

WEED BUSTERS

Two Virginians approach the chemical spraying business differently. They go for the industrial and commercial accounts, those who usually don't use the custom applicator for weed control.

Lyle Anderson and Dave Schoonover developed a new market while starting a spray business last year.

"Our business came from an increased piece of the market pie," says Schoonover. "We picked up 150 industrial and commercial accounts. Ninety-eight percent never before

had hired a custom applicator to kill weeds."

Says Anderson, "When I wasn't spraying, I was selling. We decided we didn't like to drive by potential new business."

Where do they find this new business? "Practically any operation with a gravel lot or storage area,"

says Anderson. "We look at warehouses with surrounding areas prone to weeds, firms with outside storage areas, steamline companies, pipeline companies, property management companies, major manufacturers, utilities, and wood preservation firms."

Adds Schoonover, "We'll be developing lots of these and others similar to them in 1986. We are going from our one rig operation to three units. We'll triple our number of accounts."

Incorporated in 1985, Custom Weed Control operates within a 65-mile radius of Roanoke, Va.

"The potential is enormous," says Schoonover. "Keeping down weeds is not just for aesthetics. The practice has dollar value, though the aesthetics do constitute a value by improving the image of the business to a customer. Our customers are finding lots of additional economic values."

More workable areas

He says Custom Weed Control cleaned up an auto salvage firm at less than \$1 per car and made the area workable. "Employees not only find it easier to spot a designated model, but can pull parts without competing with a flourishing weed crop."

Partner Anderson stresses further that gravel storage areas, once overgrown, have to be mowed or dug up—unless the weed crop is killed out by chemicals.

"Weed encroachment carries soil and these areas quickly require more gravel. Chain link fences deteriorate more rapidly when overrun by weeds. Fences free of weed growth are not as prone to rust," he says.

The business fulfills a dream for the partners. Schoonover and Anderson, veterans of custom spray operations, both hold business degrees and wanted to use their experience with their own firm.

"Our goals the first year (1985) were to determine which market areas were available to us, the most effective equipment and products to use, develop new business, and operate at a profit. We feel we accomplished these goals," says Schoonover.

Market saturation

Initial business was sold by developing a mailing list of prospects



Dave Schoonover (left) and partner Lyle Anderson (right) talk with Larry Sharpe, northeast marketing manager at Forshaw Chemicals.

from many sources—Chamber-of-Commerce, trade magazines, and business and industrial directories.

Direct mail, complete with a return reply card, was followed up by a phone call. Personal sales calls were the next step.

"We wanted market saturation—not a job here and there. As a result, we have many small, standard-size accounts plus some major manufacturing firms and electrical co-ops," says Schoonover.

"We needed an effective product and we needed a system," he continues. "We leaned on distributor and company representatives and they came through.

One herbicide, Arsenal, has worked well for Custom Weed Control. Schoonover says, "We needed a post-emergence product because, early on, our customers—new to chemical weed control—had to have weed problems and the promise of bare ground control before we could sell the job."

First-time customers are informed that total kill with Arsenal takes

about a month. The customers are appraised of each time, thus giving them an education in weed control.

The partners say more than hard work is needed to begin this kind of business. They cite the need for effective products and equipment, and the right kind of on-the-job company support.

Long-term clients

The partners see their business as an annual service. After the first year of cleanup, they write a yearly maintenance contract. "We want total customer satisfaction, and we expect most every account to be a repeat customer," Schoonover states.

To both partners, image is important.

Company shirts and uniforms are standard. After every job is assessed and customer satisfaction is assured, a thank-you note is written to the customer.

Also, for keeping customers appraised of results, and especially for selling new accounts, a before and after photo record is kept of

every job. These photos are kept in a binder and used for every call relating to new business.

A great help in this first year of business has been off-season demand for their spray rig as a power washer. With major flooding in the fall of 1985, they ran 12-hour days helping clean up warehouses. A crew with industrial squeegees accomplished the task much faster with help of the power washer.

Another factor that builds customer confidence is the use of a spray pattern indicator, a blue colorant tank mixed with the spray.

"We use eight ounces of colorant per 100 gallons of water," says Anderson, "and customers can see immediately that we have provided thorough coverage."

The entire sprayed area temporarily carries a blue haze cover and is easy to see.

"We save chemical because we don't overlap, and skips are easy to spot, reducing our retreatment cost. We have a saying, 'If it's blue, it's dead,'" says Anderson. **WT&T**



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