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### { ISSUE FOCUS: Driving Sales }

## Everybody Sells!

Harden Blackwell's Terminix franchise is the model of a sales-driven organization. In this edition of BizIQ, he shares his secrets of success.

Eight years ago, Harden Blackwell had an epiphany: If fast-food workers could ask without fail, "Do you want fries with that?" then every employee of his Terminix franchise in Greensboro, N.C., could ask for more business, as well.

And with less than one-third of customers having both termite and pest control contracts, Blackwell knew there was plenty of potential for new sales out there.

Today, the family-owned business is the model of a sales-driven organization. Revenue jumped 11 percent to \$18.8 million in 2008, followed by a 3 percent increase in 2009.

While full-time sales staffers are essential to the business, generating 33 percent of total sales, more revenue in 2009 came from nontraditional

sources. Pest and termite technicians contributed \$3.1 million in sales (46%), including \$500,000 in referral business and \$350,000 in termite-related services like crawlspace vent installation and moisture control. Customer care representatives (CCRs) added 15 percent and managers 6 percent. So how did his 200 employees like having "sales" added to their job descriptions? Not so much. It took top-down commitment to calm fears, reinvent the culture and develop training, said Blackwell. Following are his pointers to get everyone in the company selling:

#### Training overcomes fear

Initially, employees viewed sales as "voodoo" and fell



back on excuses like, "I wasn't born to be a salesperson," recalled Blackwell. "We quickly realized they needed as much sales training as technical training." Employees now meet twice a week, spending an hour on technical issues and an hour honing sales skills. Everyone attends. "You can't hold sales training once a year and expect people to pick it up," Blackwell said.

#### Problem-solvers, not salespeople

Eventually, employees realized selling is merely solving a customer's problems, said Blackwell. The key: keeping eyes open to other pest issues

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"We quickly realized they needed as much sales training as technical training. You can't hold sales training once a year and expect people to pick it up." — Harden Blackwell, president, Terminix Triad, Greensboro, N.C.

# DOW DISPATCHES

**S**ales is the engine that drives your business and ours, so that is the focus in this issue of BizIQ. I am particularly happy that Harden Blackwell has agreed to share some of the principles that have made his company so successful. I have known Harden for years and have seen that the key to much of his success is that he has made sales a part of his company's culture.

We follow a similar philosophy. I started out in the pest control business more than 25 years ago as an entry-level sales person. Today, it is still our standard practice to hire new people in our commercial business in field sales. We want our employees to gain a real understanding of the customer — their business, general operations, needs and opportunities. That understanding gives our entire organization a customer-focused mentality. Yes, some people move into different roles, such as marketing, sales management or even human resources. We do that to develop the skills necessary for senior management roles. But our company's core strength is a sales mentality based on experience. Having an understanding of customers also helps us drive research into new pest management solutions, as well as practical business support.

Most people reading this have been successful in sales to launch, sustain or grow their business. But sales is a business fundamental that is good to revisit often. I hope the articles in this issue of BizIQ will help challenge you and your team to increase sales in the coming year. 🌱

## Dave MORRIS

Commercial  
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## SELLS { PAGE 1 }

and alerting customers to the problem. Technicians may use digital cameras or get customers to go under the house if necessary to start a dialogue: Here's the problem, this is the cost; we can fix it Friday, explained Blackwell.

### Paper practice

The only way to overcome employees' fear of incorrectly filling out paperwork was to train, train, train and find creative solutions, said Blackwell. After hearing technicians explain they couldn't draw graphs needed to sell termite jobs, one branch manager had them draw one graph a day for a house on their route. "After a month, you didn't hear, 'I'm scared to draw a graph,'" Blackwell said with a smile.

### Simplify pricing

Employees also worried about over- or underpricing jobs, especially termite work. So a branch manager provided a basic price for all termite jobs. As technicians got over their fears, the manager modified pricing to better reflect each job. The Sentricon® *Termite Colony Elimination System* also helped allay technicians' termite selling fears. "You can't screw up anything we can't unscrew with Sentricon," Blackwell said. "It works, it's not threatening to the environment and if a technician prices it wrong, adjustments can be made," he explained.



Creating a sales-driven culture has paid off for veteran PMP Harden Blackwell and his company.

#### **Show sales in action**

Since seeing is believing, Blackwell's managers ride with employees to demonstrate proven selling techniques. Employees see firsthand that sales don't depend on slick or pushy tactics, but rather alerting customers to unknown pest problems and then offering solutions.

#### **Provide the right tools**

To be effective at sales, employees need access to customer history to know what services their clients have and relevant literature for services they could add on.

#### **Schedule time**

Technicians need enough time at each stop to identify sales opportunities. Don't overload their schedules so they're running from job to job, said Blackwell. Give them time to inspect and talk to the customer.

#### **Make it personal**

Most employees feel little motivation to sell, until they receive their first commission check. Then they're hooked, said Blackwell. No surprise, money is the biggest motivator, followed closely by recognition. Show employees they can make more money selling jobs than servicing them — sit down and do the math together, Blackwell encouraged.

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## Demystifying CRM

### Are you doing all you can to enhance your customers' experience?

Customer relationship management — or CRM — gets a lot of deserved buzz. But, it's not just for companies with big budgets and lots of resources. According to sales experts, large and small pest management companies can take steps to enhance the customer experience:

#### **Pinpoint leads**

Do you have a thorough understanding of where leads come from? Salespeople, existing customers, directory advertising, the Internet, referrals? If so, do more of what works. If not, it's time to dig deeper to find out. This will help you better align marketing dollars for a bigger sales impact.

#### **Touch more**

Increase the quality and number of times you "touch" customers. This could be through phone calls, e-mails, direct mail, face-to-face contact or other methods. The magic number is five, goes the old sales adage. After that many touches, customers are most likely to purchase.

#### **Improve the process**

Do you have a sales process in place that develops a deeper bond with customers? Take a look at how sales happen and standardize demand generation, lead qualification, quoting and order placing to ensure customers benefit from good communication and feedback at every step.

#### **Maintain to retain**

Once a client comes on board, maintaining communication is critical. Touch often and with information of value. Experts agree customers drop services because they never hear from their provider except at billing time.

#### **Learn from loss**

When customers leave, do you know why and what you could have done differently to keep them on board? When did you last survey customers on their expectations — for service and nonservice issues like communication, billing and problem resolution? Get to know clients' needs better and you'll be better prepared to exceed them.

## SELLS {PAGE 3}

### Make it fun



Keep training exciting, "not boring as hell," Blackwell said. One employee favorite is Terminix Team "Jeopardy®," which incorporates technical and sales topics. Fun competitions between teams and branches also get employees charged up, Blackwell said. Manufacturers, distributors and associations may offer training that can be modified for your own regimens.

No one knows who will become your company's best sales performers until given the chance to shine.

### Set clear expectations

New hires at the Terminix franchise come on board knowing their duties are

divided equally between technical service and sales. Those who bring in \$0 to \$1,000 in sales a month are considered low performers. On the other end of the scale, those who bring in \$10,000 or more a month are ranked excellent performers. Reward and recognition are given accordingly, creating a healthy sense of competition among employees.

### Be open to surprise

No one knows who will become your best sales performers until given the chance to shine, reminded Blackwell. Some of his best sellers are employees he initially thought would be duds. That's why it's important to keep an open mind and train everybody, he said. **IQ**

## Keeping Lifelong Customers



Practical tips from a retention specialist for building customer loyalty.

In this economy, everyone's working hard for the sale, but retaining customers you already have is more important than attracting new customers. Retention Specialist Dr. Rachna Jain of Gaithersburg, Md., suggested these tips for building customer loyalty:

### Market to existing customers

Selling to customers you already have costs far less in effort and money than reaching out to new ones, said Jain. They're your prime market to sell additional services or extended contracts for services they're already buying.

### Future sell

Alert customers to services they don't yet need, said Jain. When on-site to treat ants, for instance, let the client know, "If you ever have a problem with (fill in the blank), here's a coupon you can use," she explained. You'll have top-of-mind awareness when that pest strikes.

### Teach solutions

Keep customer education a priority, especially Integrated Pest Management and how to prevent pest problems. If customers have to call you to solve the same problem over and over, they eventually get the impression that you can't fix it, said Jain. Empower customers to help solve the problem and you become a trusted ally.

### Eliminate pet peeves

Pay particular attention to how your phone is answered, how long customers are placed on hold, how easy or difficult it is to make an appointment, whether technicians are on-time and how follow-up meetings are made. Every owner should call his or her company periodically to check on those service basics firsthand, Jain suggested. Do these effectively, and most customer service issues can be avoided, she said.

### Reward loyalty

Recognize long-term customers with discounts for other services your company offers, such as lawn, pool, handyman or holiday lighting services. Or, develop a referral program with noncompeting businesses that gives customers a discount for using recommended providers.

### Fast and easy

Responding quickly, effectively and decisively to customer service issues is essential, said Jain. If it's too difficult to get a problem solved, customers will jump ship. Give employees the authority to fix problems up to a certain dollar amount. Zappos, the online shoe retailer, lets reps solve any issue costing less than \$50 without getting management involved, said Jain. Customers get instant satisfaction and employees feel empowered, she added.

# Why Customer Service is Not Enough

For successful service businesses, customer satisfaction is the key. BY LISA FORD

What was your latest customer service slogan? “The customer is always right; “The customer comes first”; or how about this one — “The Year of the Customer.” I spoke recently at an event and that was the theme of the conference. Shouldn’t every year be THE year of the customer? Managers have read all the books (or at least bought the books) extolling the virtues of customer service. They have pledged faithfulness to the customer via slogans and speeches, yet their service remains mediocre at best. So what’s going on?

Most of these efforts create the right attitude, yet no action seems to follow. Success comes from *action* not good intentions. The best go beyond talking about what they should do or what they are going to do. They simply do it. And it is that simple. Great customer service is not difficult. It is about delivering what you promise, being nice, creating systems so your people can deliver what is needed and doing lots of little things right. See, it is simple.

But the reality I see is three levels of service: Rude, indifferent or exceptional. Of these, which do you mostly receive? Indifferent is my vote. Here is one of my recent experiences: While renting a car, the customer service agent folded the rental contract, told me how to find the car and

the space number, and then said, “Thank you, sir.” Wrong, since I am a “ma’am.” Better yet, why not use, “Thank you, Ms. Ford.” The misstatement indicated indifferent, robotic service.

Most organizations are very good at processing customers; very few excel at serving and satisfying them. We get processed all the time. Go to the bank and think about the experience — you got what you wanted, you got what you needed. However, did anything occur that left you with a positive impression that would keep you loyal?

Become a student of the companies who are getting it right — call GoDaddy.com and be amazed at the personalized, enthusiastic service, and did I mention it was done by a real live person who answers the phone?

Exceptional service that leads to satisfaction is required to create loyal customers. Everyone is talking about creating a great customer experience. Take a look at your organization and think about how you are going beyond talking about memorable service to actually delivering it. The best companies get it by simply doing what it takes to create loyal customers. Customer service is NOT enough. Customer satisfaction is the goal. **IQ**

*Lisa Ford is president of the Ford Group, a consulting business based in Atlanta, Ga., [www.lisaford.com](http://www.lisaford.com).*



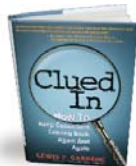
## BUSINESS BOOKSHELF

A look at what savvy pest management professionals are reading.

### “Clued In”

by Lewis P. Carbone

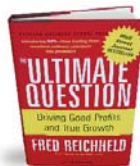
Good, bad or indifferent, every customer has an experience with your company and the services you provide. In this book, Lewis Carbone, founder and CEO of Experience Engineering, shows exactly how to engineer world-class customer experiences, one clue at a time.



### “Ultimate Question”

by Fred Reichheld

Too many companies are addicted to bad profits. These bad profits undermine growth by creating legions of detractors — customers who switch to competitors at the earliest opportunity. Now loyalty expert Fred Reichheld shows how to turn customers from detractors into promoters.



### “How the Mighty Fall”

by Jim Collins

Every institution, no matter how great, is vulnerable to decline. But decline, it turns out, is largely self-inflicted, and the path to recovery lies largely within our own hands, according to Jim Collins, author of “Good to Great.” As long as we never get entirely knocked out of the game, hope always remains.



# The Best of Times?

Can you grow your business during this challenging economic climate? Most small businesses plan to do just that, according to a new survey.

Despite the stagnant economy, nine out of 10 small-business owners see opportunities for their own companies, according to a survey conducted for Intuit®, maker of QuickBooks®. More than three-fourths expect their business to grow in the coming year. In previous recessions, many small businesses actually grew by taking advantage of weakened competition and big company cutbacks.

For the best, most ambitious pest control companies, an economic recession is the best time to grow your company. Here's why.

In a recession, what do most companies do? They cut marketing budgets and nearly stop their marketing activities. This gives you — the ambitious, progressive pest control company — a distinct advantage. Of course, when business is down, you should carefully watch expenses. If you can cut an expense, you should. But reducing an expense that results in reduced sales is a big no-no! When faced with such a challenging business climate, never forget the key principles of growth during a recession. They are:

## KEEP . . .

### Good employees

This is a place companies often start when trimming budgets. Think about the big-box stores you probably patronize. When the economy turned south, they start cutting checkers — leaving longer lines and aggravated customers!

### Your most popular services

Carefully analyze the services most sought-after from your customers and keep them. That being said, there's nothing wrong with examining all services and analyzing those that are the least profitable and making changes to those.

Yvonne Caddell of Co-op Exterminating in Atlanta contends her company is doing well because it has not made any drastic changes to its service menu or the way it conducts business. And its business has not seen a decline. Robert Kunst, owner of Fischer Environmental Services, Metairie, La., agrees. "We've made a con-

certed effort to pay stricter attention to not doing something new. We've loaded our salespeople's schedules and have gone back to basics in how we run the company."

### Your culture and principles

When times get tough, companies tend to panic and start straying from what made them successful. It's important to



## Peer Business-building Advice

"Invest in your customers. Take time to strengthen your relationships with your customers. They are probably hurting as well. Connecting with them will help to cement your relationship so they will be less likely to go price shopping. I talked with a customer last week who said he has an endless parade of pest management companies wanting his business, but he is not going to change because of the great relationship he has with us."

**Brad Smith, Preferred Pest Control, Des Moines, Iowa**

emphasize the culture, values and principles to all your employees and customers.

#### **Your visibility**

Continue community activities and sponsorships and send press releases — anything to keep people thinking about you. If you remain visible to customers and prospects during slow times, who will they think of when things pick up? Because you've continued to market, they'll think of you!

#### **Your profitable customers**

Brad Smith of Preferred Pest Control in Des Moines, Iowa, reports, "During the boom times, I wasn't as concerned about less-profitable accounts. But now, I am taking a hard look at every route to make sure that they make sense economically. I am taking into account wear and tear on trucks, driving time, production per hour, production per day, etc. I am psychologically ready to lose an account if they will not or cannot pay us what we need to make a profitable route. This has been tough because many of these are customers who have been with me for a long time."

#### **Marketing your services**

Promote your business by targeting your customers during the recession and when the good

times bounce back, you will have a lot more market share. Instead of cutting expenses to the point of cutting sales, you will have grown your business during this recession.

Eric Hodson of Whitworth Pest Solutions in Puyallup, Wash., says it has dramatically decreased its Yellow Pages presence in favor of more online marketing. "Marketing should be the last thing cut and should remain a high priority in spending," explains Hodson. Whitworth Pest Solutions has been fiscally conservative and maintains a sizable savings account that can be used in case of emergencies so no loans have to be acquired to pay employees.

#### **Your current customers**

Despite the economy, Bob Kunst has hired a part-time employee to call customers just to keep in touch. He says customers' invoices carry a report card and they are encouraged to complete it. Technicians are paid an incentive bonus if the comments are positive.

### **GET ...**

**New employees.** They bring new talents.

**New ideas.** Consider ideas from customers or businesses outside our industry. Ask your customers, "What else can we do to make your life easier?"

**Methods that will increase your efficiency** — different equipment, methods, products.

**An adviser.** Whether it's a business coach or a good friend, it's worthwhile to have someone to bounce ideas off of.

**Money owed to you.** Smith says, "I have not noticed a decline in sales, but I have seen a definite slowing down in the payment of invoices. As a result, we scrutinize every account. We have tightened our credit policies to make sure we will be paid. We also have shortened the amount of time before a customer is sent to collections."

**New customers.** Now is the perfect time to contact real estate agents and contractors, according to Kunst.

#### **Diversified services.**

Besides pest control services, Drew Cowley of Cowley's Termite & Pest Control Services in Neptune City, N.J., says his company offers a wide range of services, including holiday lighting, bird control services, wildlife work, handyman services and installation of gutter guards. In addition, his company has revamped its Home Protection Plans to provide three levels of service.

Finally, stay positive.

Remember: Recessions are cyclical. Take advantage of opportunities now so you'll be in a great position when the economy improves. **IQ**

"Focus on customer service." Despite the economy, Bob Kunst hired a part-time employee to call customers just to keep in touch. "Company invoices carry a report card that customers are encouraged to complete. Technicians are paid an incentive bonus if the comments are positive."

**Bob Kunst**  
**Fischer Environmental Services**  
**Metairie, La.**

"Go through your budget and cut and tighten where you can. Separate 'needs' from 'wants' and eliminate the 'wants' — things you instituted as extras when times were good."

**Eric Hodson**  
**Whitworth Pest Solutions**  
**Puyallup, Wash.**



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