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MULTITOOLOO PLAYER

Indiana contractor offers multiple services in order to provide for all of his customers' needs
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On the ROAD

Blowing Off Steam

By giving frozen pipes a dose of heat treatment, the Arctic Blaster boosts customer service for Canadian plumbing company.

- By Ken Wysocky



On the Cover

David Buckmaster, master plumber for Feikema Plumbing & Sanitation, is clearing a sewer line with a RIDGID 1500 drain machine at a residence in Munster, Indiana. The company, based in Munster, provides residential and repair services, septic tank pumping and drain cleaning to the northern half of Lake County.

Photography by Marc Lebryk

Coming Next Month - Inspection, Location & Leak Detection

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Cory Dellenbach

One Focus at a Time

Specializing in one service could be the way to see your company grow its customer base easily

W

hat is your niche? Yeah, that can be a tricky question to answer. And, do you really need a niche?

The answer should be yes, even if you offer many other services. The Merriam-Webster dictionary offers six definitions of the word “niche,” but the one we care about is this one: “a specialized market.”

In two of our features this month, our writers talk about plumbing contractors finding their specialty. Joan Koehne offers tips on how to do that in this month’s Getting Down to Business column, and Anthony Pacilla talks about it in the Industry Insider column. Why is it so important though?

Here is an easy way to put it: Your business can’t do everything and compete with everyone. Finding a niche is so crucial to a small business’ success because it is far easier to describe to potential customers what you do and sell.

Imagine if a customer comes to you and asks what kind of plumbing you do. You answer with 12 different plumbing services from new construction installation to drain cleaning, and everything in between.

You’ve just overwhelmed them. Overwhelming customers can have a negative effect. You could be coming off as being OK in those jobs, but not great. Or they might think with all those offerings that you are charging more than someone who specializes in just one, even if that isn’t the case.

When you are niche, you are focused on being the best at what you do and whom you do it for. Everything else doesn’t matter. This means you don’t chase trends or worry about the competition. You hone your skills and do what you know best.

Dirk Feikema, owner of Feikema Plumbing & Sanitation in Indiana, has his niche: drain cleaning. Yes, he also does typical plumbing work and even septic pumping, but the heart of his business falls with drain cleaning.

“I grew up doing it, so I never considered not doing it,” Feikema says. “At the end of the day, drain cleaning is a serious part of my business.”

REHAB AND REPAIR

A big part of drain clean services that Feikema does is pipe repair with pipe bursting services.

You’ll find pipe repair and rehabilitation as the main focus in the Product Focus feature this month. There is equipment in that feature that will allow you to help your customers even more. Take a look at what is out there and see if any of it could help your business grow.

When you are niche, you are focused on being the best at what you do and whom you do it for. Everything else doesn't matter.

WHAT IS YOUR FOCUS?

Do you focus on one area more than the other? How important is it for you to highlight that in your area? I’d love to hear from some of our readers on this topic. You can email me at editor@plumbermag.com or call at 715-350-8436.

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INDUSTRY WISDOM

Successful Plumbers Offer Advice

Applying another person's experiences to your own is a great way to learn. This online exclusive takes a look back at the contractors who were profiled in the magazine in 2018 and some of the best pieces of advice they shared. Read their stories and see if it sparks any ideas on how you can improve your own business.

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NEW TECH

Plumbing Installation Innovations Boost Productivity

Streamlining operations and improving productivity for contractors has been a big push in the industry the last several years. That's why more manufacturers have been introducing and expanding press and push-to-connect tools. This online exclusive takes a look at a few of the manufacturers who were at the AHR Expo back in January and the various installation tools that they're rolling out to the industry.

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PRO TIPS

A Deep Dive Into Toilet Flange Repairs

For an industry newbie, the seemingly simple repair of a toilet flange may not be so straightforward. Master plumber and regular contributor Anthony Pacilla provides some advice to keep in mind in this online exclusive.

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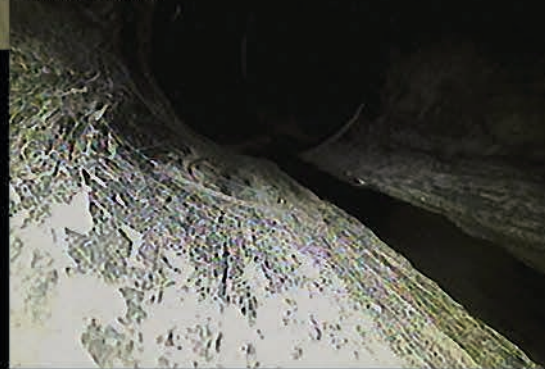
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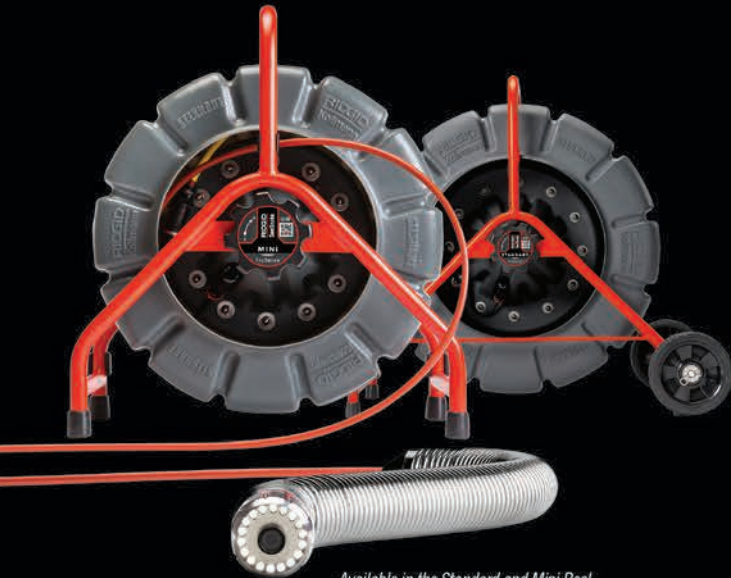
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MULTITOOLOO PLAYER

Indiana contractor offers multiple services in order to provide for all of his customers' needs

By Ken Wysocky |
Photography by Marc Lebryk

Feikema Plumbing & Sanitation, Munster, Indiana

OWNER Dirk Feikema
EMPLOYEES 8

FOUNDED 1956

SERVICES Residential service and repair plumbing, septic tank pumping, drain cleaning

SERVICE AREA Northern half of Lake County

WEBSITE www.feikemasanitation.com

Some plumbers don't want anything to do with drain cleaning beyond the occasional clogged kitchen sink or bathtub. Then there are plumbers like Dirk Feikema, who've made drain cleaning — ranging from smaller jobs to stopped-up sewer lines — a staple of their service offerings.

Sure, there are additional costs involved to enter this market. And yes, sewer jobs literally stink. But the owner of Feikema Plumbing & Sanitation in Munster, Indiana, says that given the profit margins and the high demand for such work, it's hard to justify not doing it — especially if it means giving away the business and revenue to a subcontractor. Moreover, larger drain-cleaning jobs serve as a launch pad for other high-margin, repair-related services, such as drainline inspections and pipe bursting to replace bad lines.

"I grew up doing it, so I never considered not doing it," says Feikema, 50, the third-generation owner of the company. His grandfather, the late Peter Feikema, established the business in 1956 in Munster, located right by the Illinois/Indiana state line in the northwestern corner of Indiana. "I've been rodding sewer lines on my own ever since the day after my 16th birthday. I got my driver's license and my dad put me to work doing sewers on my own.

"Now sewer lines are a huge part of how I stay in business," adds Feikema, who says cleaning drains generates about 13 percent of his annual revenue. "It's a case of one hand feeding the other. I get calls a couple times a week from different contractors who can't get a sewer line open and believe it's broken. Then I can come out and use

a camera to locate the problem and give the customer an estimate to fix it, if need be.

"At the end of the day, drain cleaning is a serious part of my business," he concludes, pointing out that he and two of his six technicians are dedicated primarily to drain cleaning work.

BUSINESS EVOLVED

The company started out as Peter Feikema Excavation, which primarily focused on new residential construction work, fueled by a post-World War II building boom that drove demand for everything from digging basements to installing septic systems.



◀ Dirk Feikema, the third-generation owner of Feikema Plumbing & Sanitation, has had to tweak the services he offers to fit the changing needs of customers in northwest Indiana. Feikema is shown with a vacuum truck built out by Advance Pump & Equipment and carrying a National Vacuum Equipment pump.

▶ Apprentice Chris Burrell assists master plumber David Buckmaster in clearing a sewer line with a RIDGID 1500 drain machine.



▲ Apprentice Chris Burrell, left, and master plumber David Buckmaster, right, accept their day assignment sheets from Feikema.

▼ Darrell Smith carries the hose reel for a Vaporooter residential foamer out of a 2017 Ford Transit service van.



“I grew up doing it, so I never considered not doing it. I’ve been rodding sewer lines on my own ever since the day after my 16th birthday. I got my driver’s license and my dad put me to work doing sewers on my own.”

Dirk Feikema

After a few years, the elder Feikema and his son, Wesley Feikema, decided to pump out septic tanks, too, as well as branch out into installing waterlines, sewer lines and drain tiles.

Larger market forces nudged the company toward plumbing work, but it didn’t happen overnight. Over the years, as new-home construction gradually slowed in the northern half of Lake County where the company does most of its work, demand for excavation work declined. Meanwhile, demand for service-and-repair plumbing grew as the housing stock aged. As such, doing plumbing work locally made more sense than making longer drives to do new-home construction work, not to mention incurring the associated higher costs for fuel and vehicle maintenance/wear-and-tear, he says.

“We could’ve followed the new-construction world, but that would’ve meant working farther and farther away from our yard,” says Feikema, a master plumber.

“Or we could focus on fixing our neighbors’ problems and stay 5 to 10 miles away from our yard. It was a no-brainer.”

Dirk Feikema started working for his father during summers after he graduated from eighth grade. He went to college with ambitions to be a teacher. But after he graduated from college in 1991 with a history degree from Calvin College in Michigan, he decided to work for his father.

At the time, the company already was dabbling in minor plumbing jobs, but Feikema felt it could be more valuable than just fill-in work. “So drain cleaning and service plumbing became my thing,” says Feikema, who started attending plumbing school. “I’d pump two septic tanks in the morning, and then do two or three drain cleanings in the afternoon. That’s how we went along for years.

“There was never any kind of master plan,” he says of the company’s gradual makeover. “It was just a go-where-God-leads-you kind of thing. I’m good at what I do, but I’m no strategic genius. Plumbing was just more my thing, while my father (Wesley Feikema, now retired) just loved to dig holes.”



▲ Feikema disassembles a faucet for job at a residence in Munster.



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• The Feikema Plumbing & Sanitation team includes (from left) Chris Burrell, Rob Hamstra, Dirk Feikema, Kyle Arnold and David Buckmaster.

INVESTING IN EQUIPMENT

Offering a variety of services requires an array of equipment. For drain cleaning, the company relies on almost a dozen RIDGID machines; a cart-mounted water jetter made by General Pipe Cleaners/General Wire Spring; a Crap Shooter and Crap Shooter II, made by BullFrog Industries for cleaning smaller drainlines; and a Kinetic Air Ram drain cleaner, made by General Pipe Cleaners/General Wire Spring. Feikema also owns two RIDGID SeeSnake pipeline inspection cameras, one SeeSnake Mini camera and a pipe bursting system manufactured

by TT Technologies.

The plumbing end of the business relies on three service vehicles: a 2018 Ford F-59 box truck with a 16-foot aluminum box body made by Morgan Olson, a 2004 GMC Savana extended-length cargo van and a 2017 Ford Transit van equipped with a storage system from Kargo Master.

“The Kargo Master cabinet (with three long drawers) is just about the best thing ever,” Feikema says. “It runs parallel to the bulkhead, so the drawers pull open to the side of the truck, which makes things very accessible.”

Continued ▶

Creating customers for life: Simply do the right thing

To Dirk Feikema, the essence of good customer service is not all that complicated: Be accessible. Operate with honesty and integrity. And make it easy for people to remember your company the next time they need service.

“A lot of it boils down to just caring for the customer,” says the third-generation owner of Feikema Plumbing & Sanitation in Munster, Indiana. “Most of my customers are pretty loyal to me because I take care of them. The key is providing timely service at a reasonable rate.”

Accessibility is a key factor in that customer care. “For better or for worse, I answer the phone almost all the time,” he says, noting that office calls usually get transferred to his cellphone if no one is in the office. “That way, when customers call, I can give them an answer right away.”

The honesty component comes into play by not recommending unnecessary products and repairs. For example, Feikema says he could try harder to persuade

customers to buy new fixtures and the like instead of making repairs — but he doesn’t. “I don’t put any pressure on my guys to try and upsell products, either,” he says.

In addition, Feikema says he strives to avoid overscheduling his technicians. That way if a customer wants to get a repair done that wasn’t expected, there’s still time to do it.

To make it easy for customers to remember his company, Feikema hands out refrigerator magnets designed to look like his 2018 Ford F-59 box truck. The magnets, made by Stamp Works Magnets in Texas, include the company’s contact information.

“People respond well to that,” he says. “It’s hard to quantify how it affects business. All I know is that when I go into customers’ kitchens to get paid, I usually still see the magnet on the fridge.”

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▼ Burrell, right, looks on as Buckmaster solders a pipe during a replacement job.



“It was just a go-where-God-leads-you kind of thing. I’m good at what I do, but I’m no strategic genius.”

Dirk Feikema

The drawers are divided into compartments. Feikema says he uses the bottom drawer for storing tubular combinations for traps, the middle drawer for faucet parts and the top drawer for items such as wax rings, Fluidmaster toilet fill valves, expansion plugs and so forth. “It’s basically a horizontal filing cabinet that holds a ton of stuff,” he notes.

In addition, the top is large enough to double as a shelf that holds Feikema’s three smaller RIDGID drain machines: a K-40 sink cable machine and K-50 and K-60 sectional drain machines. The truck also carries a larger K-1500 drain machine.

For power tools, Feikema prefers Milwaukee Tool products. The company also owns a Sawtec air-powered concrete saw; a ROTHENBERGER USA Ropress tool for joining copper fittings; a RIDGID pipe-sawing machine; and a smoke leak-detection machine made by the Superior Signal. “We might only do smoke-testing three or four times a year,” he explains. “But that machine paid for itself after two jobs. And it has an electric motor, so it’s not like it’s going to go bad.”

For repairing sewer lines and waterlines, crews use three dump trucks built on a 2004 Chevrolet Silverado 3500, 2014 Chevrolet Silverado 3500 and 1997 International 8100. The Silverados carry 5-cubic-yard dump bodies made by Regional Truck Equipment of Indiana, and the International carries a 15-cubic-yard dump body. The company also owns a Bobcat mini-excavator, as well as a backhoe and a tractor made by John Deere.

JUST THE RIGHT SIZE

Looking ahead, Feikema has no ambitions to dramatically increase the company’s size and scope. Once again, geography makes that an easy strategic decision. “Size-wise, I don’t want to grow any larger,” he says. “I’m at a comfortable level in terms of employees and equipment.

“In addition, I’m sort of limited by my geographic location in that we work out of a barn on a farm my family owns,” he continues. “When we started out, there was no town around us, but now we’re boxed in by neighbors, so I can’t expand my yard. And it makes no sense to move to another location to get more room. Again, would you rather do service calls a mile or two from your shop or, say, more than 30 miles from your shop? I’ve accepted the size-limitation factors.”



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Down the road, Feikema may have to accept something else: The fact that there might not be a fourth generation taking over the family business. He has two children, a son and a daughter, ages 18 and 16, respectively. And neither of them appear to be interested in taking the reins.

"I don't expect my son to come back," Feikema says. "I'm trying to not put pressure on him to come back, either. If it happens, it happens — he has to choose his own life.

"But in the meantime, I would like to operate the business for another 10 years or so. And at the point, if there's no heir apparent, I'll have to look at selling the business."

Feikema says closing up a longtime, family-owned business would be difficult. But finding a buyer he likes would help ease the pain. Either way, he has no regrets about the decision he made 30-some years ago to come back home and work for his father.

"It's funny because when I was at high school, I used to get mad at my dad because he was such a workaholic," he says. "And now I realize I work just as much as he did — it's easy to work long hours when you take ownership of something.

"Ultimately, I feel lucky that I found something I'm good at and that allows me to help people with their problems," he concludes. "I've been successful enough at it to make a good living. It's been very good for us." 

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Going Mobile

Mobility and coordination are cornerstones of successful construction, now made easier with mobile apps *By Jared Raney*

Add up all the time lost while struggling to find the right equipment or product in a truck, workshop or warehouse; now picture eliminating all that wasted time with a single simple tool.

That's the essence of mobile applications.

Every time you've needed to go back to the office for a form, find a computer to dig up a piece of info or run back to your truck for a piece of paper to write on — the burgeoning array of products in the expanding construction productivity software market has the potential to save hours of time on and off the job site.

Most fieldworkers today have smartphones, which means any crew with these devices has the potential to be transformed into a collaborative, connected and efficient team.

A BETTER TEAM

According to a study by PlanGrid, a construction productivity software developer, the construction industry at large loses almost \$180 billion a year due to lost time while searching for project data, poor communication and rework due to mistakes while coordinating jobs.

The study also determined that “miscommunication and poor project data account for 48 percent of all rework on U.S. construction job sites.”

PlanGrid offers its productivity software on any mobile device, as well as desktop and web browser.

“What it really means is connecting the field team with the right information to do their job at the right time.”

Stuart Frederich-Smith



▲ Many fieldworkers today have smartphones, which means any crew with these devices has the potential to be transformed into a collaborative, connected and efficient team. That can make job sites more productive and keep those at the office informed of how the job is going. (Photos courtesy of PlanGrid)

“What it really means is connecting the field team with the right information to do their job at the right time,” says Stuart Frederich-Smith, vice president of marketing for PlanGrid. “How do you make sure that you have the most recent, up-to-date plans all the time? In the old paper world, it was difficult to make sure that those things were up to date. How do you make sure that the teams are prioritizing the right things, working together? So collaboration is the second piece in that puzzle. And then the third is being able to analyze performance on one project, share best practices with others and make really good decisions for the business.”

Especially for large companies, coordinating over many job sites and dozens of employees, possibly even over great distances, the ability to have a central, accessible database keeps everyone literally on the same page.

“Making sure that when you don't have physical proximity to your team, you still have consistency of access to information matters a lot,” Frederich-Smith says.



◀ Mobile applications in the construction field have been around for about a decade, but have gained steam in the last few years.

“I think that as technology has become more available, through sort of pervasive smartphones and tablets, it's created an opportunity for more technology to make its way in the form of mobile apps.”

Stuart Frederick-Smith

“I think a key value for us is to be mindful of the real job site conditions and build a product that works for people in the real world.”

FLEET MANAGEMENT

Another common use of mobile applications is in fleet management. SkyBitz is one developer specializing in object tracking and asset management. Its Ops Center Mobile software allows users to not only track assets, but sort and organize from a tablet or smartphone.

“It all boils down to, for whatever reason, asking, ‘Where is it?’ They can quickly go on the mobile app, enter in the asset ID, or they can pull up the map, and say, ‘I’m expecting to find this asset in this location. Let me see what’s there,’” says Debbie Sackman, senior product manager for SkyBitz.

The mobile app can also sort by region, by asset type, and a number of other options to aid managers in keeping a handle on the many pieces of equipment they are responsible for. Another feature allows alerts to be set up for a work site, or “geo-zone.” If equipment leaves that work site when it’s not supposed to, supervisors are notified instantly.

“Any information you look at, it’s the same whether I’m looking at it on my mobile phone or whether I have somebody back in the home office looking at it from a web screen,” Sackman says. “We’re seeing the same set of information, so it’s always very quickly synchronized.”

BEST USES

Mobile apps are another technology that are often only as good as the uses they are put to. It’s important to know what your goals are when implementing a mobile solution.

“The recommendation I would have is that there be a very clear plan in terms of how it’s going to be used and

who’s going to be responsible for updating these things,” Frederick-Smith says. “Have a very intentional plan of how teams collaborate together, with technology.”

The asset management software allows managers to create custom IDs for assets, and a consistent naming scheme is important. Again, having all your information in one place, easily accessible, isn’t worth much if you can’t make sense of it.

Lastly, getting buy-in from your team is essential.

“We see a lot of cases where a decision is made without real input from that team,” Frederick-Smith says. “The software is not actually adopted, and adoption is all that matters in this stuff. So involve the field team in a structured pilot, where they review options, think about how they might need to change their workflow or how software might adapt to their workflow.”

Before that even, you’ll need to spend some time researching to make sure the solution you choose is a good fit for the operation.

It’s OK to be picky, especially with the rapid expansion that this market segment has experienced.

Take the case of Action Auger in Calgary, Alberta. Owner Brham Trim knew they needed a better way to organize inventory, as they were losing tens of thousands of dollars a year in wasted or missing parts.

Despite a thorough search, he didn’t find quite what he was looking for and instead hired a software developer to create a personalized mobile application solution.

“After we’ve inventoried a truck, we’ve set parameters into the app, that this is what we think it should have, and that’s a living list,” Trim says. “It allows us to know what’s on the trucks and allows it to move from truck to truck.”

By cataloging each truck’s inventory into a single, easily accessible database, Trim’s crew has a fuller picture of the overall inventory, limiting doubled purchases and extraneous parts.



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No matter what direction you go, it will involve a considerable investment upfront — both in money and time. To ensure that you see results in the long run, choosing the right software is possibly the most important factor of all.

AN EVOLVING FIELD

Mobile applications in the construction field have been around for about a decade, but have gained steam in the last few years.

“I think that it’s evolving, definitely,” Frederick-Smith says. “I think that as technology has become more available, through sort of pervasive smartphones and tablets, it’s created an opportunity for more technology to make its way in the form of mobile apps.”

As they develop, companies who aren’t embracing the changes of the modern world may find themselves falling behind. Fortunately, the possibilities are more limitless by the day, and any company can find a solution that fits its needs.

“It’s really only limited by what our customers are telling us they want us to do,” Sackman says. “From a technology standpoint, so far we have not run into anything that somebody has asked for on a mobile app that we haven’t been able to do. We continue to add functionality based on what our customers are asking for and new features that they feel are important. So it’s like anything in technology — we’re never standing still.” 

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Anthony Pacilla

Focus on What Separates Your Business

Keeping your company simple and stating a specialty could end up making your business last for generations *By Anthony Pacilla*

Any historian will tell you that international trade, the enormous success of the United States as a colony, and later as a country, and the rise of the British Empire all got a humble beginning from sheep.

Before Britain became a powerhouse of trade and got all their fancy buildings, they were farmers. They sat down and realized they had an abundance of sheep. So they decided to take what they had and use it as a trade incentive to whoever was in need of clothing.

They searched out trade partners, set up remote establishments where they would house their own countrymen in the receiving country, turned the wool into clothing, dyed it and sold it to their newly befriended trading partner.

If you are an older plumbing firm, maybe it's time to remind your local population what your specialty is.

This sets up what we know now as the British Empire and later the United States of America as powerhouses of international trade and wealth. Imagine for a minute all of what we know today, as far as international trade and business, was started because of some of “the fallas” tending their sheep. Instead of focusing on how bad things were or how great other nations were doing, they hunkered down and went with what they had and built from there.

THE LESSON LEARNED

A much needed business lesson can be learned from those ventures, the most important of which are focusing on what you excel at, executing at an extremely high level

and marketing it to your surrounding area.

In a world of what seems to be an insurmountable heap of plumbing companies per square mile, along with the clutter and exhaustion the internet puts on your business, it can be very difficult to stand out. Advertising simply as a good plumbing company will take your local \$1,000 ad and turn it into camouflage.

Stand out by specializing — especially if you are a startup business. You can't be everything to everyone. Forgo what some guys do, spreading out too far too fast. There are startups that seemingly spawn overnight into plumbing, heating, windows, insulation, siding, doors, restoration and house cleaning specialists. By doing this, you will have turned yourself into a slipshod handyman business overnight.

When you appear to be conducting yourself as a handyman, you will only ever receive handyman wages. Don't confuse making a profitable living with “getting by.”

FOCUS ON YOUR NICHE

Try instead to focus your marketing efforts on plumbing and knuckle-down on what you personally excel at. What are you and your men and women excellent at? Installing and repairing well water systems? Tankless water heaters? Drain cleaning?

Say, for example, you excel at installing and repairing well water systems. There may be a hundred companies in your town who do the same type of work, but do they market themselves as the well experts? Marketing is all about finding your niche and pounding it into the brains of the locals repeatedly until the terms “well water” and “plumbing” are synonymous with your company's name.

Plumbing companies are often run by plumbers who mimic what other plumbing companies do with marketing efforts. You will continue to receive the plumbing calls, but you will pick up more and more business from well



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In a world of what seems to be an insurmountable heap of plumbing companies per square mile, along with the clutter and exhaustion the internet puts on your business, it can be very difficult to stand out.

water customers and slowly become the go-to guys for wells in your area, especially since that is truly your specialty. Customers will see you and your men bursting at the seams with knowledge relating to that subject.

If you feel like your business marketing is floundering, whether you are a new startup or an old business, sometimes the simplest answer is the correct answer. If you are an older plumbing firm, maybe it's time to remind your local population what your specialty is.

All those old companies you used to deal with who "specialized in everything" are no longer in business. Most old plumbing firms still alive and kicking after 80-some years in business usually adapted when necessary, but kept things simple.

We've all worked in those pink or green bathrooms from the '50s and '60s. If you've ever researched old plumbing company advertisements from back in the day, it would have the company logo, a picture of a sparkling new and clean pink bathroom with a tag line that usually read: "The Kitchen & Bath Specialists." Those companies back then made a killing just by keeping it simple.

So when you are in doubt of where to take your next marketing campaign, think of a sheep. Go with the simpler option, and do what you do best. 

Anthony Pacilla has been in the trades since he was 9 years old (family business). He started cleaning toilets, mopping floors and putting fittings away in the warehouse. As he picked up skills, he would add becoming a ground man and laborer. When he was ready, Pacilla became an apprentice and then a journeyman plumber. He graduated college with a business and economics degree and immediately wanted to come back to work in the family business. A few years ago, Pacilla became a licensed master plumber. To contact Pacilla, email editor@plumbermag.com.

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Blowing Off Steam

By giving frozen pipes a dose of heat treatment, the Arctic Blaster boosts customer service for Canadian plumbing company

By Ken Wysocky

Winters in Saskatchewan can be brutally cold. How brutal? Think 40-degrees-below-zero cold — and possibly worse with a wind chill factor. As such, frozen sewer pipes and other pipelines keep plumbers like Bruce Hunter, a technician at P & J Plumbing & Heating, busy during wintertime.

In fact, during severe cold snaps, it's not unusual for Hunter to do nothing else but thaw out pipelines every day for a week or more at a time. His secret weapon for achieving that kind of productivity? The Arctic Blaster, made by Alberta-based Arctic Blasters, that uses steam to quickly melt ice.

"It's easy to use and easy to move around," says Hunter, who's been a plumber for 12 years at P & J Plumbing & Heating, owned by Dwayne Andrychuk and Bruce David. Established in 1988, the company employs 14 people and is based in Kamsack, a small town in southeastern Saskatchewan, about 240 miles north of the United States/Canadian border in North Dakota. "It also has a built-in handle and legs, so it's very easy to carry and very stable. And it does a very good job of quickly thawing out pipes."

The Arctic Blaster weighs about 70 pounds and measures 16 inches long by 7 inches wide and 11 inches tall. It's basically a water-boiling unit that heats water with a lit propane torch. The propane torch and tank must be bought separately.

OPERATING THE BLASTER

To use it, first fill the unit with about 2 gallons of water; that's enough to produce about 15 minutes of steam. Then attach one of the two single-braid hydraulic hoses that come with the device: a 3/8-inch-diameter hose designed for thawing larger-diameter pipes and a 1/4-inch-diameter hose for smaller-diameter pipes. Both include a quick-coupler connection and are rated for up to 3,000 psi.



▲ Bruce Hunter, a plumber for 12 years at P & J Plumbing & Heating in Kamsack, Saskatchewan, stands near his service vehicle and an Arctic Blaster from Arctic Blasters. The Arctic Blaster is basically a water-boiling unit that heats water with a lit propane torch to create steam, which can then be led into a frozen pipe to thaw it. (Photo courtesy of P&J Plumbing)

“In the kind of winter weather we have, it's definitely a good tool to have. We get a lot of work because of it.”

Bruce Hunter

Next, light the torch and place it inside the unit's fire tube in the rear of the machine. Then wait until steam comes out of the end of the hose, which indicates the device is ready to go to work. It generally takes about 5 to 8 minutes to heat the water to the point that it creates steam, Hunter says.

To start thawing, insert the hose into the frozen pipe. But be careful; the hose emits scalding-hot steam. For safety, the unit features a 16 psi pressure cap atop the water-tank portion. "If the pressure builds up too high, a valve



• Kamsack, SA

COMPANY P & J Plumbing & Heating, Kamsack, Saskatchewan

OWNERS Dwayne Andrychuk and Bruce David

MACHINE Arctic Blaster from Arctic Blasters

FUNCTION Thawing frozen waterlines and sewer lines

FEATURES 2-gallon water tank; steel body; weighs about 75 pounds; measures 16 inches long by 7 inches wide and 11 inches tall; includes two single-braid hydraulic hoses (3,000 psi), 3/8- and 1/4-inch diameter

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pops — very similar to a car radiator,” Hunter says.

It doesn't take long to develop a feel for the thawing process. “You just kind of feel your way through the pipe until the hose dead ends (into the ice), then you keep advancing it into the ice as it melts,” he says.

It's difficult to say how fast the Arctic Blaster will thaw out a pipe because of variables such as the length of the blockage and the diameter of the pipe. But a demonstration video on the Arctic Blaster website shows the unit thawing a 4-foot-section of completely frozen, 3/4-inch-diameter copper pipe in about 2 minutes. The same video shows the unit thawing a 4-foot-long section of completely frozen, 4-inch-diameter PVC pipe in about 10 minutes.

A DURABLE GREEN MACHINE

The Arctic Blaster offers several benefits compared to other thawing techniques. For starters, it runs on clean-burning propane fuel, no electricity required, which eliminates the need to hunt for electrical outlets on job sites. It also doesn't use countless gallons of water, like a water jetter, creating less of a mess. Moreover, the unit's portability makes it easy to take into even hard-to-access areas.

Aside from the green, eco-friendly aspects, the Arctic Blaster is also durable. “Last winter, I basically spent one week steaming pipes for eight hours a day,” Hunter says. “It requires no maintenance, and it's never broken down.”

The unit is also capable of handling extreme cases of frozen pipelines. Hunter recalls a day-care center where 30 or so feet of a 3-inch-diameter sewer main was frozen solid. “First I steamed the pipe through a clean-out, located down below in a crawl space,” he recalls. “Then I went to a ground-floor bathroom, removed the toilet and steamed the line from up there. It took nearly a whole day, but I thawed out the line. It was a great test for the machine.”

Hunter has a few operating suggestions, such as keeping the steam hose in the heated cab of a vehicle, so it doesn't freeze, and always completely dumping out any water left in the unit when a job is completed. Also, the torch should not be used inside a building, he adds.

Overall, the Arctic Blaster is a valuable, maintenance-free machine that helps boost the company's customer service. “In the kind of winter weather we have, it's definitely a good tool to have,” Hunter says. “We get a lot of work because of it.”

For more information, visit www.arcticblaster.com or send an email to delsgal@live.com. To order an Arctic Blaster, call 403-638-3934.

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Erik Gunn

Setting Prices or Staking Out Territories With Competitors Can Be a Felony Offense

Collusion is a clear and present danger when neighboring pumping companies get together and talk business. Handle these relationships carefully. *By Erik Gunn*

Working together is a wonderful thing — except when it's against the law.

Let's say you have a great customer base on the north side of the interstate highway bisecting your county that gives you enough work to keep you busy.

There's another plumbing company south of the interstate. They seem pretty busy, too, in their half of the county. You get along with each other well enough at your state trade association meetings. Maybe you've even gotten a call from them to help out one of their customers because they were so busy they couldn't respond to one more emergency.

Imagine you run into the owner at an industry show. He invites you out to dinner and offers a suggestion:

"I know you do good work, and you know I do good work. You're busy, and I'm busy. And we probably both worry about some newcomer expanding into this county and poaching our customers. What do you say, how about we just make a gentleman's agreement that you stick to the north side and I'll stick to the south side?"

With that last sentence, the two of you are at risk for breaking the law.

RULES ARE RULES

You might think only corporate giants need to worry about antitrust laws and other regulations that punish businesses for squelching competition. Not so. The specific laws might not be the same, but small businesses like yours are subject to laws against collusion and anti-competitive behavior just as much as big ones, says Peter Carstensen, a professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin Law School, where he teaches antitrust law, is a senior fellow of the American Antitrust Institute, and has published widely on the law and business competition.

"Antitrust law applies to every business," Carstensen

says. "Almost every state has a state antitrust law that is roughly similar to the federal antitrust law. So if the feds don't get you, the states will."

While you might not get prison time, if you get caught, you could wind up with a felony conviction. And because big business is on the federal radar when it comes to anti-competitive shenanigans, states are more likely to keep their eye on small and midsize companies.

"Antitrust lawyers are not cheap," he warns. "But secondly, it takes so much of the energy and mental attention of managers of a business if they get caught up in an antitrust case." That's energy and attention that you should be using to build and improve your business.

Why do these rules exist at all? Our economic system is founded on the idea that fair competition provides the best deal for consumers. So if competition isn't fair, consumers suffer. And that's when government steps in.

So when two or more independent businesses carve up a territory and agree not to compete, "that's pretty much a hardcore violation," Carstensen says.

And colluding over a territory isn't the only way businesses — even small ones — can run afoul of antitrust laws. Agreements among competitors over how much they'll charge for a service are another "straight-up no-no," he says.

WHO'S WATCHING?

It's not always the customers who complain, either. Other competitors, if they figure out you're up to something, will be just as ready to turn you in.

A number of years ago, Carstensen recalls, real-estate agents in a particular market got together and agreed to raise their commission rates. Their plan didn't get very far, though. "At least three of the brokers left the room and called the Justice Department," he says.

Continued ▶



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Another form of collusion that sometimes crops up is when competitors cooperate to cut one of their number out.

For instance, suppose there are five businesses in the same industry in a particular region and they all use the same supplier. Then, for whatever reason, four of the five decide they want to force the fifth company out of business. (Let's call the blackballed business XYZ Plumbing.)

So those four go to the supplier. "Stop selling to XYZ Plumbing," they say. "If you don't, the four of us will stop doing business with you."

In a case similar to that example, Carstensen says, the supplier agreed and stopped selling to the target company. The blackballed company in turn sued the supplier and won damages.

GRAY AREAS

Sometimes it's hard to tell if industry infighting is a case of honest whistleblowing or a conspiracy to restrict competition.

If a group of businesses complains to a supplier about one of their competitors, they might genuinely want to sound the alarm about a bad apple. On the other hand, Carstensen says, "Many times people will infer there is an agreement among those guys to complain."

The bottom line: If you have evidence that another business really is a bad actor, it's your right, even your professional duty, to make sure that the appropriate authorities know.

But if you are trying to run someone else out of business and you gang up with other competitors to try to do that, you're breaking the law. "You can't agree to attack a competitor," Carstensen says. "Those are things a business needs to watch out for whenever you're interacting with another business: Why is this happening? Is this lawful?"

Another gray area can arise in supplier dealings.

Suppose your regional trade group hires an engineer from the local university to evaluate a series of alternative products. The engineer produces a report and rates the various technologies for their effectiveness, ease of application or other criteria. The report is made available to the trade group, recommending some products and not others.

By itself, Carstensen says, that's perfectly appropriate: Each member of the association can still choose which product to use.

"Where we get the problem is when they say, 'We ought to standardize on something so we don't confuse customers by giving them all these options.' Now they've

Our economic system is founded on the idea that fair competition provides the best deal for consumers. So if competition isn't fair, consumers suffer. And that's when government steps in.

fenced out all the other suppliers. The customer is not given a choice."

THE RIGHT WAY

That doesn't mean competitors can't cooperate at all. Trade associations represent the entire industry, providing training, serving as a voice for member businesses in dealings with the public and with government agencies, and promulgating best practices.


Other forms of cooperation are also permissible, so long as they don't harm competition. For instance, if two or more competing companies agree to a joint venture so they can purchase their supplies in larger quantities at a lower price, that's perfectly acceptable, Carstensen says.

By all means, cooperate when doing so doesn't mean you'll interfere with competition and when you'll serve the interests of all your competitors as well as your customers and the community. Work through established, reputable trade groups.

Carstensen says agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice are often willing to advise business owners as to what arrangements will be viewed as legitimate and what ones look questionable. But, he warns, ask *before* you embark on any collaboration of that sort.

If you're going to take that step, even if you don't have any questions, consult with a lawyer versed in both state and federal laws that govern competitive business practices. That can be a challenge, he acknowledges; lawyers with antitrust experience don't come cheap.

But if you have a regular business lawyer (and you really should), the state bar association should be able to direct him or her to an antitrust expert willing to do a one-time phone consultation at no charge.

That way you can be sure you don't fall into the collusion trap. 



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Finding Your Niche

Doing some research, keeping an eye on competition and talking to other plumbers can help you home in on your specialty *By Joan Koehne*

It didn't take long for Joseph Wood to find his niche in the plumbing industry.

As the son of a plumber, he would ride along with his dad for service calls, giving him an early introduction to service and repair. He earned additional experience while working as an apprentice for his brother, John. When Wood opened Boston Standard Plumbing and Heating in 2008, he knew his strengths and skills were well-suited for residential service and repair work.

"I wasn't just going to dive into something I'd never done. I stayed in my lane. That's how I came up with service and repair," Wood says.



“We survive on plumbing. It’s always there as an undercurrent. We supplement with heating and air conditioning seasonally and further supplement that with service plans.”

Joseph Wood

When opening a business, plumbers need to decide what work they will provide. Wood and Brad Sims, owner of Mr. Rooter Mid-Michigan, offered six tips to help new plumbers carve out their niche.

Evaluate your skills and knowledge

“Clearly, you need to start with what’s in your wheelhouse to do,” says Wood, whose company serves the area of eastern Massachusetts. Starting a new business is challenging enough without trying to tackle a new industry at the same time, he says.

Draining cleaning was Sims’ first niche. He opened Brad’s Drain Cleaning in 2003 and broadened his services in 2007 as a Mr. Rooter franchise. By hiring master plumbers and technicians, Mr. Rooter Mid-Michigan added people with the skills and knowledge to support a full line of plumbing, sewer jetting and pipe bursting services for an 11-county area.

Determine market demand

When Wood was starting out, he noticed other companies provided air conditioning services in addition to plumbing and heating. It’s the common adage

Continued ▶

▶ Joseph Wood, owner of Boston Standard Plumbing and Heating in Boston. Wood identified air conditioning units as a market demand and expanded his niche to include installation, service and repair of residential air conditioning units. (Photography by Scott Eisen)



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◀ Brad Sims and his wife, Amanda, operate Mr. Rooter of Mid-Michigan in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. By hiring master plumbers and technicians, the company was able to expand from just drain cleaning work to typical plumbing jobs as well, expanding Sims' niche. (Photography by Danielle Tenbusch)

“If it's going to work, it's going to work because you want it to. So much work is out there.”

Brad Sims

“One call. That's all.” A company is more attractive when it can offer a full line of services.

Wood identified this as market demand and expanded his niche to include installation, service and repair of residential air conditioning units.

He attended night classes and worked alongside experienced technicians to offer air conditioning services. By adding air conditioning to its repertoire, Boston Standard not only met a market demand, it also eased the lull that occurs after the heating season.

New plumbers can determine market demand through online research and industry experts and by interacting with established plumbers in the area.

Consider the competition

An online search for plumbers in the area can help determine the level of competition for specific services. For Sims, it was easy to identify the competition.

“We only do service, because there's no service plumbers around,” he says. “We actually decline the new-construction jobs.”

Plumbing service and repair have been a great niche for the company. “We're in and out of houses; we can do 10-20 houses a day, or even more sometimes, depending on how many technicians we have,” Sims says.

Commit to success

“If it's going to work, it's going to work because you want it to,” Sims says. “So much work is out there.”

With plumbers retiring and a shortage of plumbers entering the business, the lack of skilled tradesmen means huge opportunities for new business owners. “Any plumber who wants to start out — he's pretty much successful if he wants to be successful,” Sims says.

One secret to the success of Mr. Rooter Mid-Michigan is the 24/7 service the company offers. Mr. Rooter caters to the people who clock out of work, go home and find a plugged sewer or water leak waiting for them.

“If you think you're going to get out of work at 4 o'clock as a plumber, chances are you're not going to make it very long,” Sims says.

Look at your experience

An apprenticeship program can help you gain the experience you need to feel comfortable striking out on your own. Wood calls it “learning off someone else's dime.” Take advantage of the benefits of working for someone else, gaining experience without the additional stress of running a business, he says. Learning about business operations is also helpful.

“The biggest thing people struggle with now is being a tradesperson. You always fall back on what you're best on, which is tools. If you're going to start a company, you need to handle the business side, too,” he says.

Use caution when revising your niche

Boston Standard and Mr. Rooter both have revised their niche over time. They've also experimented with other types of work, with mixed results.

“We branched out into new-construction jobs and didn't like it at all,” Sims says. Sims prefers a steady cash flow, and new-construction jobs tied up their money for too long. “We decided right from the get-go we'd be service plumbers, not new-construction plumbers, because that's what we already knew.”

Boston Standard occasionally does commercial work at restaurants or multifamily units, but typically sticks to residential work. Other contractors are faster, have the

Continued ▶

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right equipment and can turn a better profit.

“We’re just not as good at it as other people,” Wood says. “For some, that’s all they do.”

Finding a niche in the plumbing industry helps new plumbers determine what products and services will yield a profit. Making strategic decisions from the outset can give them a solid foundation for long-term growth and success. For Boston Standard, plumbing provides that solid foundation.

“We survive on plumbing. It’s always there as an undercurrent,” Wood says. “We supplement with heating and air conditioning seasonally and further supplement that with service plans.” **P**

Editor’s Note

This is the third in a series of business stories focused on helping plumbers start their own company. Throughout the year, we’ll offer different tips geared toward those looking at starting their own operation. If you have any suggestions, email us at editor@plumbermag.com.



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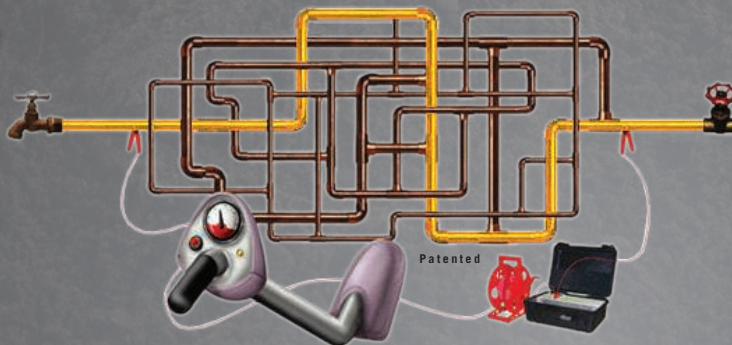
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Rehabilitation and Repair

By Craig Mandli

Bursting



Pow-R Mole Sales PD-33M

The PD-33M pipe bursting machine from Pow-R Mole Sales is designed to replace existing underground pipes 2 to 6 inches in diameter. Its nonslip, cylinder-activated jaws prevent cable damage while providing 60,000 pounds of pulling force. It offers a cost-effective alternative to open-cut excavation, reducing customer disruption and increasing company profits. The process replaces the existing pipe with a fused HDPE pipe, which eliminates all joints, and allows the operator to pull through bends such as 45-degree fittings. This system is modular and can be easily disassembled and reassembled for manhole and basement applications. With a compact design and very small footprint of only 20 by 20 inches, this unit can be used in tight locations. **800-344-6653; www.powrmole.com.**

Spartan Tool UnderTaker

With 30 tons of lateral pulling force, the UnderTaker pipe bursting system from Spartan Tool employs a hydraulically powered cylinder that pulls a bursting head through the existing line while simultaneously replacing it with seamless, high-flow, code-approved high-density polyethylene pipe. With a small hole at each end of the run, the user can pull pipe from the building to the main, accommodate bends in the pipe, increase diameter and lay new line at a rate of up to 5 feet per minute. The system allows replacement of 2- to 6-inch pipe with up to three 45-degree bends in the pipe. It can also upsize from 4- to 6-inch pipes. When assembled, the unit weighs 210 pounds, but it disassembles into four separate components for easy transport, with no part weighing more than 70 pounds. **800-435-3866; www.spartantool.com.**



Excavating

Bobcat R-Series E85

R-Series E85 excavators from Bobcat offer a design geared toward increasing operator productivity and comfort, as well as machine uptime protection. Operators will benefit from the performance of the nondiesel particulate filter, turbocharged engine with increased horsepower, and an optimized integrated rear counterweight design that enhances the machine's stability. An optional automatic heating and air conditioning system provides complete control over the cab climate. Strengthened hinges and latches and more ridged, aligned excavator panels reduce vibration in the cab, making for a more enjoyable workday. Along with having the largest cab openings in the industry, there is increased floor space and additional glass surface area, which includes an improved top window and narrower side pillars for increased visibility. **800-743-4340; www.bobcat.com.**



Fittings/Fixtures

LSP Products Group - part of NCH Corp. - One Stop Box

The One Stop Box from LSP Products Group - part of NCH Corp. - is a small combination valve, condensate and drain box designed mainly for new construction. It is also suitable for replacing an existing outlet box, as the valves are replaceable. This means in the future, if a plumber has to replace the valves, they can do it fast and easy without the expense and hassle of cutting into the drywall, disconnecting/cutting the water supply lines, removing the valves, putting in new valves, reconnecting the waterlines and repairing the drywall. All they do is remove two screws, pull out the metal bracket, pull the current valve out, put in



a new valve, and reinstall the metal bracket and screws. No drywall or water supply line work is required. **800-854-3215; www.lspproducts.com.**

Uponor ProPEX

ProPEX copper press adapters from Uponor allow plumbers to efficiently connect PEX piping to existing copper press piping systems. They are made from high-quality, lead-free brass, meeting all local and national potable-plumbing codes. This is a flameless solution to make hybrid PEX-to-copper connections fast and easy by utilizing existing tools that cut project timelines by up to 71 percent compared to sweat. It incorporates a design to securely fasten the pipe and fitting together, eliminating the need for a stainless steel ring. They are the only copper press adapters available in 2 1/2- and 3-inch sizes. **800-321-4739; www.uponorpro.com.**



recirculation hoses, pressure gauge, temperature gauges, band clamps and pull strap. It serves as a complement to the Max Inferno compact, electric-powered, hot-air portable heating unit and the simple-to-use Max SteamKick. **877-426-5948; www.maxlinerusa.com.**

Perma-Liner Industries Vinyl Ester

Vinyl Ester high-performance epoxy resin from Perma-Liner Industries provides corrosion resistance, durability and toughness for CIPP applications. It is well-suited for specific applications where fluid temperature is relatively higher and also for high-pressure and corrosive environments. The molecular architecture delivers a number of benefits, including superior mechanical properties and catalyzed pot life. **866-336-2568; www.perma-liner.com.**



Pipe Relining Equipment

CUES Easy Grout

The CUES Easy Grout system offers a computerized graphical user interface that intuitively leads the user through the grouting process. The software includes help files, tool tip descriptions and recommended settings to assist operators throughout the grouting process. Since the system has been designed to consolidate all the valves and electrical controls into a single instrumentation cabinet, it can be mounted in any location, therefore saving space. **800-327-7791; www.cuesinc.com.**



Picote Solutions Dual-Color Epoxy Brush Coating System

The Dual-Color Epoxy Brush Coating System from Picote Solutions allows technicians to rehabilitate pipes from 1.25 to 12 inches for drains, sewers, water pipes, electrical conduits, and heat and air-conditioning ducts by brush casting a coating. The coating resin forms a pipe inside the original pipe that is a tested, safe and environmentally friendly product. The new pipe is dampproof, corrosion-resistant, wear-resistant and noncorrosive. It is ASTM and NSF certified (NSF/ANSI 61-5). It is a 100 percent solids epoxy, and the method allows for clear visual verification during the application process. Apply to small areas or all drains in multistory buildings. The system is practical and easily fits in tight places. **219-440-1404; www.picotesolutions.com.**



MaxLiner USA Max HotKick 2.0

The Max HotKick 2.0 from MaxLiner USA is a mobile hot-water curing system with built-in recirculating pump. It is half the size of the company's original, making it compact and easier to transport. The propane-fueled unit is safe for indoor use when applicable. Firing at 199,000 Btus, it reaches high temperatures quickly for curing larger diameters and longer lateral liners. It includes a 3- to 8-inch curing manifold with pressure-relief Kunkle valve, two 25-foot red and black



Pipeline Renewal Technologies Quick-Lock

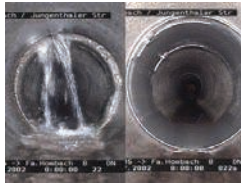
For stand-alone point repair, or for pre-lining under high infiltration, the Quick-Lock sleeve from Pipeline Renewal Technologies offers a rapid, easy-to-install and economical way to repair failing pipe. It restores the host pipe's strength with heavy-gauge 316L stainless steel, and seals out infiltration with a single-piece vulcanized EPDM rubber gasket. Suitable for sewer, water and industrial applications, a sleeve installs in minutes with minimal equipment and overhead. It is positioned inside the host pipe on a wheeled flow-through

Continued ▶

packer pushed by any standard CCTV crawler. Once in position, the packer expands the sleeve against the pipe wall to structurally reinforce it and stop infiltration. They are available in diameters ranging 6 to 28 inches, and in lengths of 16 and 20 inches. Multiple sleeves can be interleaved to perform longer repairs. 866-936-8476; www.pipelinert.com.

RauschUSA QuickLock Point Repair

QuickLock Point Repair from **RauschUSA** is a permanent no-dig trenchless pipeline rehabilitation installation that includes a 316L stainless steel sleeve encased in an EPDM rubber gasket that is mechanically compressed against the inner pipe wall and permanently locked in place by two locking gear mechanisms. No chemicals or resins are used, so there is no cure time. It meets ASTM Standard F3110-14 and is NSF 61-certified for use in potable water. Applications include repairing leaking or offset joints, fixing cracks and holes, preventing root intrusion and closing unused laterals. It augments the structural strength of the pipe and is a permanent and reliable repair. The installation withstands and passes internal pressure tests. Since there are no chemicals involved, it can be installed with flow. It can be used in pipes from 6 to 32 inches in diameter. 717-709-1005; www.rauschusa.com.



Warrior Trenchless Solutions Thermoform

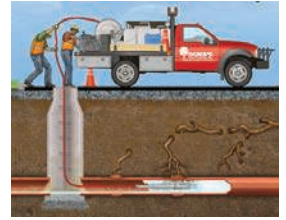
Thermoform from **Warrior Trenchless Solutions** is a PVC-alloy structural pipe lining system designed for the trenchless rehabilitation of failing sewer and culvert pipes. It is an environmentally friendly, styrene-free thermoplastic. There are no harmful emissions, and it does not rely on any chemical reaction during installation. Factory-controlled production with rigorous material testing ensures a consistent quality product that conforms to and exceeds the expected standards. The material is highly flexible, allowing it to expand and fit tightly to the host pipe, including changes in shape and dimensions. It is produced in sizes ranging from 4 to 36 inches in diameter, and the wall thickness can be varied according to the application. All installers must be accredited and audited to ensure the highest quality work possible. 716-601-7760; www.thermoformliner.com.



Rehabilitation

Duke's Root Control Razorooter II

Diquat-based **Razorooter II** root-control herbicide from **Duke's Root Control** is registered by the U.S. EPA for controlling nuisance tree roots in sanitary sewer collections systems. It kills roots and eliminates mainline stoppages caused by live tree roots. 00-447-6687; www.dukes.com.



Enz USA cutting ball

The water-driven cutting ball nozzle from **Enz USA** is available in 3- and 4-inch sizes; and it can move easily around curves in 3- to 6-inch polyethylene, steel or concrete pipes while safely removing roots and mineral deposits, resulting in no damage to the pipe. It works without impact but has the ability to switch to a vibrating nozzle. It comes with a hard metal front blade for pipes that are more than 50 percent clogged. The side blades are self-sharpening and maintain their sharpness over their entire service life. The cutting ball operates with controlled rotation speed and is capable of running on recycled water. It is leak-free. 877-369-8721; www.enzusainc.com.



HAP System

The **HAP System** is used to help secure pipes in the walls, which reduces the plumbing labor required, leading to fewer days with walls open. Using the system allows inspectors to quickly verify that pipes are properly secured. Once, the property is inspected, drywall can be put up to close the walls and allow more of the interior to be built in a more comfortable environment for workers. 847-787-7777; www.hapsystem.com.




Milwaukee Tool 10L pipe wrench

The 10L pipe wrench with POWERLENGTH handle from Milwaukee Tool is a 10-inch pipe wrench with an extended-length handle. Due to its OVERBITE JAW with additional teeth, the wrench delivers a large grip surface, keeping the material centered in the jaws even in challenging pipe and fitting configurations. The tool's slim jaw profile, paired with its extended length, allows for access in the tightest spaces. It has a dual-coil spring design for longer tool life and a handle that offers a comfortable fit in the hand for extended use. 800-729-3878; www.milwaukeetool.com.



RIDGID Quick-Acting Pipe Welding Clamp

The RIDGID Quick-Acting Pipe Welding Clamp is designed for quick setup and easy alignment of pipe from 2 to 12 inches. It comes in two sizes —

2- to 6-inch and 4 1/2- to 12-inch — allowing contractors to select the clamp best suited to their needs. Both sizes offer quick-release buttons and integrated handles for fast adjustment, alignment and easy switching between pipe sizes. They also include spring-loaded winged setscrews for precision three-point alignment and an integrated size gauge for simple pipe measurement. ACME threaded screws transmit ample clamp force, while the heavy-duty steel construction is built to withstand rugged job site applications. 800-769-7743; www.ridgid.com. 

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Rehabilitation and Repair


By Craig Mandli

University dining hall repiped in limited time window



Problem: Constructed in the late 1960s, the main dining hall at West Texas A&M University's campus in Canyon has served many hungry college students. Deteriorating water quality caused by the corrosion of the dining hall's antiquated galvanized steel potable water system required a repiping of the 56,000-square-foot facility and its 68 plumbing fixtures. The extensive job had to be completed during the school's winter recess by the university's maintenance staff.

Solution: REHAU RAUPEX UV shield pipe in 1/2- to 2-inch diameters and coil lengths up to 1,000 feet was specified. The flexible cross-linked polyethylene (PEXa) pipe allowed for easier installation in the challenging crawl space area underneath the kitchen floor. REHAU provided onsite training to the university's maintenance staff.

Result: "We were very pleased with this project from all aspects," says Roger Wilson, master plumber on the project. "The materials were easy to work with and helped us conserve time on the job. The 180-foot-long, 2-inch-diameter RAUPEX main cold-water supply line was installed in just 30 minutes using only one coupling." The complete tear-out and repiping was finished in eight days, versus an estimated 30 days for rigid copper piping, and came in at a lower cost. 800-247-9445; www.rehau.com/commercialsolutions. 



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Product Spotlight

Toilet features a modernized look

By Craig Mandli

While toilets may have all looked the same years ago, that isn't the case anymore. Now, if your client is going for a modern look, they have options, including the Avalanche Elite from Gerber Plumbing Fixtures. The toilet features a modernized contemporary design with a simple semiconcealed trapway, providing a more sleek, refined look, according to Lovin Saini, Gerber Plumbing Fixtures' senior product manager.

"The trapway is built separately from the body by craftsmen who focus intently on the shape, diameter, angles and texture of this vital piece," he says. "The simple concealed trapway makes the toilet easier and quicker to install. For installation, there's no special hardware or bolt alignment required, there's no interference with the water supply/angle stop and the seat can easily be installed before or after the bowl is installed. The design keeps maintenance low, makes it easy to clean, adds style and can instantly modernize any bathroom."

According to Saini, the Avalanche Elite has one of the highest performing flushing systems on the market. The streamlined, compact intake and rim design helps channel water at a higher speed, which adds force to help scrub off stains and toilet paper. This flushing system



also has 50 percent more line carry than the national standard, ensuring there are no hidden clogs under the toilet or in the pipes. The Avalanche Elite's enlarged, rectangular footprint means it will cover virtually any old/dirty flooring or damage caused by the previous toilet — making it ideal for remodeling, renovation or replacement.

The Avalanche Elite series is available in three models — the ErgoHeight Elongated that stands at an ADA-approved 17 inches high and

features an elongated bowl for added comfort; the ErgoHeight Round Front that stands at 17 inches high but comes with a round front bowl for smaller spaces; and the Standard Elongated that stands at 15.5 or 16 inches high and features an elongated bowl. All are available in either 1.28 or 1.6 gpf models, have a large 2-inch fully glazed trapway for clog-free waste removal, and extra-large dual fed siphon jets, which increase the force of the flush, clearing the bowl effectively. Their 3-inch flush valve provides maximum water flow and flushing power. A corrosion-resistant Fluidmaster flapper provides long-lasting operation and easy replacement, while a Fluidmaster 400A Fill Valve provides durable, long-lasting anti-siphon operation and easy replacement. 630-754-0278; www.gerberonline.com.

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Taco Comfort Solutions Hot-LinkPlus-e ECM recirculation system

Hot-LinkPlus-e by Taco Comfort Solutions offers high-efficiency, intelligent domestic hot-water recirculation ideal for retrofit applications. A dedicated return line is not required. The HotLinkPlus-e combines a 006e3 ECM hot-water circulator with the company's Hot-Link Valve and SmartPlug Instant Hot Water Control in one easy-to-install package. The valve, installed at the building's furthest water fixture, sends cooled water back to the water heater so hot-water lines remain hot. The entire package is compact, making it ideal for tight spaces. Multiple connection options are available. A temperature sensor is included. **401-942-8000; www.tacomfortsolutions.com.**



Lenova Sinks TKO Touch hands-free faucet line

The TKO Touch faucet line from Lenova Sinks is constructed in high-quality, no-lead brass and is coated with a PVD finish to withstand years of use. These faucets stand out for their smart features such as automatic shut-off and integrated sensors with LED lights to indicate water temperature for safety and comfort. The TKO line is available in brushed nickel or polished chrome and includes a pull-down adjustable sprayer and a single lever handle. **877-733-1098; www.lenovasinks.com.**



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Webstone, a brand of NIBCO, Ultra-Compact Thermostatic Mixing Valve



Webstone, a brand of NIBCO, expanded its Thermostatic Mixing Valve line to include a new Ultra-Compact model. The space-saving 2 1/2- by 3 1/4-inch body is ideal for under-sink installations.

An optional temperature gauge and cold-water bypass is available on select models. The valves are certified lead-free. **800-255-9529; www.webstonevalves.com.**

American Standard Flash pressure balance valve



The Flash pressure balance valve from American Standard delivers maximum installation flexibility with features that speed up installation. The valve

provides a variety of pipe connection options with a compact size and design that makes installation quicker and easier in different construction situations. An exclusive stub-out connection works with press-connect fittings without additional solder or piping. The valve body rotates 180 degrees, enabling PEX connections from either floor or ceiling supply lines, with no need for additional elbows. **800-442-1902; www.americanstandard-us.com.**

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Triangle Tube announces new director of sales

Triangle Tube announced the appointment of Tom Tonkins to the role of director of sales and business development. He will report directly to Shaun Edwards, CEO, Groupe Atlantic - UK, ROI & North America divisions. Tonkins comes to Triangle Tube from a senior sales role with ADEY Innovation and will be responsible at a strategic level for all sales and new business development.



▲ Tom Tonkins

Taco names Cheryl Merchant as new president

John Hazen White Jr., Taco CEO and owner, announced that Cheryl Merchant is joining the company president of Taco Family of Cos., North America. She has spent the last 19 years as the president and CEO of Hope Global Industries, based in Cumberland, Rhode Island.



▲ Cheryl Merchant

REHAU announces promotions in its leadership team

REHAU announced promotions in its Americas leadership team and the transfer of the current regional CEO Christian Fabian to head a newly formed technology and performance global services division. He will also serve on the company's group executive board. As of Jan. 1, the regional executive board of REHAU Americas, headquartered in Leesburg, Virginia, includes Theo Haast, serving as president in addition to chief financial officer; Thomas Troeger, filling the newly created position of chief marketing officer; and Terry Barnaby, head of operations.

In addition to his current role as CFO Americas, Haast will also serve as president of business in the Americas region. In his role as CMO, Troeger will assume responsibility for the company's product divisions, including sales, marketing and engineering. Barnaby, who has been with the company for 33 years, will continue to serve on the regional executive board as chief operation officer. 



▲ Christian Fabian



▲ Theo Haast



▲ Thomas Troeger



▲ Terry Barnaby

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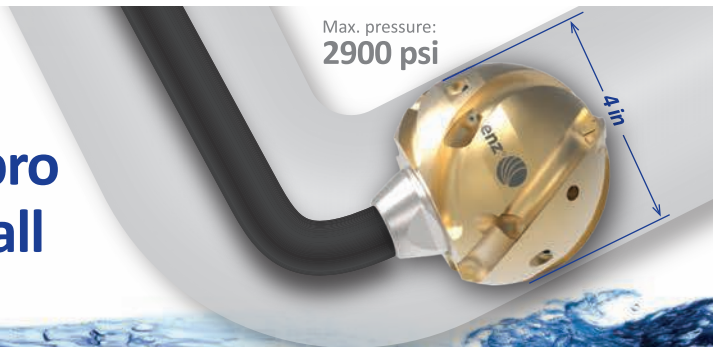
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WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY SERVICE?

- Plumbing/Heating/Cooling Rehabilitation/Relining/Bursting
 Sewer/Drain Cleaning Dealer/Distributor/Manufacturer
 Septic System Installation/Repair Consulting/Engineering
 Other _____

WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PRIMARY JOB FUNCTION?

- President/CEO/Owner Management/Supervisor
 Operator/Technician Other _____

HOW MANY EMPLOYEES DO YOU SUPERVISE OR WORK WITH AT YOUR FACILITY?

- 1-3 4-9 10-19 20+

HOW MANY VEHICLES DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE IN SERVICE?

- 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21+

WHAT IS THE APPROXIMATE POPULATION OF THE AREA IN WHICH YOU PROVIDE SERVICE?

- 1-10,000 10,001-50,000 50,001-100,000
 100,001-200,000 200,001-500,000 500,001+

WHAT IS YOUR ANNUAL EQUIPMENT BUDGET?

- \$1-\$50K \$51K-\$75K \$76K-\$150K \$151K-\$250K
 \$251K-\$350K \$350K +

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU PERFORM ON A REGULAR BASIS?

- Plumbing Maintenance/Repair Sewer/Drain Cleaning
 New Construction - Commercial Pipe Bursting
 New Construction - Residential HVAC TV Inspection
 Location/Leak Detection Septic System Installation
 Septic Tank Pumping Other _____

March 22

Illinois PHCC Expo & Education Day,
Drury Lane Conference Center,
Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois. Visit www.ilphcc.com.

March 23

Flow Expo 2019,
Fairplex, Pomona, California. Visit www.flowexpousa.com.

May 7-9

National Hardware Show,
Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas.
Visit www.nationalhardwareshow.com.

June 9-12

**American Water Works Association (AWWA)
Annual Conference & Exposition (ACE),**
Colorado Convention Center, Denver. Visit events.awwa.org

June 9-12

**Safety 2019 Professional Development Conference &
Exposition,** Ernest N. Morial Convention Center,
New Orleans. Visit www.safety.assp.org

Sept. 11-13

World Plumbing Conference,
Melbourne Convention Centre, South Wharf, Australia.
Visit www.worldplumbingconference.com

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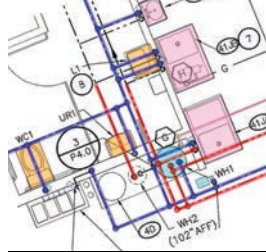
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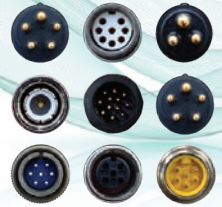
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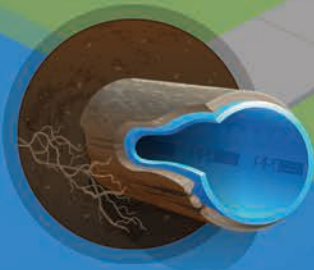


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