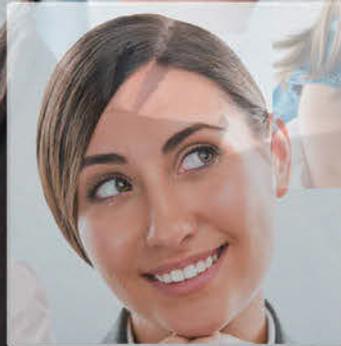


NEW STRATEGIES VIEW



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LD ▶ NEW CUSTOMERS



KEY TAKEAWAYS



- Pest control companies still rely on the personal touch, such as phones and in-person contacts to get new customers, but they'll have to add new technology.
- Streamlining interactions with customers via text and SMS messaging could someday be a necessity.
- Targeted marketing may be possible through electronic home assistants such as Echo and Alexa.
- The internet, particularly the review sites, will continue to be a source of customer leads as well.
- It's important that pest control companies monitor what people are saying and try to counter any negative reviews in a positive manner.
- After-hours sales are a growing trend, and companies may want to hire a business to answer the phone, take messages, sell leads and schedule appointments during this time.
- Recommendations from current customers will continue to be one of the best ways to bring in new customers.
- No matter what combination of lead generation and referrals you want to try, NPMA has resources to guide you through the process.

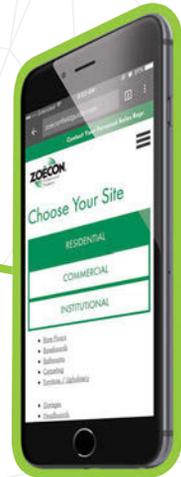
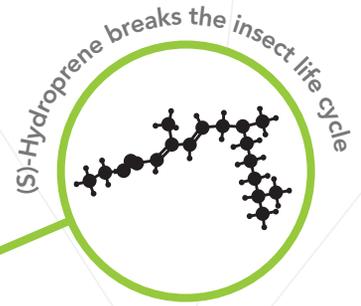
BY MARY LOU JAY

PEST CONTROL COMPANIES THAT WANT TO REACH today's tech-savvy customers are going to have to make some changes to their operations, advises David Bradford, CFO, Environmental Pest Service.

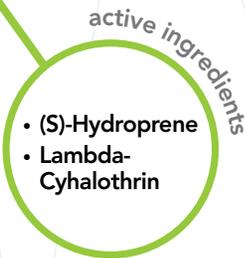
"Pest control companies still rely on the personal touch—phones and in-person contacts to get new customers. But they will have to change. The pest control industry is lagging in sophistication and the use of technology, particularly in the customer acquisition process," Bradford said.

Environmental Pest Service set up its own brainstorming group, with representatives from different departments and different age groups looking at these issues. "We were trying to come up with a strategy not only to communicate with customers now and in the future but also try to think specifically about how to communicate with the millennial

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generation that's starting to buy homes now," Bradford added. "We are very conscious about moving to a platform that allows those who don't want to pick up a telephone or meet with somebody to order pest control services through a device or over the internet."

"One of the specific technical things that we are really focusing on—and what we think is almost a necessity—is the idea of streamlining interactions with our customers via text and SMS messaging," said Wade Stankich, director of IT at Environmental Pest Services. "We're looking at vendors now specifically in text-to-pay and account management transactions via text and mobile phones,"

Electronic home assistants such as Echo and Alexa may offer other opportunities. "There is some targeted marketing that you can do there. If someone with one of these assistants sees an ant on the floor, they can quickly find their local pest control company and order the service with their voice through the system," Stankich said.

The brainstorming group at Environmental Pest Service is also considering several other millennial-friendly strategies, like car wraps that would attract their attention or different styles or colors of uniforms that would be more appealing to them. The company does realize, however, that it will need to employ a variety of targeted marketing and advertising strategies to appeal to customers in various age groups and in certain geographic areas.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK ATTRACTS NEW CUSTOMERS

The internet, particularly the review sites, will continue to be a source of customer leads as well. "The more reviews you have, the better," said Emilio Polce, owner of EcoChoice Termite and Pest Control LLC of Coventry, Connecticut. "For me, that is the game changer; that's something that lets small companies compete with the big companies."

Polce gets reviews from customers by asking for them immediately after a technician completes a service. The technician sends a text to the customer's cell phone, and the customer can complete their review in 30 seconds.

But that's only the first step. "Quite often you get reviews, but they get lost because there is no platform to put them on," Polce said. He works with a media company that posts the reviews on Facebook and on Google Maps. Polce believes that the map site yields the best results, since it shows the number of reviews a company has. "If your competition

has only three or four reviews and you have 180 reviews, the customer is more likely to go with you."

It's important that pest control companies monitor what people are saying and try to counter any negative reviews in a positive manner. "People should see that you're willing to listen to customers and respond to them in the same forum they've used, and that you're trying to make it right for them," said Bill Olesen of Chuck Sullivan Exterminators, Inc. in Olympia, Washington. "Hopefully the customers will post something when you've fixed the issue."

GETTING THE BEST ROI

Understanding how each site works and what it's good for will enable PCOs to get the biggest benefits from each. Olesen said that Facebook is better for brand recognition than for producing leads, and that companies can increase their lead generation on Google Maps by making it appear they have multiple office locations.

"When you search for something, Google Maps will show you the companies closest to your geolocation," he explained. But the site doesn't take into account the fact that a company operating out of one area may serve several others as well.

To get around that limitation, "Companies who have technicians who work from home and get all their paperwork there can register those locations as sideline offices," Olesen said. One company he knows rents a small office in another town so its name will show up in the map listings there.

24/7 AVAILABILITY

Polce said he's seeing a growing trend towards after-hours sales, so he's hired a business to handle that coverage for his company. "When my business is closed, all of my phones get rolled over to them. They answer the phone, take messages from current customers, sell leads and schedule appointments for my outside sales staff," he said. "There's nothing better than coming in on a Monday and seeing four or five sales from over the weekend, or seeing an appointment for a customer who has scheduled another service." He relies on the same business for his website's online chat feature and website queries.

Customers today don't want to leave a voicemail and wait for someone to call them back, he adds. They want to schedule a service whenever and wherever they think of it. If one company doesn't accommodate them, they'll look for another.

FIND-A-PRO

NPMA's Find-A-Pro service helps potential customers find you! On the site (www.pestworld.org/find-local-exterminators), customers can find a local, licensed pest control operator, searchable by zip code.

To ensure your company's zip code is up-to-date, go to npmapestworld.org/member-center/frequently-asked-questions/#findapro and follow the instructions. If you need help, contact NPMA at (703) 352-6762 or npma@pestworld.org.

RELYING ON REFERRALS

Recommendations from current customers will continue to be one of the best ways to bring in new customers. Olesen said companies earn referrals by providing outstanding service, by addressing customer's concerns and by reassuring them about the safety of their family members and pets during and after a service.

Chuck Sullivan Exterminators credits current customers' accounts when someone they refer makes an appointment. "Once people have a referral, they normally won't call other companies, because someone they value and believe has recommended you. That gives you instant credibility," Olesen said. The company also makes an effort to stay connected to the children and grandchildren of current account holders who are moving into their first homes.

Olesen said the company has begun working with managers of rental and real estate companies so that young renters become familiar with their services. "Then, when millennials make their first purchase, they'll think of us because they have built a relationship with us and they know we take into consideration whether they have dogs or cats or kids," he said.

GO WITH THE PROS

No matter what combination of lead generation and referrals you want to try, NPMA has resources to guide you through the process.

"You can reach out to other NPMA member companies, and if you don't want to reach out to someone locally there are forums that you can go onto to ask questions," said Polce.

Expert help is also a good idea when it comes to implementing new technology and services. Polce said he received some good advice about social media and online marketing a few years ago at PestWorld. "They said 'Don't do it yourself. Hire somebody.'" ●