

From Bugs To Birds

No matter how you look at it, it's all pest control, says one pest control company owner who has successfully made the move to offering bird control services. Here are 10 things to consider to help you be successful. **By Stuart Aust**

Bug Doctor Termite & Pest Control, Paramus, N.J., was formed in January 1992. Initially we concentrated on selling and servicing commercial accounts. Subsequently, with the volume of commercial business we attained, we segued into the residential market. As we continued to grow, the bird, animal, wildlife and mosquito control became natural add-on businesses.

More than 10 years ago the bird division of Bug Doctor was established. As an experiment, we put one "Bird Doctor" truck on the road. It was a surprise when the bird business "took off" the way it did. We initially cross-marketed to our Bug Doctor clientele and were astounded by the tremendous response. Our Bird Doctor division currently has six vehicles that are logoed and labeled with signage that advertises Bird Doctor.

Our Volkswagen beetles are covered with decals that suggest bird droppings. It's not unusual to have people pointing, laughing and taking photos of our vehicles. It's clearly a niche business, but if people have the need, they know who to call.

Our revenues in 2006 from Bird Doctor alone exceeded \$1 million. For 2007, we are projected to break our 2006 numbers. Our client list reads like a "Who's Who" from major corporations to hospitals to hotels to pharmaceutical companies to stadiums and the list goes on and on.

10 TIPS/THOUGHTS. If you're thinking about starting a bird division, the following 10 tips might help you get started and be profitable from the get-go:

1.) Do you know how much time is required to complete the work? Will the



Stuart Aust's Bird Doctor business took off thanks to advertising on his service vehicles.

work be completed during normal business hours, night time or on weekends? If the work is done at night or on weekends, overtime should be factored in. Always ask your clients upfront when they prefer service in order to calculate appropriate charges.

2.) Materials and equipment to perform bird work are costly. Does the job require lift equipment, scaffolding, booms or special tools to complete your work? Rental fees and equipment prices need to be calculated. Every day you exceed the allotted time for the rentals, you incur additional charges. Other types of equipment you might need are the following: drills, girder clamps, flashing, harnesses, safety cones, caution

tape, power washers, Tyvek uniforms, respirators with HEPA filters, special lighting for jobs performed in the evening, digital cameras, etc.

3.) Depending on your existing insurance plan, you might need special liability insurance for operating lift equipment. Most corporate clients are requesting \$5,000,000 in liability insurance.

4.) Is the labor to be calculated at prevailing wage rates or union wages?

5.) Are permits needed?

6.) Do your employees have lift training and training in full protection gear and harnesses?

7.) Are your employees OSHA trained and certified?

8.) What additional licensing will you need when you work in different states (and sometimes certain counties)?

9.) If you work out of state, factor in additional expenses for lodging, meals, travel time and extra fuel costs.

10.) Surround yourself with professional people. You want to hire a different caliber service technician for bird work. The skills you want your bird service technicians – or as we say in the industry, “professional installers” – to have is the ability to perform work at various heights, to operate power tools safely and to communicate effectively with your customers.

Since bird work is usually a big dollar item, your installers, like all your employees, need to represent your company in a professional manner. Most of our repeat business comes from our existing clients who are pleased with their service experience with Bird Doctor.

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES. Bird control hasn't always been a “stroll in the park.” We learned a lot of hard lessons the old-fashioned way. Years ago, when we installed our first bird net at an Edwards Superstore

loading dock, Bird Doctor lost money. We miscalculated the costs of materials, tools and labor needed. Now I look back at that experience and regard it as a price paid for training.

With bird work you must always factor in the unexpected. An example of this is when we provided services at the famous Plaza Hotel in Manhattan. Our Bird Doctor crew was shut down by the New York Police Department to accommodate the St. Patrick's Day parade on 58th Street.

On another occasion, we were shut down when protesters rappelled off the roof of the Plaza Hotel to protest President George Bush and the Republican National Convention that was being held at Madison Square Garden.

On another project at Grand Central Station, we were working on scaffolding five to six stories from street level. When heavy winds and rain came, we had to suspend service for the day. This happened frequently as this project was to be completed during the winter months.

Our Bird Doctor division is growing at such a rate that it will eventually rival our Bug Doctor division, which is our primary

company. Bug Doctor continues to grow in revenue annually, but the growth rate of Bird Doctor is exponential. Both divisions support each other.

As Bird Doctor performs numerous bird services for our existing Bug Doctor clientele, we also acquire quite a bit of pest control work from our Bird Doctor accounts. Who would have anticipated that your add-on business could eventually match or even surpass your primary business in revenue?

Bug Doctor's other add-on divisions are Mosquito Doctor and Animal Doctor. We also have the rights to the name Grass Doctor, if we enter the lawn care business.

I recently read, “Eagles never fly in a flock.” Did you know that when there is a storm, eagles fly straight into it? Are you ready to face life's challenges head on? Do you have the courage to take action, do what others only talk and dream about? Go where eagles go! Get ready to soar! 🦅

The author is president, Bug Doctor, Bird Doctor, Animal Doctor and Mosquito Doctor. He can be reached at saust@giemedia.com or 201/599-1007, ext. 14.

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