

Putting the Cart Before the Horse

By Rob Seeger

At RJS Pest Management, our top priority is our valued customers. We built our business from the ground up by providing honest, high-quality pest management services that put the needs of our commercial clients first. As a family-owned and family-operated company competing against big brand-name pest management providers in the New York City metropolitan area, we've relied on a strategy of going above and beyond in the areas of proactive client communication and customer service to win projects and earn customer loyalty.

Over the past seven years, this strategy has served us well. What could go wrong when you put the customer first, right?

We learned the answer to that question the hard way when we got a call from a prospective hotel client in New York City about a pest infestation that their existing pest management provider had been unable to control. Excited by the possibility of landing a big hospitality industry customer and eager to prove ourselves worthy, we performed a thorough on-site inspection as part of our free consultation service. As experts on NYC pest control and hotel health codes and regulations, we outlined and documented a comprehensive IPM program tailored to the property. After discussing and sharing a copy of the plan with the prospective client, we felt confident we'd hit one out of the ballpark. We were certain we'd receive a call to implement our program.

The phone didn't ring. Why?

Because the prospect took our detailed plan and had it implemented by their existing pest management provider.

There are three lessons we learned from this experience, which can be helpful for any pest management provider who is looking to grow their business in a competitive environment of bigger companies with more brand recognition:

1 Prospects Are Not (Yet) Customers. This lesson seems obvious, but how do you toe the fine line between showing

what you know to build credibility or trust and giving away your trade secrets for free? At RJS Pest Management, we take pride in offering free consultations and estimates as part of the service we offer as a premier NYC exterminator. Now, instead of sharing step-by-step plans of our proposed pest management program with our prospects, we take them on a walk-through of their facilities and talk about our pest control approaches. We also take the time to explain how our solutions may differ from those offered by other pest management providers.

2 Build Credibility in Multiple Ways.

Prospects are looking for more than pest control expertise when choosing a pest management provider. They are looking for a trusted partner who will manage their pest control needs so they can focus on the day-to-day activities that keep their business running smoothly. But, how do prospects pick who to trust?

They look for established providers with a track record of success, and they ask their friends or colleagues for recommendations. So, what does this mean for you?

You need to be visible and you need to build credibility, both online and in person. After losing that hotel industry prospect, we redesigned our website and built a book of references and testimonials from existing clients in each of the industries we serve — education, food and beverage processing, hospitality, health care, manufacturing, restaurants, parks and property management. Now, when prospects ask about our credentials, we point them to our website or tell them about our satisfied customers in their industry. Chances are, they know and trust some of the people we've worked with. And, having a professional-looking online destination for prospects to visit not only shows that we take our business seriously, but also helps us to



PMP Rob Seeger learned the hard way the difference between prospects and customers.

generate leads when people search for pest management providers in the NYC area.

3 Don't Underestimate Education. The importance of educating prospects (and existing customers) cannot be emphasized enough. For many prospects, pest management may be a low priority on their agenda — until a pest problem occurs, and that's when we get the call. When we educate our prospects about their current pest control issues and the potential pest problems that could arise, we have the opportunity to:

- Demonstrate our expertise
- Differentiate our solutions from those of our competitors
- Upsell preventive services

In fact, education is a critical component of the service we extend to our customers and it can even be the difference between winning or losing a bid. After all, proper implementation is the most important part of any pest management program, and a pest control plan is only as good as the provider that implements it.

It was our hotel industry prospect's turn to learn a lesson the hard way when their existing pest management provider tried to implement our plan. Even with our proposal, they weren't able to bring the infestation under control.

The happy ending? We lost the initial bid, but won the pest control war and now that prospect is a satisfied customer. **PCT**