy, spun the head a few times and waited for the smell of burning plastic. After about 10 minutes, the toy was easily retrieved. [▲ plumbermag.com/featured](http://plumbermag.com/featured)



## Medical and Natural Gases

**Are you qualified to install and maintain these critical systems?**

According to the National Fire Protection Agency 99-Health Care Facilities Code (NFPA 99), a person doing the work has to be certified, not qualified. The difference comes down to who is saying you have met the minimum proficiencies to do the work. The qualification process is typically done by the manufacturer or trained personnel, whereas a certification requires that you be educated and tested by a third-party. [▲ plumbermag.com/featured](http://plumbermag.com/featured)

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## OVERHEARD ONLINE

*"Before going on a job, have an experienced associate role play with a new plumber. They should guide the employee through the entire scope of a service request. Encourage them to pose questions that challenge new associates to consider the possibilities of what could happen once they arrive on the job site."*

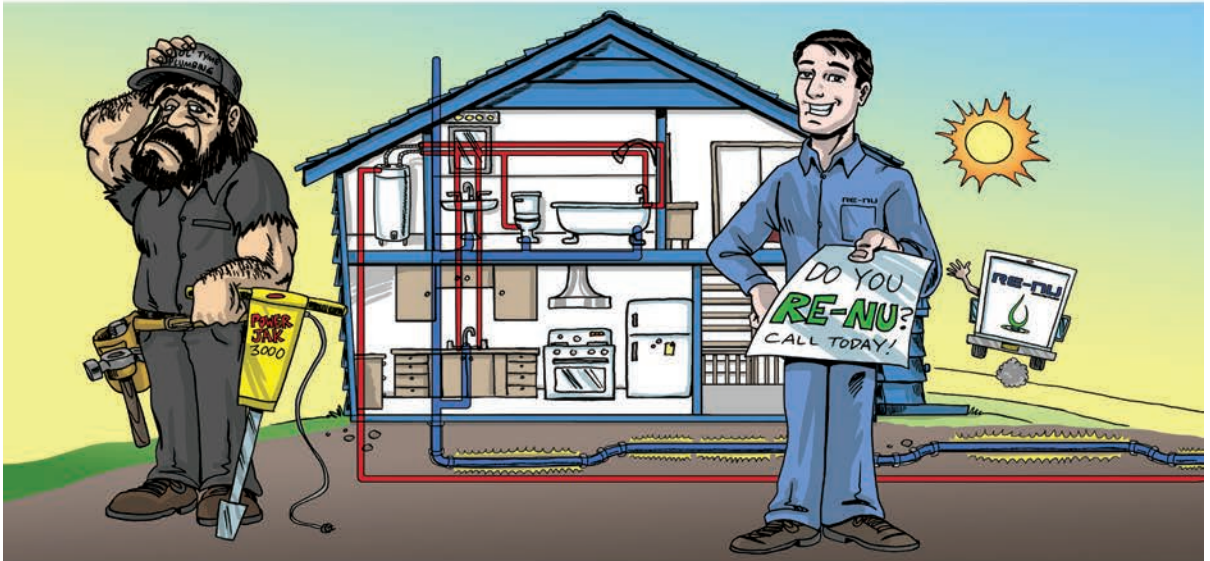
**A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR TRAINING NEW PLUMBERS** [▲ plumbermag.com/featured](http://plumbermag.com/featured)

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# Dressed for SUCCESS

Calgary plumber uses data-driven, number-crunching strategy to ensure customers get the best service possible – delivered by Canada’s best-dressed technicians

By Ken Wysocky | Photos by Mike Ridewood

*Action Auger, aka The Gentlemen Plumbers, Calgary, Alberta, Canada*

**OWNER** Brham Trim

**EMPLOYEES** 40

**FOUNDED** 2001

**SERVICES** Residential and commercial plumbing, sewer line installation and repair, trenchless pipe replacement, CCTV sewer inspection, root removal, waterjetting, drain cleaning, water heaters, sump pumps, furnace installation and repair

**SERVICE AREA** One of Canada’s larger plumbing companies, serving the city of Calgary and the southern half of Alberta



▲ Kale Trim of The Gentlemen Plumbers explains the company's fixed-pricing program to a client, including how much the job will cost, before beginning work.



When Brham Trim established a plumbing company called Action Auger in 2001, his business strategy was simple: Be the lowest-priced plumber in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

"I called every plumber and found out what they charged and set out to become the cheapest plumber out there," Trim says. "I couldn't have been more wrong. I lost money my first year in business and was within a month or two of closing my doors."

Today, Action Auger, known as The Gentlemen Plumbers for the clip-on ties its technicians wear, has 25 service trucks, 40 employees and serves customers throughout the southern half of Alberta. Since 2001, revenue has increased about 7,850 percent. It is also one of the larger plumbing and heating companies in Canada.

What prompted this dramatic business U-turn? A dramatic increase in prices, for one, along with an intense focus on customer service, a decidedly unique marketing approach that differentiated the company from competitors, and an emphasis on business analytics that enables the company to spot small problems and deal with them quickly, before they become bigger problems.

"I think one of the main reasons we grew so fast is because people like how we do business," Trim says. "We offer our customers a 100 percent satisfaction guarantee — if they're unhappy with anything, we refund their money. At the end of the day, customers feel like they can't lose when they do business with us and that's why they keep coming back."

#### ▲ Investing in trucks, equipment

The company's service trucks play a large role in ensuring customer satisfaction. After starting with smaller cargo vans, Trim eventually settled on GMC 4500s with 16-foot box bodies made by International Truck Body (ITB). Internally, each of the company's 25 trucks — equipped to handle plumbing and heating calls — is outfitted with storage systems from ITB or made in-house. On board is a Garmin GPS that works in conjunction with Fleetmatics fleet tracking software.

Taking what Trim calls a "go big or go home" approach, trucks feature such upgrades as hardwood floors and polished stainless steel trim. Some trucks have built-in exterior cargo boxes with flip-up doors that provide extra storage space as well as fast and easy access to often-used tools. Other trucks carry inverters that can supply electricity for power tools.

"After about one year in business, we switched to the box trucks when we needed to buy a second truck," Trim says. "They carry more parts and equipment, so we don't waste our time or our customers' time.

"Plus, they make for great billboards. They stick out and people notice that," he says of the distinctive vinyl wraps that cost about \$4,500 each. "They're a very worthwhile investment."



▲ Taylor Simpson works on a hot-water tank.

Each truck carries a cart-mounted RIDGID water jetter (3,000 psi at 3 gpm) and Spartan cart-mounted jetter (2,100 psi at 2 gpm) for clearing tough clogs in 2- to 6-inch-diameter pipes. Trucks also carry a Spartan Tool cable drain cleaning machine for augering 3- to 6-inch lines and a smaller Spartan drum machine for 1 1/2- to 2-inch lines.

“We like the drum cable machines because they minimize splatter,” Trim says.

A smaller DRZ drain cleaning machine, made by General Pipe Cleaners (a division of General Wire Spring Co.), is

used for clearing P-traps in sink, shower and bathtub drains.

“We also use RIDGID SeeSnake pipeline inspection cameras,” Trim says. “We found them to be invaluable, so we put one on every truck. It was quite an investment, but the cameras take the guesswork out of pretty much everything.”

For pipe wrenches and other tools, Trim prefers the RIDGID brand.

“They’re expensive, but they last — you get what you pay for,” he says.

“We offer our customers a 100 percent satisfaction guarantee — if they’re unhappy with anything, we refund their money. At the end of the day, customers feel like they can’t lose when they do business with us and that’s why they keep coming back.”

**Braham Trim**

For power tools, the company invests in DEWALT or Milwaukee products, for the same reason. The Gentlemen Plumbers also recommend BioSmart to customers — a microbial drain additive made by BioOne/One Biotechnology that devours fats, oil and grease.

### ▲ The price is right

While Trim’s initial cheapest-plumber-around approach seemed like a sure-fire strategy for success, he quickly learned there’s



▶ Braham Trim (left) discusses furnace sequences and safeties with Kurt Wiesner (center) and Matthew Compton.

▶ Jay Bruzell uses a RIDGID SeeSnake camera during a pipe inspection.

a steep downside to undercharging for services. The bottom line: He couldn't afford to give customers the best possible service. There wasn't enough money to pay someone to answer phone calls 24/7. Or to buy a nicer-looking vehicle — one large enough to carry a full load of parts to avoid profit- and time-killing runs to supply houses. Or to purchase better uniforms to convey a more professional image. He also couldn't afford to do drug testing and criminal background checks on prospective employees, which hampered his ability to hire quality technicians.

"I realized that it's not all about price," Trim says. "It's all about value and providing customers with everything they want."

So Trim took the plunge and adopted a flat-rate pricing structure that effectively doubled his hourly rate and ensured he'd make a profit on service calls.

"I learned that customers hated being surprised by the price of a job, so I wanted to give them the exact cost to do the work up front so they can decide from the start if they want to do the work," he says. "That was a game-changer — customers loved that."

Gradually, the strategy worked. Soon Trim was able to hire someone to answer the phones. He could afford to offer the best workmanship warranties, buy better and bigger trucks, purchase nicer uniforms and drug test prospective employees.

"I also could finally afford to pay my bills," he says. "I could afford to train employees better, too, which contributed to improved customer service. That allowed us to build a strong client base. Things just kept snowballing and getting better and better and better."

### ▲ Runs in the family

Ironically, Trim never planned to be a plumber, even though his father, Marty, his grandfather, Wilford Trim, and three of his brothers were plumbers.

"I worked a lot of weekends with Dad and hated it because all my friends were out playing while I was working," he says. "In retrospect, it was great because it taught me the value of hard work ... but I didn't want to be a plumber. I felt that people viewed plumbing as a trade for dirtbags."

Trim went to college instead, taking preliminary classes required to get into dental



school. But after a couple years, he realized he didn't want to be a dentist. So Trim followed his father's suggestion and started his own plumbing business.

"I was only 22 years old, so figured if it didn't work, I still had age on my side," he says.

One thing Trim did right from the get-go was successfully set his company apart from competitors. The point of differentiation? Technicians wore uniforms and clip-on ties. The marketing strategy was so effective that it eventually led Trim to rebrand the business because customers kept calling and asking if Action Auger was the company with "the gentlemen plumbers."

Trim was influenced by what he saw while working for his father — plumbers at parts warehouses that looked grubby and grimy. And he hated that plumbers were always, well, the butt of jokes.

"I wanted to create a perception that would help build a better name for plumbers as a whole," he says. "If the first impression you make is positive, it helps build trust and likeability."

"It also helps our marketing efforts," Trim says. "When your company name is The Gentlemen Plumbers and your servicemen wear a tie, it all comes together. If it's just Joe Smith Plumbing, there's no differentiation. People remember the ties. They not only create a good impression, they also serve as a great marketing tool."



## ▲ Attitude versus skills: It's not even a contest

After running The Gentlemen Plumbers in Calgary, Alberta, the last 15 years, owner Brham Trim has learned a thing or two about hiring employees who can meet his high expectations for customer service. One key lesson: Technical skills can be taught. Attitude? Not so much.



▲ Brham Trim (center) discusses septic tanks and drainfields with Kurt Wiesner (left) and Matthew Compton. Technicians participate in one-hour-long training sessions three to five times a week. Topics include new developments in technology, customer-service techniques and discussions about problems technicians encountered the day before.

As such, in Trim's eyes, a less-skilled job candidate with a great attitude trumps one with great skills and a poor attitude — every time. Moreover, drug testing and criminal background checks are a must to ensure that technicians are the kind of people customers can feel comfortable having in their homes.

Even with all that, Trim admits it's difficult to tell in a one- or two-hour job interview who's going to be a good employee and who isn't. To underscore the point, he was on the fence about hiring two individuals who are now his top-producing technicians.

"I look for attitude and then for skills," he says. "We can train someone to be a plumber but we can't train someone to be a go-getter or have a great work ethic."

Like many plumbers, Trim has a difficult time finding qualified job candidates. So he takes an unorthodox approach: Whenever he encounters a great employee in an underpaid industry — a waiter in a restaurant, for example — he gives them one of his business cards and urges them to call if they're interested in a career change.

"No matter where I am, I'm always looking," he says.

Once an employee comes on board, they're quickly taught The Gentlemen Plumber routine for customer service: Introduce yourself to the customer. Wear shoe covers. Make some friendly conversation. Ask the right questions to get to the root of the plumbing problem. Explain the company's fixed-pricing program and tell how much the job will cost. If the customer agrees, do the work.

"At the end of every call, we do a complete home inspection," Trim says. "That not only gives us an opportunity to do more work while we're there, it also helps the customer avoid another future dispatch charge. And we can fix things that could develop into more expensive repairs if left undiscovered."

Technicians are also required to ask customers if they want to become Diamond Club members for \$7.95 a month, which includes a camera inspection of the home's sewer lateral line, a 20 percent discount on repairs and a \$30 discount off the usual \$69.95 dispatch charge.

Why such a structured routine? Trim says it ensures that no matter which technician makes a call, the customer always gets the same high level of service.

Technicians also participate in one-hour-long training sessions four or five days a week before they hit the road. Topics include new developments in technology, customer service techniques and discussions about problems technicians encountered the day before — an invaluable training tool, Trim says.

"One guy may have an answer to a problem another guy encountered, so you go from one guy knowing something to 30 guys knowing it, and everyone is that much better," he says. "It's amazing how it snowballs."

Sometimes technicians get trained too well, in a sense, and go on to form their own companies — and become competitors. But Trim says that's a risk well worth taking.

"The bigger question is what if they stay and you haven't invested in them?" he says. "Then they end up costing you more money with screw-ups and customer complaints. It's just not worth it."

Continued ▶



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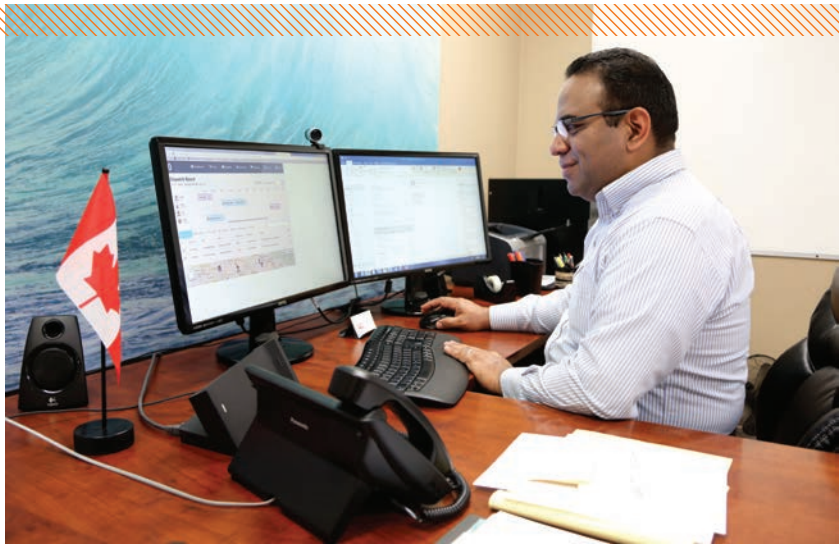


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*Brham Trim*



### ▲ Business-like approach

Returning to school several years ago, Trim earned a master’s degree in business administration, which further honed his desire for using analytics to run his business more efficiently and profitably.

“To me, business is just a big chess game,” he says. “You’re always trying to figure out the next move, but unlike chess, the rules in business are always changing. I love being able to make decisions — especially important ones — with all the facts in hand.”

The company tracks nearly every facet of its operations. Trim constantly reviews reports that monitor everything from the average invoice amount per technician and the number of calls each one makes to how many memberships they sell in a preferred-customer program and how many complaints customers lodge against them.

“We know who’s performing and who’s not,” he says. “In essence, we can tell what’s happening in real time. Without this, we might have guys operating on cruise control for a month or two before we’d realize what’s going on.”

Analytics also pushed Trim to drastically cut spending on phone book advertising by about 95 percent in recent years. Moreover, technology enables the company to track with great accuracy which advertising venues work best

▲ Rodrigo Hernandez, financial manager, uses ServiceTitan business management software to dispatch technicians. The cloud-based service records when the technicians were dispatched, the customer’s name and location, as well as which technicians produce the most revenue and what advertising campaigns generate the most bang for the buck. The system also provides updates on revenue and net profits in real time.

and eliminate those that don’t deliver an adequate return on investment.

For example, the company has over 400 different phone numbers and uses business management software to track which ones generate enough revenue to justify continued use of a particular ad campaign. That includes different phone numbers on service trucks in various service areas, on various regional internet websites, in phone books and even on refrigerator magnets in different markets.

“We can go right down the line and decide where we can most effectively spend advertising dollars,” Trim says.

Looking ahead, Trim anticipates continued growth for The Gentlemen Plumbers.

“I’m excited about the future,” he says. “We’ve positioned ourselves strategically to be No. 1 in all of our markets ... and we’ve positioned ourselves to ramp up and get better and better. In the next five years, I anticipate a lot of consolidation in our industry, which should provide plenty of opportunity for growth.” **P**

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# Vintage Chevy Wows Customers

Paired with modern amenities, plumbing truck's accessibility and functionality fuel drive for efficiency *By Ken Wysocky*

**T**erry Swney just might drive the most unusual — and coolest — service vehicle around. It's a Frankentruck of sorts that marries the cab of a restored 1955 Chevy 3/4-ton pickup with the chassis and drivetrain of a 1997 GMC 3500 and a modern 8-foot-long utility bed that offers plenty of storage for tools and parts.

Nicknamed "Buster" (the name of its former owner), the eye-catching truck does more than just help Swney stay organized. It also serves as a marketing campaign on wheels for Tonkin Plumbing, the company he co-owns with partner Phillip Tonkin in Riverside, California.

"Phillip and I are old-school and we're kind of known around town for being old school plumbers," says Swney (pronounced "Swee-nee"). "And Buster takes that to the next level. I really think that the truck's retro look helps create the perception that we're old school and will do jobs the old-fashioned way — do them right."

It took about eight months to completely overhaul Buster, which Swney discovered in a California orange grove. It's hard to believe that the once-rusting hulk is now a gleaming, fully restored vehicle, right down to the period-correct color, skyline blue, which was the color of Swney's first service truck. (The master plumber has been in the industry for 35 years.)

But the retro look doesn't mean the truck lacks for modern amenities. In back of the cab, a utility bed manufactured by California Truck Equipment Company provides all the storage capabilities of a modern-day service vehicle, even though it blends perfectly with the vintage cab. Swney credits Michael Mobley, the owner of Brand New Classics, with uniting the truck's disparate components into one seamless package.

"We were quite surprised at how well it worked out," Swney says. "And Michael has even taken Buster to car shows and won a few trophies."



▲ Buster looked rough when Terry Swney rescued him from a California orange grove.



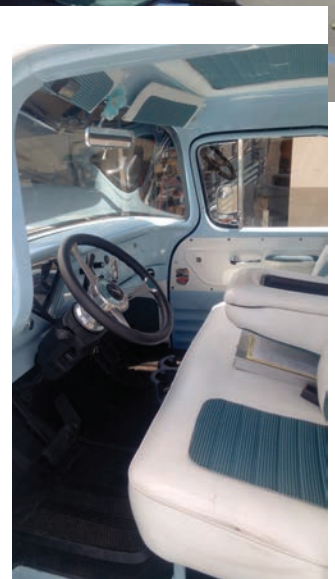
<b>COMPANY</b>	Tonkin Plumbing Inc.
<b>LOCATION</b>	Riverside, California
<b>OWNERS</b>	Phillip Tonkin and Terry Swney
<b>VEHICLE</b>	Restored 1955 Chevrolet 3/4-ton pickup, paired with a 1997 GMC 3500 chassis and a new 4- by 8-foot utility bed with storage compartments
<b>BENEFITS</b>	Efficient, productivity-enhancing storage and eye-catching marketing vehicle
<b>COST</b>	About \$60,000
<b>WEBSITE</b>	<a href="http://www.tonkinplumbing.com">www.tonkinplumbing.com</a>



▲ A flip-top storage compartment and three side cabinets provide plenty of room for hand-held tools and fittings.

“I really think that the truck’s retro look helps create the perception that we’re old school and will do jobs the old-fashioned way — do them right.”

*Terry Swney*



▲ Cab comforts include air conditioning, heat and stereo with Bluetooth wireless connectivity.

Swney opted for a new 4- by 8-foot utility bed because the original wouldn’t fit on the GMC chassis. But he’s pleased with the results, which feature a storage tray with a flip-up lid on top and three cabinets below on each side. Swney stores the tools used most on the passenger side, so he doesn’t have to stand in the street. Less-frequently used tools are stored inside the driver-side cabinets.

The top trays hold a multitude of miscellaneous copper and steel fittings up to 1 inch in diameter. In the cabinets, Swney stores items such as hand threading equipment made by RIDGID; hand tools made mostly by Craftsman, RIDGID and Channellock; a RIDGID SeeSnake pipeline inspection camera; and a portable Spartan 100 drum drain cleaning machine from Spartan Tool (for cleaning kitchen drains and other small lines). LED lights in each storage compartment enable Swney to keep working when it gets dark.

Most of his battery-powered tools — from drills to a reciprocating saw — are made by RIDGID. A 4,000-watt inverter in one of the storage cabinets keeps the tools fully charged.

“It’s really handy because I can charge my power tools while I’m driving,” Swney says. “There’s nothing worse than having a flat battery when you need it.”

The inverter is about half the size of a briefcase, occupying the top shelf in one of the storage bins.

“And I can run other electric-powered machines, like my drain cleaning machine, off it if there’s no electric on a job,” he says.

Swney carries a GO1500A electric-powered water jetter made by Gorlitz Sewer & Drain in the open bed. The jetter delivers up to 1,500 psi, flows to 2.1 gpm and can clean lines from 1 1/2 to 2 inches in diameter. The company also owns a Gorlitz GO3500 (3,500 psi at 5.5 gpm) jetter and a Spartan 1065 drum drain cleaning machine, both good for clearing lines up to 6 inches in diameter. But because they are too heavy to lift, Swney uses another service truck, equipped with a small crane, to deliver them to job sites.

Buster has aftermarket air conditioner and heater in the cab, which features a new stereo that includes Bluetooth wireless connectivity.

“The stereo even fit in the original holes in the dashboard,” Swney says. “Overall, I got the best of both worlds — I was pleasantly surprised at the options available in terms of adding modern conveniences to an old truck.”



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To stay organized and boost efficiency, Swney keeps an erasable whiteboard in one of the driver-side tool bins. Every time he uses a part, he writes it down so he knows what to restock at the end of the day.

“That saves me a lot of time by not going back and forth to supply houses,” he says. “I don’t have to leave a customer’s house and then drive back. No customer likes to see that.”

They do, however, like to see Buster.

“We always get calls from people who ask us to send the blue truck,” Swney says. “Some people just love the fact that we’re reusing an old truck.”

Swney admits the ’55 Chevy doesn’t handle like the 2005 1-ton GMC crew cab pickup he drove before he found and rescued Buster. He also misses the GMC’s spacious interior, including the extra row of seating.

“But I’m OK with sacrificing those things,” he says. “It’s a small price to pay for driving such a cool truck every day.” 

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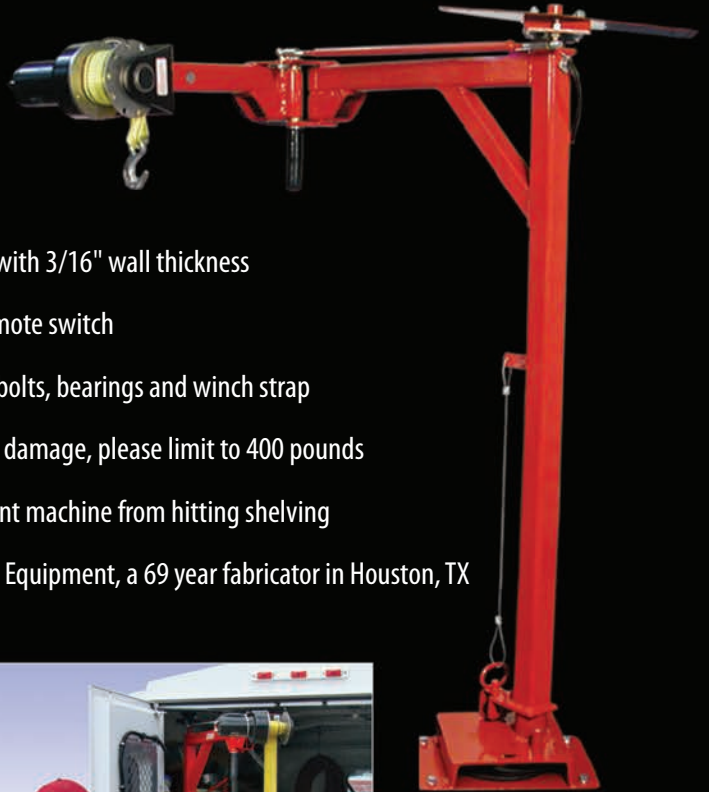
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# Keep Your Fleet in Tip-Top Shape

California plumber looks at replacing vehicles when odometer tops 200,000

By Marian Bond

**N**ick Kastanes, a master plumber with 34 years of experience, has owned Sac Val Plumbing in Sacramento, California, since 1991. His fleet of 10 vehicles (mostly 1997 to 2015 Chevrolets) and 13 technicians circle a 75-mile radius of the Central Valley of California metropolitan area, serving seven cities with a combined population of about 1.44 million. Kastanes says the key to providing top customer service comes down to qualified technicians and timely vehicle maintenance.

## Q: Who does your maintenance? Do you have a mechanic on staff?

**A:** We had an in-house mechanic, but he recently retired and we are using an outside shop at this time for all fleet maintenance.



▲ Nick Kastanes

## Q: What do you look for when selecting an outside shop?

**A:** Honesty and reliability, and somebody who can turn around the vehicle in a timely manner.

## Q: Will you consider bringing in someone to perform these duties in the future?

**A:** If we had a mechanic like the person we had before, we would. He was a part-time mechanic who through the years became a part-time technician. We don't have

enough vehicle work for a full-time mechanic. We were fortunate to have him.

Additionally, vehicles these days are very technical. If we had someone, it would be to perform tasks such as replacing brakes, belts, alternators. We would still go outside for diagnostics.

## Q: Do you have a maintenance program you review on a daily basis?

**A:** Nothing on a daily basis at this time. Our software is capable of doing that, but we haven't had time to get something up and running. We are in the process of doing some upgrades to have better control.

## Q: What are the primary duties of fleet supervisor Ruslan Zavorotynskyy?

**A:** Ruslan, among other things, reminds our plumbers they need to check the fluids, have the oil changed, check the transmission and brakes and contact him when there are issues.

## Q: What type of vehicle do you prefer?

**A:** We need a variety that includes vans for our light-duty technicians — drain cleaning and small maintenance jobs. Plumbers who do larger jobs need a box truck or van with a larger compartment or doors that roll up or have double doors at the back, like walk-in box vans.

## Q: How do you determine when it's time to retire a vehicle?

**A:** If the mileage goes over 200,000, we take a look at the vehicle and the condition, how many repairs and how often. I've had vehicles go 300,000 miles with no problem. We look at each one individually. I've gotten rid of a vehicle with 120,000 miles that was breaking down too often. But at 200,000 we look closely.



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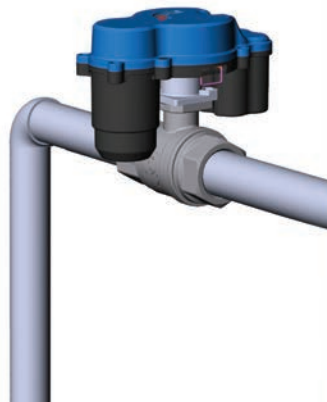
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**Q: What do you estimate is the inventory value of a typical service vehicle in your fleet?**

**A:** It varies from vehicle to vehicle, depending on what it's used for; probably from a few thousand to \$30,000.

**Q: Since you serve such a large metropolitan area, do you follow any special routing?**

**A:** As we grow, we will try to lock down technicians in certain areas based on their skills.


**Q: Do your plumber/technicians take their vehicles home at the end of the day or return them to the shop?**

**A:** They have the option, but they all take their vehicles home.

**Q: How important is GPS to proper fleet management?**

**A:** Extremely. I recommend that even the smallest companies have GPS.

**Q: What do you find most satisfying about your fleet management program?**

**A:** At this time I don't have a comfort zone. In the future I will, once we get more technology developed and have it all in the computer. Computers don't make mistakes. That's what we're working on right now. You have to take care of your fleet. It's your bread and butter. 

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# Secrets to a Showroom-Sharp Plumbing Truck

Clear-coat finishes still need to be washed and waxed **By Ed Wodalski**

**F**ace it, you love your truck. It's your baby, your favorite means of transportation. In many ways it's your closest companion and greatest source of income. You wash it, wax it and beam with pride.

You'd like to keep your baby showroom sharp. But that can be work. And with today's high-tech finishes, how much care does it really take for that classy truck look?

Mike Phillips, author of *The Complete Guide to a Show Car Shine*, director of training at Auto-geek.net and former Meguiar's sales representative/trainer, says while a non-wax finish might be a good sales pitch, today's clear-coat car and truck finishes (generally found on vehicles built since the mid-1990s) still need to be washed and waxed.

"The clear is paint without pigment; it's still paint. You still have to wash it, clean it, clay it, polish it, protect it — just like paint on a 1952 Chevy," says Phillips, former host of Autogeek's *What's in the Garage* TV show on the Fox Sports Network and whose car-care tips can be seen on *My Classic Car* and *Two Guys Garage* and *Motorhead Garage*.

"The factory clear coat — not a hot rod or custom paint job, but the factory clear coat on a new truck or car, the clear layer of paint — is thinner than a Post-it note (approximately 3 mils and less in some spots)," he says.

That thin layer is constantly under attack.



▲ Detailing clay is designed to safely remove above-surface bonded contaminants, enabling wax or sealant to better adhere to paint. (Photos by Ed Wodalski)

"UV rays from the sun, chemicals in the air and rain, road splatter and road grime. If you don't take care of the paint, that thin layer will corrode and deteriorate. And while you could clean your truck with dishwashing soap, that's a detergent. It's overkill for what you want to do," says Phillips, who recommends a non-detergent car wash.

For that classy truck finish, Phillips, who's been teaching detailing for 27 years, says it's all in the preparation. Before diving in with the bucket and brush, reach for a paint cleaner or pre-wax cleaner.

“The factory clear coat — not a hot rod or custom paint job, but the factory clear coat on a new truck or car, the clear layer of paint — is thinner than a Post-it note (approximately 3 mils and less in some spots).”

**Mike Phillips**



▶ Placing your hand in a thin sandwich bag (the thinner the better) will heighten your sense of touch, enabling you to feel the slightest impurity.

“These are typically nonabrasive and chemically remove any impurities from the surface and light oxidation — they clean the paint and prepare the surface so the wax sticks better,” he says.

To ensure all impurities have been removed, Phillips suggests “The Baggie Test.”

Put your hand in a thin sandwich bag (the thinner the better) and inspect the surface. The baggie will heighten your sense of touch, enabling you to feel the slightest impurity.

If you feel any bumps, the next step is detailing clay.

### ▣ What's detailing clay?

Introduced in the 1990s, detailing clay (available in a single 4-ounce bar) is designed to safely remove above-surface bonded contaminants, enabling wax or sealant to better adhere to paint. Remove the clay bar from its wrapper and tear into two pieces. Unused clay can be stored in the original plastic container or a resealable sandwich bag.

Knead the clay into a round, pancake-like patty. It should be large enough to cover the palm of your hand (approximately 4 1/2 inches in diameter). Spray a clay lubricant onto the patty and section of paint (approximately 16 to 20 inches) you want to clean. Rub the clay over the paint until it glides effortlessly. Wipe off excess residue from the surface with a micro-fiber towel until dry before moving on to a new section.

#### **The four benefits of detailing clay:**

- Safely removes above-surface bonded contaminants
- Enables your choice of wax or paint sealant to better bond or adhere to paint
- Restores a silky-smooth, clean finish
- Makes polishing easier, more effective and safer

“Most people will agree that a great-looking finish is a glossy-looking finish,” Phillips says. “Gloss comes from smoothness. And if you have contaminants that are bonded to the paint — they don’t wipe off and they don’t wash off — like tree sap and industrial fallout, it creates a texture and diminishes or decreases gloss. It also creates a barrier on the surface.”

Phillips says most quality brands of wax are designed



to adhere to a layer of paint, not dirt.

“If you don’t remove those contaminants, the wax won’t last very long.”

But don’t think waxes and polishes are the same. Designed to remove paint defects, compounds and polishes use abrasives.

“Compounds tend to be aggressive for severe defects and come in three categories: medium cut, fine cut and ultrafine cut,” he says. “So a person can pick and choose what will be the best product for the condition of their

“Most people will agree that a great-looking finish is a glossy-looking finish. Gloss comes from smoothness. And if you have contaminants that are bonded to the paint — they don’t wipe off and they don’t wash off — like tree sap and industrial fallout, it creates a texture and diminishes or decreases gloss. It also creates a barrier on the surface.”

**Mike Phillips**

paint. At Autogeek we tell people the wise choice is to use the least grit to get the job done, because it leaves the most paint on the car. Since it starts out thin, you don’t want to take out more than you have to.”

When it comes to vehicles subjected to harsh environments — mud and grime — Phillips follows the same procedure.

“I have a four-wheel-drive monster truck, and I do the same thing that I do to my wife’s Mercedes-Benz, and she just goes back and forth to work.”

Now go make your truck proud. **P**

# Engineered for High-Head Conditions

Franklin Electric's FPS IGPH grinder pumps deliver 414,000 cuts per minute *By Craig Mandli*

**I**t's one thing to talk about a new product or hand out brochures, but the opportunity to see a product in action can often help make the sale. That was Franklin Electric's thought as company personnel not only handed out information on the FPS IGPH Series of high-head grinder pumps, but demonstrated its powerful grinder on the 2016 Water & Wastewater Equipment, Treatment & Transport Show floor.

The FPS IGPH Series of pumps are engineered for demanding high-head conditions found in many low-pressure sewage transfer applications. Available in automatic or manual versions, the FPS IGPH Series of high-head grinder pumps use a state-of-the-art cutter system with tight clearances for grinding clogs and stringy solids at 414,000 cuts per minute. According to Amy Rainer, a product manager for Franklin Electric, the series is a solid fit across several wastewater applications.

"It can be used for either private residential or municipal low-pressure sewer systems," she says. "With all of the material getting flushed into systems that can potentially clog them, it is important to have a grinder that eliminates the threat."

The pumps feature two non-clogging impeller stages for efficient pumping of sewage slurries with a shut-off head of 200 feet. With 16 full-load amps at minimum head requirements of 100 feet, the pumps provide power to meet most applications.

"This particular grinder pump is ideal for residential and light-commercial sewage waste transfer where higher head conditions exist," Rainer says. "It would work perfect for a basement bathroom or a facility where the wastewater needs to be pumped up to reach the sewer or septic system."

Available in single- or three-phase models, the pumps are powered by a 2 hp, 3,450 rpm motor to handle the demands of grinding domestic sewage. Other design features include corrosion-resistant upper and lower brass impellers that minimize downtime and maintenance and built-in overload protection to prevent over-current/over-temperature damage.



▲ Erasmo Barron, applications engineer with Franklin Electric, demonstrates the grinding action of the company's FPS IGPH high-head grinder pump for a group of attendees at the 2016 WWETT Show. The pumps use a cutter system with tight clearances for grinding clogs and stringy solids at 414,000 cuts per minute. (Photo by Craig Mandli)

The automatic model has its start/run components encased in an oil-free chamber that requires no control panel, while the manual model uses externally mounted start/run components. It has dual-stage hydraulics, a carbon/ceramic mechanical seal, a deflection-resistant short motor shaft, corrosion-resistant upper and lower brass impellers that help minimize downtime, tight cutting clearances for fast and efficient grinding, and an epoxy-coated finish for



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“The reaction from those who’ve used it in the field has been terrific,” Rainer says. “We believe it’s been a very solid addition to our pump lineup.”

Franklin Electric is a longtime exhibitor at the WWETT Show and, according to Rainer, the 2016 show was great for the company. Having the new high-head grinder on display for demonstration certainly helped bring people into the booth.

“Just giving people the chance to see the grinder in action grinding up rags and other things that could potentially be clogged is extremely valuable,” she says. “Once people see how effective the grinder really is, they get excited. And with the clogging and wipes issues that are out there in the market right now, excitement for solving that problem is a good thing.” 260/824-2900; [www.franklinengineered.com](http://www.franklinengineered.com). 

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## Backed Up and Nowhere to Go

Missouri's Drain Surgeons jet through grease and debris, freeing up restaurant's sewer lines *By Paul Nicolaus*

**W**ith stockings hung by the chimney and the holiday season in full swing, Benji Grimes, operations manager for Drain Surgeons LLC, received a call at about 8 p.m. from a fine dining establishment in a Wildwood, Missouri, shopping center.

The restaurant's drain and sewer lines were backing up, creating a health hazard and leaving guests without restroom facilities. Faced with closure if the problem wasn't immediately rectified, Grimes determined a vacuum truck and water jetter would be needed to clear the lines.

Within the hour, a three-member team joined Grimes at the restaurant site. What they found were 10-inch lines packed with grease. Although equipped with interceptors, Grimes says problems occur when they aren't cleaned on a regular basis. Grease forces its way into the lines, where it begins to coagulate and stick to the pipe walls.

"If that grease is built up on the pipe walls, 360 degrees around the diameter of the inside of the pipe, it starts closing off," he says.



▲ Benji Grimes, operations manager for Drain Surgeons LLC, Imperial, Missouri.  
▲ An O'Brien 3500 Series trailer jetter was used to flush the lines.

<b>Imperial, Missouri</b>	
<b>COMPANY</b>	Drain Surgeons LLC
<b>OWNERS</b>	Herman and Connie Grimes
<b>LOCATION</b>	Imperial, Missouri
<b>YEAR FOUNDED</b>	2000
<b>SPECIALTY</b>	Sewer and drain cleaning

As restrooms are used, waste material becomes blocked or caught up on the grease until it creates a dam, completely blocking the pipe.

"It happens all the time to restaurants all over the city

— it's very common," Grimes says. "But when they back up, it gets pretty intense. People get excited."

To tackle the problem, Grimes and the Drain Surgeons team brought in a 2004 Ford vacuum truck (2,500-gallon capacity) with Moro PM80T pump to remove the grease and water mixture until the incoming and outgoing lines in the manhole became visible.

An O'Brien 3500 Series trailer jetter with 2,200 psi/35 gpm flow and 3/4-inch hose was used to flush the lines.

**“ Rather than being reactionary, we like to give our clients options to be preventive so it doesn't cost them downtime or their reputation, as far as their customers are concerned.”**

**Benji Grimes**


Drain Surgeons uses a two-man crew to run the jetter. The second technician serves as a competent person in case something unexpected, such as a hose break, occurs. He also helps with traffic control, keeping curious onlookers away from the open manhole.

“A lot of companies will chance it and go with a one-man crew,” Grimes says. “But at our company we've never done that. We always fall on the side of safety and caution when it comes to running high-end equipment like this.”

Grimes estimates his team remained on site until about 2 a.m., ensuring the lines were clean and flowing properly.

“The restaurant manager was extremely pleased with our response time and that we were able to get the problem resolved,” Grimes says.

Since the emergency call, a regular preventive maintenance schedule has been established.

“That's one of the things our company has built a good reputation on,” Grimes says. “We'll come in, find out why there was a blockage or problem, evaluate, and then offer suggestions to prevent it from happening again. Rather than being reactionary, we like to give our clients options to be preventive so it doesn't cost them downtime or their reputation, as far as their customers are concerned.” 



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Erik Gunn

# Managing Your Plumbing Payroll

An outside service can help you stay organized and compliant with state laws *By Erik Gunn*

If you've got a growing plumbing business, chances are you're adding employees. Hiring other people to work for you can be a sign of success and the key to continued growth.

It can also be — let's face it — a bit of a headache.

You want to be sure people are paid on time and the proper amount. That's obvious. And you want to make sure you stay out of trouble with the many state and federal laws that come into play. Are you following laws about overtime? Withholding the correct amount in taxes, Social Security and Medicare contributions? What about making sure that personal employee information is maintained securely so you don't wind up accidentally enabling an identity thief to take advantage of your employees?

And even if you manage to stay on top of those responsibilities, there's also the fact that embedded in all your payroll information is a lot of potentially valuable intelligence you could use to deploy your staff more efficiently and run your operation more smoothly.

Many small employers manage to master all of those challenges and at least get by. Some may train a clerical staffer in all the necessary skills to do the job. Computer software packages are available that can help smooth the way as well. But for some businesses, the answer might be a payroll service.

## Payroll firms

Third-party firms that take care of issuing paychecks and make sure the employer is properly following both financial and other elements of the employment laws and regulations aren't just for big employers. Companies that specialize in this service are interested and able to work even with very small employers of 10 or fewer workers.

"With all the deductions and insurance benefits and taxes — state, local and federal — and things like

garnishments on people's wages, using a payroll service honestly is a no-brainer," says Matt Timberlake, president of Ted Berry Co., a New England pipeline cleaning, inspection and rehab contractor. His business has been using a payroll service for 25 years.

There are several payroll service companies available. Among the most prominent are ADP and Paychex. Both companies serve employers of all size, but have specific segments aimed at the smallest companies.

For ADP, the small-business unit is called Run Powered by ADP and serves companies with zero to 50 employees, says Scott Leiman, the product marketing manager for that segment.

Leiman says one way a service can be really helpful is administering payrolls for a small but widely dispersed workforce, perhaps a handful in each of several different states. The data systems for a payroll service can ensure that each of those states' laws are followed properly in withholding the proper taxes for the employees based in those states, he points out.

Run Powered by ADP also has broader human resources services available for an extra fee. The company can provide solutions for retirement programs, health and other benefits, and worker's compensation insurance. For some of those, several small employers can be bundled into a larger risk pool, potentially lowering individual premium costs.

Run's services are based largely on the internet and do not require the client firm to install its own software. "It's a secure platform," Leiman says.

And because of the company's national reach, "we have a large team who are involved in compliance — not just the 50 states, but for municipalities," he adds.

Paychex is another payroll service company, and one that specializes in the small and midsize employer market.



“About 80 percent of our clients have fewer than 20 employees,” says Andy Childs of Paychex. “And half have fewer than five.”

Paychex clients are assigned a payroll specialist accessible around the clock via a call center, Childs says. The company’s services range from strictly payroll administration to broader HR services and, at the more complex level, serving as a “co-employer” under a contractual arrangement with the client. That service can allow small companies to offer more complex and expensive benefit packages at generally cheaper rates than they could on their own, he says.

Its services also include administering retirement programs.

“We are the largest recordkeeper for 401(k) plans that we manage,” Childs says. And Paychex can help administer health insurance and worker’s compensation insurance, among other benefit programs.

### ▲ Fees and offerings

Fees for payroll services vary. Charges may be based on a flat percentage of the payroll or on a per-employee basis. Additional services, of course, cost more. In choosing

a payroll service, get clear information on how you’ll be charged and what the total will be for the services you purchase.

Timberlake advises taking your time and reviewing carefully the offerings of various providers when choosing one. And don’t underestimate the complexity or time involved in making a change.

“Where the devil in the details is with what payroll company you select and how you set it up really is based more on the sophistication of the financial systems that your individual business uses,” he says.

“The biggest value with a payroll system is simply the compliance,” Timberlake says. “However, the real value comes in how effectively that system communicates with our other systems — our project management system and our financial management system.”

But even with that challenge, it’s likely to be worth the change if you manage it properly, he says. **P**

*Erik Gunn is a business writer in Racine, Wisconsin.*



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# Service Vans/Fleet Management

By Craig Mandli

## GPS Tracking



### DPL Telematics Trackall OBD-II

**Trackall OBD-II** from **DPL Telematics** combines compact GPS tracking and integrated OBD-II, so management knows not only where vehicles are, but exactly what they are doing and how they are operating. By remotely capturing vehicle OBD activity,

they can evaluate real-time and historical operational data to proactively diagnose vehicle issues, efficiently schedule repairs and pass emission tests. The system provides real-time visibility into improper or inefficient use of vehicles, as well as safety concerns such as excessive speeding, harsh braking or unnecessary idling. For the vehicle owner, this is a complete telematic solution to increase driver safety and productivity while decreasing the costs and risk of unauthorized asset use. **800/897-8093; www.dpltel.com.**

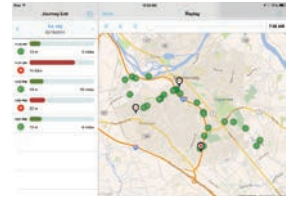
### Fleet Complete Tracker

The **Fleet Complete Tracker** is an affordable and easy-to-operate all-around fleet management solution that enables the user to carry out service from a single platform to cover various performance points. It can monitor vehicles in near real time without the need to regularly check in, and quickly gauges the best vehicle and driver for the job in the most optimal proximity to the client. The driver's ability to select the best route to their destination helps conserve fuel and optimize their time of arrival. The driver behavior dashboard provides visibility on driver conduct, including idling and aggressive driving, which can lead to high fuel costs; it also gives insight into when assignments are completed to better assess actual billing hours. The system includes geofencing, vehicle maintenance management, operational reporting for business intelligence and sensory status for auxiliary needs. **800/220-0779; www.fleetcomplete.com.**



### Fleetmatics Reveal

The **Reveal** GPS vehicle tracking system from **Fleetmatics** is designed to improve productivity for most mobile workforces. The cloud-based platform includes native apps for iOS and Android, providing visibility of field activity and actionable insight into driver behavior and workforce productivity. **704/716-7646; www.fleetmatics.com.**



### Ituran USA Manageit

The **Manageit** fleet management system from **Ituran USA** helps managers increase productivity and profitably through driver and vehicle monitoring. With live GPS tracking, geofencing and landmark capabilities, you know where drivers are at all times, eliminating side jobs and helping to dispatch drivers efficiently. The system comes with driver ID capabilities, customized reports for mileage, route history, driver safety, real-time speeding and idling notifications, and 24/7 live customer support. It can help eliminate poor driver behavior and route deviation, curtailing fuel expenses and aiding in recovery of stolen vehicles. Customers can access their account through a user-friendly website and smartphone app. **866/543-5433; www.ituranusa.com.**

### NexTraq Fleet Tracking System

The cloud-based **NexTraq Fleet Tracking System** is designed to increase productivity, reduce costs and simplify fleet and business operations. Fleet Dispatch enables a company to schedule jobs, dispatch them to vehicles and send messages to and from workers in the field. Included is the job schedule board that shows all pending jobs and appointments, as well as employee availability and status of their current jobs. Immediately contact teams in the field to clock work hours, assign jobs and find the easiest route to customers via Connect, a downloadable app that makes both office and field employees more efficient in daily business activities. **800/358-6178; www.nextraq.com.**



## Vehicle Tracking Solutions Silent Passenger

**Silent Passenger** fleet management software from **Vehicle Tracking Solutions** features a suite of tools that delivers actionable reports by enabling users to view current and/or historical data, as well as receive mobile-friendly alerts (texts, emails) that are easily configurable to numerous vehicles. It can significantly increase a company's bottom line by improving safety, minimizing fuel costs, aiding in theft recovery, lowering operational costs and increasing overall productivity. **631/492-1148; www.vehicletracking.com.**



## Route Management Software

### Chevin Fleet Solutions FleetWave Mobile



**FleetWave Mobile** from **Chevin Fleet Solutions** bridges the gap between field workers and the office. It provides a simple-to-use solution for workers to collect and transfer data to a centralized system or the office quickly and securely with or without an internet connection. Using most hand-held devices, it can be tailored to capture, collect and transmit most data, including structured information, signatures and pictures; and automate and streamline most field functions, from compliance-related tasks such as vehicle inspections and mileage capture to process automation including work order creation and service receipts. **781/793-0788; www.chevinfleet.com.**

## Retriever Communications Barking for Service

**Barking for Service** from **Retriever Communications** is a mobile application designed to ensure that technicians have critical job and customer information. Users are guided through a natural workflow to capture job data — including photos, attachments and signatures — that is sent back to the office in real time for immediate invoicing and reporting. It replaces paperwork in the field, increases workforce visibility and minimizes expenses. The application runs on iOS, Android or Windows and can integrate into multiple back-end systems. **281/566-2528; www.retrieverbarking.com.**



## Trailers



### Aluma Trailers TR-8200-14K

The **TR-8200-14K** equipment-hauling trailer from **Aluma Trailers** is available in lengths from 16 to 22 feet long. It features two 7,000-pound torsion axles, 30-inch beavertail ramp, six tie rings, 10K spring-loaded drop leg jack, LED lights and a front retaining rail. The all-aluminum construction enables an 18-foot trailer to weigh in at 2,350 pounds for greater carrying capacity. Extruded aluminum floors provide durability as well as maintenance-free use. **866/415-3285; www.alumaklm.com.**

### Felling Trailers FT-14 I Vac

The **FT-14 I Vac** model from **Felling Trailers** is designed as a transport solution for vacuum systems, providing the necessary capacity and placement of component mounts to ensure proper load distribution. It includes specific crossmember locations to match the component's footprint, steel decking with pre-cut mounting hole locations, crossmembers with matching mounting hole locations and a recessed tailboard and deck area for the spoils tank to clear when dumping. **800/245-2809; www.felling.com.**



## Vans

### Isuzu Commercial Truck Reach Van

The **Reach Van** from **Isuzu Commercial Truck** provides a commercial-grade vehicle that delivers reliable performance. The fuel-efficient design features a lightweight, aerodynamic Utilimaster body and Isuzu diesel powertrain. Other features include selective catalytic reduction technology with diesel exhaust fluid injection, reducing NOx levels in engine exhaust by 85 percent. The 3.0 4JJ1-TC turbocharged, intercooled diesel engine delivers 150 hp at 2,800 rpm and 282 ft-lbs of torque at 1,600 to 2,800 rpm. It has an Aisin A460 double overdrive six-speed automatic transmission with lockup. The Isuzu Diagnostic Service System enables diesel-model owners to receive a detailed performance report. **877/478-0828; www.isuzucv.com.**



# Service Vans/Fleet Management

By Craig Mandli

## Telematics system helps guarantee products are transported safely and on time



**Problem:** Tracking trucks and managing field ticketing processes proved to be a challenge for Rick’s Oilfield Hauling of Alberta, Canada. To remain competitive, Rick’s looked for a GPS tracking solution that offered additional functionality.

**Solution:** The **AssetWorks Field Service Solution** offers GPS/telematics and paperless field tickets, along with other features for optimizing fleet management operations. Vehicle tracking through GPS/telematics enables staff to view the current location of all vehicles in the fleet on a real-time map. The paperless field-ticketing system processes electronically managed field tickets and work orders.

**Result:** “I used to spend hours on the phone trying to locate my drivers, but now I can immediately see where my trucks are, and see how close they are to site rather than just randomly guessing,” says Lee Plant, general manager of Rick’s Oilfield Hauling. Duplicate data entry is eliminated, and as soon as jobs are completed in FSS, they are uploaded into the accounting system for billing in near real time. “I keep more trucks busy on the road using AssetWorks, and I can keep trucks loaded both ways. I can plan the entire day to maintain efficient operations and service my customers in real time,” Plant says. **403/705-3880; www.assetworks.com.**

## GPS tracking program monitors location and fuel usage



**Problem:** Plumbing Medic in Gilbert, Arizona, began researching GPS fleet tracking because with drivers spread across Gilbert the company needed a technology that would help locate drivers between jobs. “Our vehicles carry expensive equipment and parts, so it is important for us to know their whereabouts at all times,” says Tami Gurka, dispatcher for Plumbing Medic. The company also needed to monitor fuel usage, when and where technicians were filling up, and how many miles were driven between fueling to ensure all purchases were legitimate.

**Solution:** With the use of **GPS Insight’s Vehicle & Asset Tracking Solution**, Plumbing Medic visibly knows where technicians are and how long it will take to get to their next job.

**Result:** Having the ability to locate any vehicle’s location in real time has provided greater control of the expensive equipment and parts in the field. By integrating its WEX fuel card data into GPS Insight’s platform, Plumbing Medic can monitor transactions to prevent fraudulent purchases. Plumbing Medic also uses GPS Insight to simplify dispatching. “On average, I would make 150 calls per day and now I make virtually no calls because most communication is done via text messages through GPS Insight,” Gurka says. **866/477-4321; www.gpsinsight.com.**

## Service truck makes easy work of sewer blockage



**Problem:** A large residential apartment complex in the Philadelphia Metro area was experiencing a major sewage backup. Raw sewage was flowing from an outside clean-out and pooling into the parking lot. Tenants were pressuring the management company for a quick solution.

**Solution:** Zoom Drain & Sewer Service arrived quickly with its **Hackney Zoom Jetting Truck**. Upon arrival, the service technician was able to clear the blockage within an hour. The organization and utility of the unit allowed the technician quick access to everything needed. The unit not only has a powerful jetter, but the space to house four to five additional drain cleaning machines and video inspection equipment.

**Result:** Residents were relieved at the quick restoration of their utilities, and the property management company was happy for the speed with which the technician was able to diagnose and provide the proper solution to get the line open. The streamlined setup of the truck combined with the strength of the jetter enabled the Zoom Drain technician to easily complete the job. 252/946-6521; [www.hackneyservice.com](http://www.hackneyservice.com).

## Tracking solution saves wear and tear on plumbing company fleet



**Problem:** Ross Wexler, IT manager for Sam Wexler Plumbing of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, sought an alternative for his drivers who would rely on map books of the Greater

Philadelphia area to get from job to job. Back at the main office, dispatchers would consult a map of their own — a large one tacked up on the wall — to decide which plumber in the field should handle which service call.

**Solution:** The company began using the **SkyBitz Local Fleets** tracking solution to manage its fleet of service vehicles. By using a tamper-proof communicator that's about the size of a credit card (and can be installed with or without the driver's knowledge), SkyBitz Local Fleets provides GPS tracking capabilities. "Before, it was all just a guessing game," says Wexler. "Sometimes it was based on employees' recall of ZIP codes and where those were located. Compared to when we didn't have a system, it was surprising to see how much the trucks were being used when they shouldn't be." In addition, the software sends out maintenance reminders tailored to the vehicle make and model. The tracker activates whenever the vehicle is turned on, monitoring idle time.

**Result:** Wexler has SkyBitz Local Fleets installed in 17 company trucks. With a sizeable service area — about a 25-mile radius of Philadelphia — efficient routing provides major cost savings in the form of fewer trips to the fuel pump, fewer miles on the vehicle fleet and fewer man-hours. The system also enables drivers to quickly respond to service calls, especially emergency situations. "We're saving thousands every month," Wexler says. "Between gas usage, wear and tear on vehicles, and employee hours, it's been a huge difference." 888/760-4477; [www.skybitz.com](http://www.skybitz.com).

## Drain cleaner uses magnets to promote services



**Problem:** James Bouie, owner of Sewer Dewater Drain Cleaning of Plainfield, New Jersey, had seen his business blossom the first three years, but decline the last two, especially repeat business. Bouie had a nice website and Yellow Page ad, but it was obvious customers were not recalling his name and number.

**Solution:** Bouie found the **Stamp Works** booth at the Water & Wastewater Equipment, Treatment & Transport Show

handing out small magnets that looked just like his vans. He decided this was a way to keep his phone number in front of his customers, 24/7.

**Result:** The investment was small compared to the return. Bouie was amazed at how much his customers wanted to receive and post his magnet. He canceled his Yellow Page ad and ordered more magnets. **800/758-2743; www.stampworks.net.**

## Telematics system improves company dispatch



**Problem:** Dispatchers at Tiger Services, which provides sales, service and installation to residential customers throughout the East St. Louis, Illinois, metropolitan area, were guessing where the company's service technicians were at any given time. Todd Kiefer, the company's general manager, was committed to improving the dispatching process. "We wanted to give our office staff and the techs a tool that would help respond to customers who said we did not show up, or were late in arriving," he says. "We knew we weren't always sending the closest tech, or that techs were going out of their way to come back to our warehouse for parts." Tiger Services also wanted to move away from the inefficiency of dispatching jobs via calls and texts, since it required drivers to either use a hands-free system or pull over and use their mobile phones to get information on their next job.


**Solution:** The TomTom Telematics WEBFLEET solution and its integration with ServiceTitan provide Tiger Services with complete visibility into where its vehicles are and what its technicians are doing. Dispatchers are also able to send jobs directly to the TomTom device in the vehicle.

**Result:** "We've moved to a much more efficient workflow throughout the day," Kiefer says. "We're now able to dispatch techs within 10 miles of their last job, cutting way down on travel time and fitting in more jobs." Kiefer estimates techs are able to complete two to three more jobs every day. The company has also gone from 12 to 28 vehicles to meet the demands of its growing business. **866/459-3499; www.tomtomtelematics.com.**

## GPS tracking helps company keep track of assets

**Problem:** James Hillis, owner of A Royal Flush, a plumbing and septic company, often places his equipment and trucks working larger plumbing jobs on location overnight with little or no patrolling. A secure solution was needed.

**Solution:** Hillis saw US Fleet Tracking's live GPS as a possible answer. Not only could he place a tracker on all his equipment — portable restrooms, vehicles and septic trucks — but also establish geofences. He liked the way the live GPS tracking software allows for easy access to his account on any platform or device. He can immediately pull up his entire fleet, or zero in on a specific device. With alerts, he's notified when the geofenced area is entered or departed from without authorization.

**Result:** Hillis received a call from an employee reporting one of the company's trucks was missing. Using his phone, Hillis was able to locate the truck. Within 20 minutes, his team retrieved the vehicle, fully intact. The sheriff deputy's office used the Historical Playback feature on the account to trace the truck's path and apprehend the thief. Hillis did not have any alerts set previously, but now he does. "Live tracking is a great asset for me. The real kicker is the geofences and alerts, so I'm completely freed up," he says. "The entire solution works like another employee for us, and I'm real pleased with it!" **405/726-9900; www.usfleettracking.com.** 

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## Product Spotlight

Poly-Ease carts take the strain and pain out of transporting rolls of pipe

By Ed Wodalski

**P**oly-Ease carts from Bridging Gaps in Olympia, Washington, were designed by a plumber for plumbers to eliminate the back strain from lifting, transporting and laying rolls of poly pipe for water, waste, gas and geothermal lines.

Available in three models, Cart 1 is made to transport and install a 300-foot roll of 1-inch poly pipe. Cart 2 can handle a 600-foot roll of 3/4-inch or 300-foot roll of 1-inch geothermal piping. Cart 3 can carry a 300-foot roll of 1 1/4-inch piping.

"I owned a plumbing company for 15 years, and for the last four or five years I've been working on eliminating the labor and back pain of unrolling poly pipe," says Larry McVay, inventor and distributor of the Poly-Ease cart. "The last time I installed 167 feet of waterline I injured my back and said there has to be a better way. Laying on the couch for three days and going to a chiropractor twice a day, I looked online. I looked everywhere and there was absolutely

nothing out there that would allow me to load a 300- or 500-foot roll of 3/4-, 1-inch or 1 1/4-inch poly pipe and install it without having all the additional labor."

Putting pencil to paper, McVay came up with a sketch and had a prototype made and tested.

"Now I can go out and install 3/4-inch, 1-inch and 1 1/4-inch pipe by myself," he says, eliminating the need for additional workers. "It's very easy and goes very quickly. I installed 90 feet of poly pipe in 32 seconds one day, and I wasn't in a hurry. It works for trenchless as well as open trench."

Made from aluminum, the 3/4- and 1-inch-line carts weigh about 45 pounds. The 1 1/4-inch-line cart weighs about 60 pounds. To use, lock the cart in place and begin pulling. **360/790-3672; [www.poly-ease.com](http://www.poly-ease.com).**



### Electric Eel Mfg. portable battery pack

The portable battery pack from Electric Eel Mfg. is designed for use with Ecam Ace, Ace Wi-Fi and Ace 2 pipeline inspection camera systems. The lithium-ion battery pack provides up to five hours of power. Features include battery gauge, low-power alarm and wall adapter for charging. Output voltages include 12-volt via DC jack and 5-volt via USB port. **800/833-1212; [www.electriceel.com](http://www.electriceel.com).**



### ThermOmegaTech Circuit Solver self-actuating thermostat

The Circuit Solver self-actuating thermostatic balancing valve from ThermOmegaTech is designed to provide hot water when needed. As water use changes throughout a building, so does the path of resistance. Installing the valve immediately downstream of the last hot-water fixture on each hot-water branch line before





it tees into the common hot-water return line, the temperature of the hot-water distribution system stays balanced. The valve modulates based on temperature differential from a setpoint, preventing sudden closure that could create water hammer. Since the valve movement is automatic, manual adjustment is not required. **877/379-8258; www.thermomegatech.com/circuitsolver.**

### Grundfos UPZC Series expandable hydronic zone controls

The expandable UPZC Series of zone controls from Grundfos Pumps are designed to manage circulator and boiler control in residential hydronic heating systems. The non-networked devices control up to six heating zones and can be coupled together in various configurations to accommodate any application. The zone relay control connects to standard thermostats using either two or three wires. The optional third wire provides 24VAC to thermostats that require external power. The UPZC operates in a cold-start configuration with a call for heat from a thermostat. **800/921-7867; us.grundfos.com.**



### TOTO WaterSense high-efficiency commercial toilets

WaterSense-labeled 1.28 gpf high-efficiency toilets from TOTO, available in ADA-compliant and wall-mount models (CT708E, CT708EG, CT708EV, CT708EVG), are designed to work with EcoPower flush valves for optimal performance and water savings in commercial environments. Features include siphon

jet flush action with optional CeFiONtect ceramic glaze to prevent debris and mold from sticking to surfaces. Colors include cotton, bone and Sedona beige. The toilets meet and exceed ASME A112.19.2/CSA B45.1 and are certified IAPMO (cUPC) for the state of Massachusetts, city of Los Angeles and others. Code compliance includes UPC, IPC, NSPC and NPC Canada. **888/295-8134; www.totousa.com.**

### Goulds Water Technology, a Xylem brand, sewage pumps

Goulds Water Technology 3SD sewage pumps from Xylem combine dual hard-face mechanical seals with a 300 Series stainless steel keyed shaft motor to resist harsh environments. Certified by Underwriters Laboratories and the Canadian Standards Association, the commercial-grade pumps are designed



for continuous operation in industrial and residential applications. The pumps feature two-vane, semi-open, non-clog impellers with pumpout vanes for mechanical seal protection. Available in single- and three-phase options and 1.5 to 5 hp, the pumps are balanced for smooth operation and capable of running dry without damage to inner components. **866/325-4210; www.goulds.com.**

### Grohe FootControl kitchen faucets

FootControl faucets from Grohe can be turned on and off with a tap of the foot on the base, leaving hands free and faucets spotless. Both K7 and Ladylux models feature 360-degree swivel, locking push-button control to switch from regular flow to spray, fixed mixing valve and automatic safety stop after 60 seconds. **800/444-7643; www.groheamerica.com.**



### J.C. Whitlam Talon drain opener

Talon drain opener from J.C. Whitlam Mfg. is formulated for use by professional plumbing maintenance personnel in hotels, restaurants, apartment and condominium complexes, nursing homes and schools. The additive opens drains clogged by grease, hair and other organic matter. It opens grease traps and controls root growth, and can be used for monthly maintenance. **800/321-8358; www.joinpipe.com.**

### Franklin Electric IGP Series grinder pumps

IGP Series grinder pumps from Franklin Electric operate on 208 to 230 volts. The IGP-A (automatic) and IGP-M (manual) are designed to handle low-pressure sewer applications and deliver 414,000 cts per minute. Features include a non-clogging impeller, shut-off head of 130 feet, corrosion-resistant brass impellers and epoxy-coated cast iron finish. Both models have a 2 hp single-phase, 3,450 rpm start/run motor with built-in overload protection. **260/824-2900; www.franklinwater.com.**



### John Guest Black CTS Twist and Lock fittings

Black CTS Twist and Lock fittings from John Guest include 1/2-inch union tees, elbows and couplers (3/4- and 1-inch sizes available). Designed for water softener and domestic plumbing installations, the fittings are suitable for hot- and cold-water



plumbing and hydronic heating applications. The fittings connect to any combination of CPVC, PEX or CTS piping. No tools or glue are needed. Fittings are made from high-quality engineered plastic with EPDM O-rings. 973/808-5600; [www.johnguest.com](http://www.johnguest.com).

**Uponor hydronic touch-screen radiant thermostat**

The A3100101 Heat-Only thermostat with touch screen from Uponor is designed for the precise temperature control of residential hydronic radiant heating systems. The thermostat can operate a hydronic radiant heating system based on the air sensor measuring operative temperature, a floor sensor (sold separately), or a combination of both to provide the optimal level of comfort and control. The floor sensor not only provides enhanced thermal comfort, but protects the floor's surface from overheating. 800/321-4739; [www.uponor-usa.com](http://www.uponor-usa.com).



**Moen Annex shower rail system**

The Annex shower rail system from Moen allows for the addition of a hand shower and slide bar to the current shower arm connection without changing the existing in-wall valve. The chrome-finish rail system works without any shower valve, shower arm, showerhead or hand shower. Features include a two-function diverter and 2 1/2-inch horizontal adjustability to accommodate varying wall thicknesses. 800/553-6636; [www.moen.com](http://www.moen.com).



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## Uponor completes expansion, partners with Belkin



▲ Pictured (from left) are Jyri Luomakoski, CEO, Uponor Corp.; Bill Gray, president, Uponor North America; Mary Hamann-Roland, mayor of Apple Valley; Ed Kearney, Apple Valley Chamber president; Anna Wills, Minnesota state representative; and Greg Clausen, Minnesota senator.

Uponor North America celebrated the official opening of the company's ninth expansion in Apple Valley, Minnesota, in May and the 11th in the Greater Twin Cities area. The \$18 million expansion adds 90,000 square feet for lean manufacturing, office space and additional manufacturing equipment for producing cross-linked polyethylene pipe used in plumbing, radiant heating/cooling and fire safety systems.

Uponor Corp. partnered with Belkin International to form Phyn, an intelligent water solution that protects family homes and businesses from leak damage, enables mindful conservation and enhances household water usage with automated and anticipatory controls.

## Ferguson opens 13,183-square-foot showroom in Atlanta

Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery opened a 13,183-square-foot showroom in The Shops Buckhead Atlanta, marketed as the ultimate shopping destination in Atlanta. Shoppers are invited to experience products through various interactive showroom displays, including a working kitchen and shower stall with multiple showerhead and body spray options. To assist customers with their lighting choice, the showroom also features an LED lighting lab that associates use to demonstrate how different light temperatures can change the look of an area.

## Nu Flow opens Mid-Atlantic office

Nu Flow relocated its Maryland office to accommodate the company's continual growth and customers' need for pipe renewal solutions across the Mid-Atlantic. The new 3,000-square-foot facility is centrally located in Frederick, Maryland, and within a one-hour drive of Washington, Baltimore, northern Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. The office features conference rooms, private offices, two dock doors and customer parking.

## Hot Jet develops two-part sewer-cleaning system

Hot Jet USA, a division of PowerLine Industries, developed a two-part system that deep cleans and renews the insides of sewer systems without having to perform major excavation. The traditional way of drain cleaning has been performed by a plumber using a cable machine that forces a wire down the sewer drain that basically pokes a hole in the blockage but does not clean the sides of the sewer pipe. The two-part system uses hot water under high pressure to deep clean, sanitize and hydro scrub the inside of the sewer lines. The second part of the system injects Total C, a mild enzymatic biological detergent that remains in the line and digests the FOG (fats, oils and greases) after the lines have been hydro scrubbed and reconditioned, keeping them clean and odor free even under excessive FOG discharges like those of restaurant and commercial properties.

## Rausch Electronics adds California distributor

Rausch Electronics USA added Municipal Maintenance Equipment of Sacramento, California, to its family of authorized distributors. MME has four locations and will provide Rausch product sales and support throughout California and northern Nevada.

## LMK Technologies VP named to MSTT board

Rick Gage, vice president of sales at LMK Technologies, was named to the board of directors for the Midwest Society for Trenchless Technology (MSTT). The nonprofit organization was established in 1998 to promote trenchless technology education and its public benefits in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin.



## American Standard launches faucet marketing campaign

American Standard, in partnership with Minneapolis-based branding and advertising agency Solve, launched a \$7 million national faucet marketing campaign. "The Life of Your Faucet" includes TV, radio, consumer and trade print, digital, paid social and in-showroom/digital video. American Standard's 2016 line of faucets includes new designs and fresh styles for the kitchen and bath. The collection is the work of a team led by Jean-Jacques L'Hénaff, vice president of design.

### ServiceTitan receives Stevie Award for Mobile 2.0 app

ServiceTitan, provider of cloud-based business management software for residential HVAC, plumbing and electrical services businesses, was named the winner of a Bronze Stevie Award in the "Best Business App" category in the 14th Annual American Business Awards. The app features an interactive pricebook, multi-option presentation mode, speech-to-text recognition, predictive search and technician dashboard. The American Business Awards includes all organizations operating in the U.S. — public and private, for-profit and nonprofit, large and small. More than 250 professionals worldwide participated in the judging process.

### TRIC Tools adds VE Group to sales team

Pipe bursting manufacturer TRIC Tools named Santiago Durango and his company VE Group to coordinate sales for the Southeast U.S. market. The VE Group began its association with TRIC in 2014 and represents the pipe bursting business in Mexico, Latin America and South America (excluding Brazil). Santiago Durango and the VE Group have been involved in the trenchless industry for 10 years, making the technology available to South America and other regions around the world. Their work began in 2006, supporting a 70,000-foot pilot tube micro-tunneling project in Bogota, Colombia.

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