

Earning their stripes

Three business partners recognize huge potential when they stumble into a virtually untapped service segment: marking parking lots.

Tom Darrow demonstrates use of the striping machine.



CHRISTOPHER COURI AND Dan Rella had a successful Connecticut-based landscape business, but they were looking for something else in which to get involved. They wanted an add-on service that could increase their growth potential.

Fellow friend Tom Darrow, owner of another nearby landscaping/irrigation firm, suggested parking lot striping. Couri and Rella were intrigued — and today, the trio has parlayed that service add-on into a national brand.

“When we first started researching this service we didn’t even know what to call it,” admits Couri. “Do you call it parking lot marking? Painting? Striping? It’s just so off the radar that there wasn’t even a name for it. When we realized there weren’t a lot of people out there offering it, we saw a great opportunity. We ended up buying a machine and getting trained on how to use it so that we could inject this service into our business.”

The primary investment for the service was the machine, which cost just under \$6,000. The trio already had use of trucks and trailers from their landscaping businesses, so that kept the start-up costs down. And it didn’t take long for the service to really take off. With almost instantaneous success, the trio started focusing on marketing for their new company, We Do Lines.

“We were getting a lot of work in Connecticut, but also as far north as Maine and as far south as Florida,” says Couri. “That told us there was a larger need. We realized there was potential for a national brand.”

That’s when Couri and his business partners decided to become franchisers.

“We wanted to put this opportunity out there on a national basis,” he says. “It’s a nice complementary business to a landscape company. Most of the time,

they’re already on the lot doing the landscaping, so it’s very easy to integrate the line striping into the process. It can definitely work as a stand-alone or full-time business.”

Starting a We Do Lines franchise is relatively simple for the average landscaper because they likely already have most of the equipment — and even the contacts for potential customers.

“You need a truck, a trailer and a machine,” says Couri. “There’s no warehouse needed to store equipment or a whole bunch of required machinery. It’s a fairly simple business model, and that makes us leaner and more attractive.”

We Do Lines has a national supplier agreement with Sherwin Williams for the paint. Couri says this has worked well for franchisees who can go to any Sherwin Williams store and access paint with one master account. In addition, We Do Lines also offers the stencil packages that franchisees would need to create all the additional parking lot markings like handicapped spaces, crosswalks and curb painting.

While Couri didn’t know much about the line striping business when he first started, he and his partners have since become experts on the service. With no major competitors in the market, it’s become a wide-open opportunity.

“The market was really ripe for a national brand,” says Couri. “Up until now, it was mostly part-time and small businesses offering this. I know maybe 20 landscapers in my town alone, but there’s only one line striping company. And there’s no question that’s also helped boost our landscaping business. We become more of a one-stop shop for the customer.”

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: We Do Lines, Ridgefield, CT

PARTNERS AND CO-FOUNDERS: Christopher Couri, president and CEO; Dan Rella, CFO; Tom Darrow, COO

WHY PARKING LOT STRIPING: The business founders recognized a huge opportunity when they couldn’t find a lot of other companies in the market that offered the service.

INITIAL INVESTMENT: The equipment is the main piece of the start-up package, along with a truck and trailer.

WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT: “There simply aren’t a lot of companies offering this service. For a landscape business, it makes for one-stop shopping. The crew can coordinate the landscaping and the line striping all in one day on the lot.”