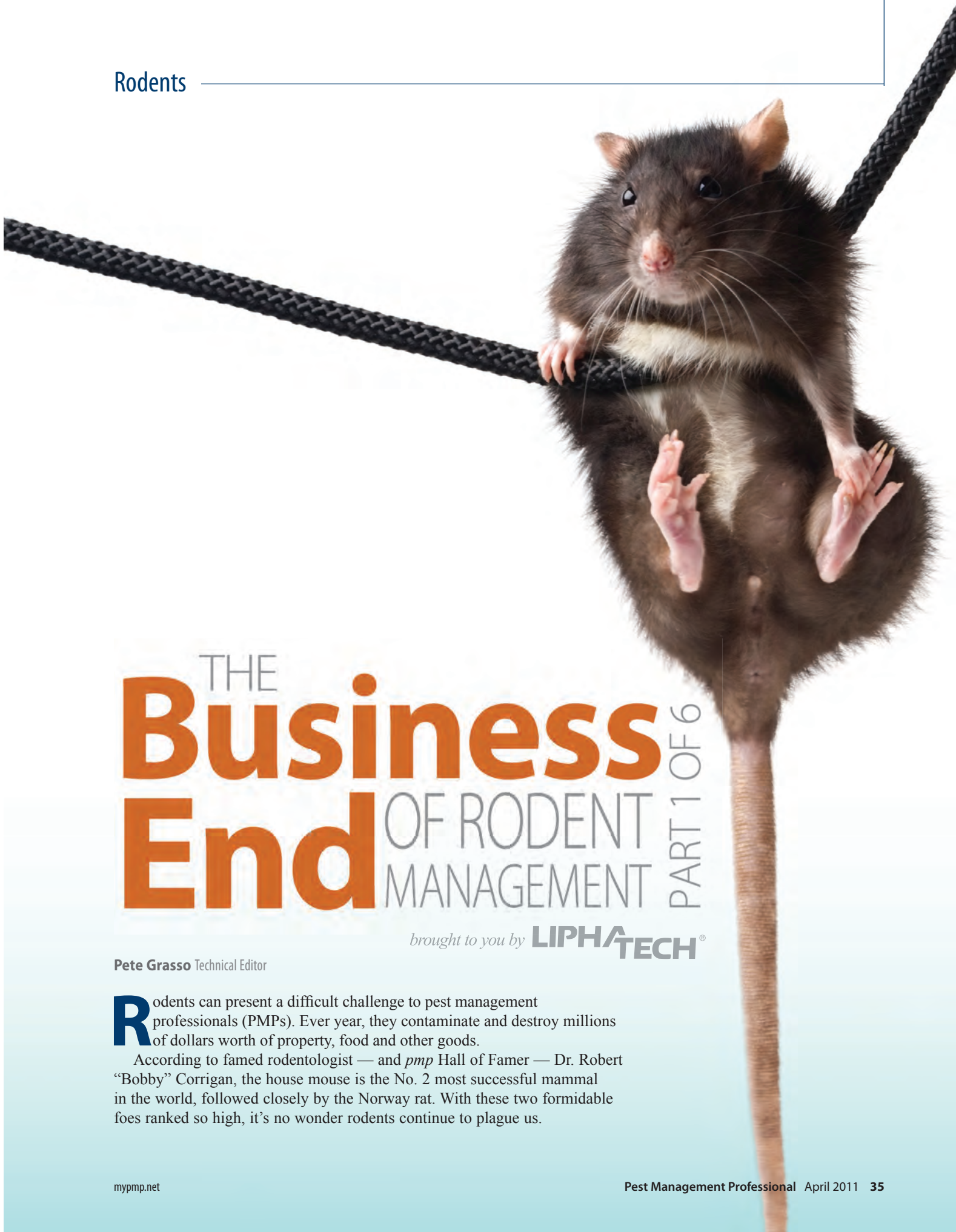




Rodents



THE Business End OF RODENT MANAGEMENT PART 1 OF 6

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Pete Grasso Technical Editor

Rodents can present a difficult challenge to pest management professionals (PMPs). Ever year, they contaminate and destroy millions of dollars worth of property, food and other goods.

According to famed rodentologist — and *pmp* Hall of Famer — Dr. Robert “Bobby” Corrigan, the house mouse is the No. 2 most successful mammal in the world, followed closely by the Norway rat. With these two formidable foes ranked so high, it’s no wonder rodents continue to plague us.

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The Nitty Gritty

Rodents can present serious health, economic and safety concerns. Rodents and their parasites carry numerous diseases. Their droppings and urine contaminate surfaces and food items. Fleas and mites are the primary parasites associated with rodents, and also have been known to spread diseases.

“Disease and filth are two main reasons for customers to have a rodent management program,” says

Rats and mice can contaminate food and spread diseases, or gnaw through walls and electrical wiring, making them among the most destructive of all pests that invade structures.

Jerry Schappert, owner of The Bug Doctor Inc. in Ocala, Fla. “Not only while they are alive, but dead and rotting rodent bodies pose a risk.”

Mice and rats can cause extensive damage to structures and their contents, whether the properties are

residential or commercial.

Rodents are particularly destructive in agricultural and food processing facilities because of contamination of food and feed items from their urine and droppings.

Rodents also like to chew and gnaw, which has led to countless electrical fires.

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But as a PMP, rodents present a huge opportunity for your business — if you do it right.

Common Mistakes

Relying Solely on Glue Boards

Glue boards can be effective for helping control rats and mice, but they should be combined with snap traps and/or bait stations. Only putting out a sticky trap or two for a rodent infestation will have little to no impact.

Choosing the Wrong Bait Formulation

The different formulations include: bait blocks, pellets, packets, ground-meal and tracking powders. For both safety and effectiveness, the right formulation must be used for the right job.

Bait blocks are meant to be installed and secured on rods inside of bait stations. They must never be thrown into areas loosely, nor should they be shoved down burrows because rats often kick them back out.

Misusing Loose Baits and Bait Packets

When loose bait is used, it must never be placed where children, pets or non-rat wildlife can reach it. Loose bait should never be thrown over fences, stuffed into tree cavities or thrown behind or under outdoor junk piles.

Indoors, baits must never be tossed and abandoned into ceiling voids or behind household appliances.

Not Securing Bait Stations

Never leave bait stations unsecured. Exterior bait stations must always be secured to the ground, fence or some other permanent type of anchor. When a bait station is no longer being serviced, it should be removed.

Inappropriate Use of Tracking Powders

Rats can carry tracking powder out of their burrows and trail it along their runs. Tracking powders should never be used in situations where human, pet or wildlife exposure can occur.

All tracking powders are restricted-use pesticides, and are allowed to be used only in extremely limited situations.

Over- or Under-Applying Baits

Using too much bait is a waste of time and money. Not using enough bait also will get poor results.

Customize Your Service

Customizing rodent management programs so they fit each of your customer’s needs is key. Though rodent behavior can be predictable and the basic principles of rodent management are universal, each job calls for a tailored management plan to optimize long-term control.

According to Batzner Pest Management in New Berlin, Wis., the goal of a successful rodent management program is to use the appropriate course of action to achieve control with the least amount of resources. To implement an effective control program, PMPs must properly identify rodent infestations and appropriate elimination measures.

Batzner uses advanced pest management techniques to determine the best course of action to manage each rodent infestation.

Monitoring, baiting or trapping

rodents are essential parts of a successful rodent management program. Batzner provides research-based pest management equipment to complement the pest management products that best meet each client's needs.

“Think outside of the box; think like a rodent,” says Stuart Aust, president of Bug Doctor Termite and Pest Control in Paramus, N.J. “Rats and mice can climb, and they can squeeze into the tiniest of holes. Look from the inside of buildings out, and look from the outside in, top to bottom, to find any possible exclusion points.”

Inspection is important to spot signs of rodent activity, potential entry points and attractants. For successful exclusion, PMPs identify and seal every potential entry points.

Know Your Rodents

To truly customize your rodent management program, you first must know the types and numbers of rodents with which you're dealing. Each job, and each rodent, is different in its own way. But management techniques can vary, too.

Though overshadowed by rats in the media, the house mouse is by far the most common rodent encountered by PMPs.

“Mice definitely are enemy No. 1, but rats are a close second,” Aust says. “We also receive calls for chipmunks, which are in the rodent family.”

The house mouse is the smallest of the rodents and is easily distinguished from rats because of its smaller size and large ears. An adult mouse typically weighs an ounce or less and can be six to seven inches long (including its 3 to 4-in. tail).

House mice can produce as many as 50 offspring per year. They climb, run, jump and squeeze through



openings as small as a dime.

Mouse droppings look like rye seeds, tapered on both ends like a cigar.

Unfortunately, an untrained technician can miss entry points simply because his or her inspection was not thorough.

A potential add-on business that could set your rodent management program apart from the competition is the repair of entry points.

Dominion Pest Control Services in Seattle is a fully licensed, bonded and insured general contracting company. Its service professionals are creative about finding unobtrusive, yet effective ways of keeping rodents out of clients' homes.

The Norway rat — prominently known in big cities, but also able to survive in the wild — is about 12 to

18 inches long including a 5 to 8-inch tail. The adult Norway rat weighs around 8 ounces to 1 pound or more.

Norway rats are good swimmers and can be found in buildings, basements and burrows under structures or other sheltered areas. They will go wherever they can find food and shelter, and that often includes buildings. Although they might look large, they can squeeze through a hole the size of a quarter.

The roof rat is usually black, brown or gray, with a pale belly. Its smaller and more slender than the Norway rat, with bigger eyes and ears and a longer tail.

The roof rat weighs 4 to 10 oz. and is 14 to 18 in. long including a 7- to 10-in. tail. Roof rats are good climbers and can be found in attics, along rafters, pipes, and wires and on



A big part of educating your technicians is teaching them how to educate customers. Pest management professionals need client cooperation regarding sanitation practices to relieve rodent problems.

rooftops of buildings.

Knowing the characteristics of these three rodents helps to know where to look for entry points and signs of rodent activity.

Training Technicians

“We have monthly technician meetings,” Aust says. “We just had a meeting about rodent control. Rodent management is a hot topic. We usually cover it once or twice a year.”

Aust says his company also conducts online training for its technicians and has done field-training tutorials, where they have

installed bait stations on the exterior of buildings.

Bain Pest Control Service in Lowell, Mass., has developed a full library of in-house training programs that are an integral part of every employee’s training.

Some companies also add on-the-job training.

“We do on-the-job and in-house educating,” Schappert says. “It’s also good to volunteer to go out on the really tough rodent jobs; they really sharpen your skills.”

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technicians will, in addition to painstaking inspections, install traps and come back daily to remove the dead rodents and reset the traps.

A big part of educating your technicians is teaching them how to educate customers. PMPs need client cooperation regarding sanitation practices to relieve rodent problems. Daily cleanup of food debris and water spills is an important process for pest prevention.

Technicians often face a challenge convincing clients to participate in the exclusion step.

“We are in an emergency service business, especially with mice and rats, as people want to know quickly that their rodent problems have been resolved,” Aust says. “I’ve always found that communication leads to more paid work.”

Bait Box Placement

Bait boxes, or bait stations, are useful in rodent management programs as monitoring tools and as methods to deliver rodenticide.

Positioning of exterior bait boxes should be at intervals of about 50 feet around buildings, or along landscaped areas.

The number and distance between bait stations should be based on the severity of the infestation.

Each bait station should be labeled with the date it is placed, the type of bait used and the technician’s initials at each service visit.

Bait boxes should be made of heavy-duty, tamper-resistant materials and should be secured.

Bait blocks are secured inside the bait boxes on rods, which prevent rodents from carrying bait outside of the units.

It is recommended that four to eight bait blocks are installed inside each bait box if the rodents are active in the area. Once the rodents have been brought under control, the number of bait blocks can be reduced to one to four. For maintenance of accounts, where few or no rats remain, the lowest dose rate of one block per station is recommended.

Bait boxes should be serviced at least once a month. For more serious infestations, they should be serviced every other week until the problem is brought under control.

Bait should be changed on a monthly basis, whether it is needed or not.

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Many times, following up with clients just to see how everything is helps PMPs uncover additional work at other locations, or at the same locations for other types of pests, Aust adds.

“Case in point: Recently, as a courtesy, I called a big utility company we service numerous locations for,” Aust adds. “When I had the client on the phone, he asked me to start service at another location, and to continue with the rodent control until there was no more activity on the interior and exterior bait stations at the facility. Communication with customers is key.”

Schappert agrees: “Communication with the client is key to keeping rodents out or at least to discouraging them from returning.”

Taking photographs of rodent burrows and droppings as well as areas that require exclusion services, and including the documentation in proposals, goes a long way toward landing new business.

Selling Rodent Jobs

Priority 1 is evaluating exterior areas: Identifying current and potential problem areas, harborages, food sources and opportunities for exclusion.

“We sell all rodent jobs with recurring services,” Aust says. “We will not sell rodent control with a one-time service.”

Taking photographs of rodent burrows and droppings as well as areas that require exclusion services, and including the documentation in proposals, goes a long way toward

landing new business.

“As they say, you need to sell the sizzle, and pictures tell a thousand stories,” Aust says.

Preventive planning and pest management helps keep rodent populations and related customer complaints to a minimum and allows you to better use your time to bring in new sales and offer other types of preventive services — particularly for customers who have finished using their structures for the season. You can offer to return in the spring to remove the traps. If the traps show activity, you might be able to turn traditionally seasonal accounts into a full-year contracts.

Schappert includes rodent management in most commercial accounts, and charges a one-time fee to regular customers.

The first step toward fully harvesting rodent management opportunities is not looking at these jobs as seasonal work. Rodents can be crafty, so stay ahead of them — and your competition — by offering rodent monitoring and preventative pest management all year long.

A rodent management contract should include:

- A service log that documents in/out times of technicians, materials and quantities used, inspection results, and recommendations;
- Mapping to show the locations of pest activity and treatments;
- Control and monitoring practices based on comprehensive surveys and regular inspections;

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Tracking Powders

Rodenticide tracking powders contain the same toxic active ingredient as typical block and meal formulations of bait, except that they're blended into a powder carrier.

The active ingredient in tracking powder is many times more concentrated than in other bait formulations, making it a particularly effective rodenticide, but with a great deal more potential for non-target species to become sick if it's improperly digested.

Tracking powder applied to a rodent burrow is designed to be picked up on rodents' foot pads, fur and/or tail during their travels. The powder is ingested when the rodents lick their bodies during grooming.

Occasionally, tracking powders are incorrectly referred to as dusts, but this term should be avoided (pesticidal dust is legally different than a powder).

In most situations, tracking powder should be considered a specialized tool used only when baits and/or traps fail due to finicky rodents that are either trap shy, or are uninterested in baits because of an abundance of alternative food.

Special precautions must be taken when tracking powders are used, otherwise, people, pets and urban wildlife could be harmed.

- Monitoring of key locations such as basements and food and refuse storage areas;
- Outside control for rodents in perimeter and landscaped areas;
- Service frequency and emergency response time;
- A meeting schedule for review of performance and recommendations;
- Diverse control practices, ranging from baits and traps to sanitation inspections and rodent-proofing of buildings; and
- Proper use of rodenticide and traps to avoid exposure to children or pets.

Clearly define an intensive rodent management program and a monthly maintenance fee that includes rates for inspection, monitoring, and treatment. Multiple visits during a month might be required depending upon needs and practices.

Emergency calls can be incorporated as part of the monthly rate or priced separately.

Sanitation Services

"Good sanitation is good rodent management," Dr. Corrigan says.

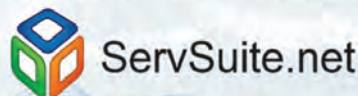
Proper sanitation techniques can deprive rats and mice of potential food and water sources that can lead to infestations.

Your customers should realize that even the cleanest homes and offices can experience rodent problems.

Keeping areas around buildings and homes free of weeds and other items that can act as harborage is important, as is sealing all openings or points of entry into the structures. These consist of holes for pipes, cables, air conditioners and the like.

Rodent management, though time-consuming, can be a great source of recurring revenue for PMPs who take the time to train their technicians, learn about rodent exclusion techniques and communicate with their clients.

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