

# Merchandising Is the Key For Fresno Custom Applicator

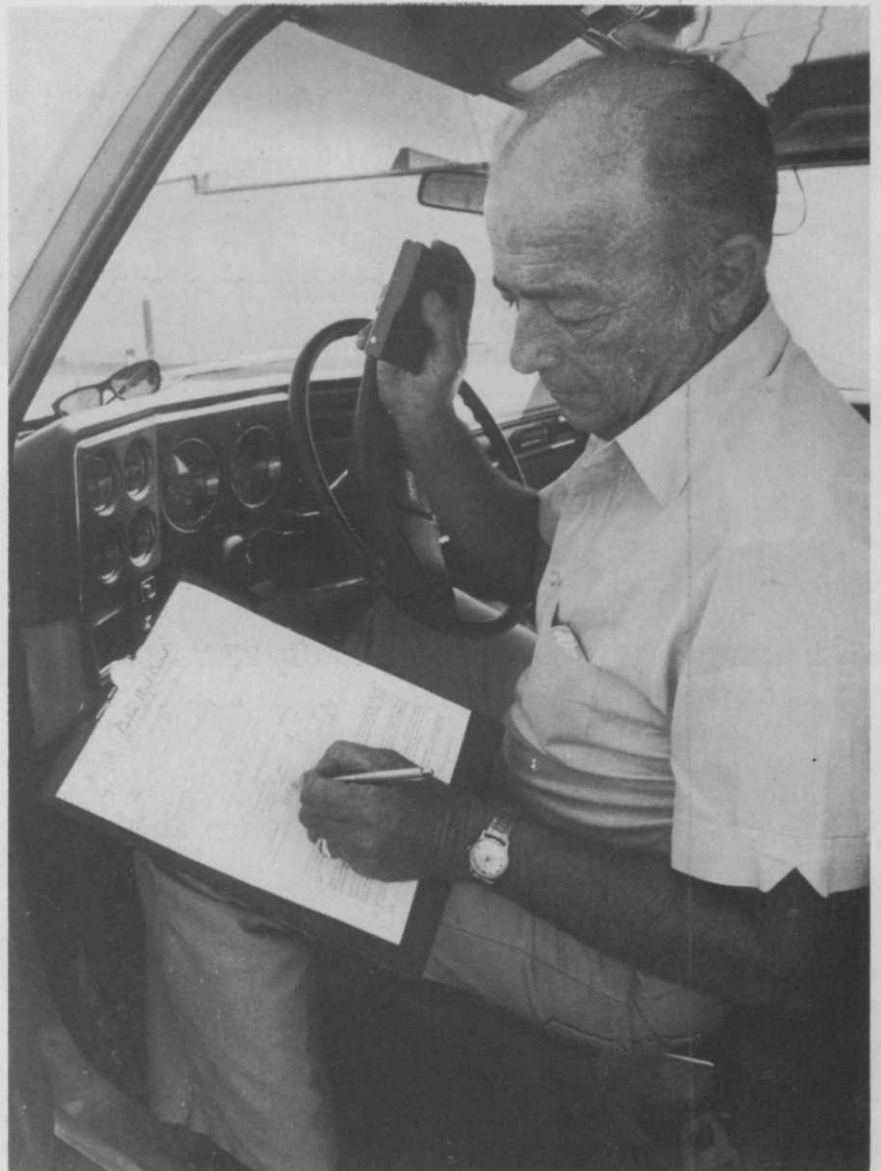
Tom Heffernan, owner of Custom Weed Control in Fresno, Calif., specializes in solving weed control problems for business and industrial concerns. He leases all spray applicator equipment, buys his own chemicals and even does his own bookkeeping. He believes in keeping a close watch over every aspect of his year-old firm, and utilizes some unique merchandising ideas to get and maintain business.

Heffernan started first by sending out a mailer to over 1,000 potential customers in a four-county area around Fresno. He got a very respectable 12 percent return, with over half of the leads becoming his first customers.

Since then, Custom Weed Control signs erected on completed projects have resulted in a call a week from each sign, but most important, his satisfied customers have been talking up the results they have seen with Heffernan's services.

A good example of how Heffernan works is the case of a new customer, Dunrite Manufacturing Company in Fresno. Dunrite, a light industrial manufacturing firm located in the sprawling urbanized area, had been trying to comply with city government requests to rid a patch of expansion-area acreage of unsightly weeds.

Russian thistle, lambsquarters, puncturevine and numerous other weeds and grasses had been infecting the troublesome area. So, when





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Heffernan has his 3/4-ton pick-up rig equipped with a 320-gallon fiberglass tank, drift-control nozzles with remote controls, a brush nozzle attachment giving him a 35-foot swath with hydraulically controlled booms mounted on the front.

hydraulically controlled booms mounted on the front of the rig. He has found the unit gives him needed flexibility to go from small patch area jobs to ditch banks and large farm acreages.

In servicing his customers, Heffernan makes follow-up calls (he even uses dummy billings to let customers know he was there servicing the account) and takes photos of the work both to remind his customer what the results have been and to use with other prospective customers.

His efforts have paid off. Beginning the second year of operation many of his customers have also requested the same service.

Other Heffernan accounts, amounting to over 3,200 acres controlled in just his first 10 months of business, include many other small to large businesses and industries, subcontracting pre-paving weed control jobs for road builders, to maintaining year-round vegetation control for utility substations, tank farms and irrigation control districts. His reputation is so good that he now even gets leads from large pest control firms whose accounts are interested in chemical weed control.

Although he's limited his working area to a four-county area around Fresno — "that's almost more than I can handle," — he is now seriously thinking about franchising his business operation to handle the great number of potential customers for total vegetation control in northern California.

Heffernan brought with him to his new business 27 years of experience as a crop chemical weed control specialist, a retailer of farm chemical spray equipment, and head of the West's largest railroad applicator firm.

Tom Heffernan believes the secret to his successful business is based on:

- Ownership operation
- Solid knowledge of the technical and practicabilities of weed control
- A total feel for business management and customer relations
- Picking the right location
- And most importantly, staying localized enough to make the right decisions on time. □

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Heffernan's mailer advertising his Custom Weed Control services came in the mail, Dunrite officials called him to take measures that would get their weed control problem "done right."

Like he does with all his customers, Tom first went out and surveyed the weed growth present on the lot. He then supplied a job proposal to the Dunrite firm indicating his suggested weed control program, projected results, and a cost quotation for year-round weed control.

On approval from the Dunrite officials of his proposal, Heffernan went to work. After preparing the ground, Tom selected Spike from Elanco Products Co., Indianapolis, Ind., which he applied with his 3/4-ton pick-up truck spray rig.

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