



[PCT Leadership Winner] Jerry Batzner

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In the greater Milwaukee area, Batzner Pest Management is recognized as a quality service provider, top-notch employer and valuable community contributor. It's been that way since the company was founded in 1946 and this legacy has reached new heights under the leadership of third-generation owner Jerry Batzner.

Since becoming company president in 1990, Batzner has followed through on his vision to significantly grow the business without sacrificing quality. During the last 11 years, Batzner Pest Management's compounded growth has been 12 percent annually and the company's service territory, which used to just include metropolitan Milwaukee, has expanded and now covers about 100 square miles around the city. All this growth has occurred despite the fact that the company does not offer termite services and the Milwaukee area's growth has been stagnant the last 20 years. A combination of Batzner's keen market insights and foresight, analytical skills and innovative marketing strategies, have provided the blueprint for his company's success.

"Jerry understands the history of the company and the industry," says Batzner General Manager Mark Janeczko, "He's very perceptive and detail-oriented and he draws from a multitude of resources he's connected to when he's looking to chart the next course for the company. He's our 'ace in the hole' when it comes to the forward movement of this company."

A COLORFUL HISTORY. While Jerry's innovative marketing efforts have helped introduce Batzner Pest Management to newer and larger audiences, the credit for branding the Batzner name throughout Milwaukee goes to Jerry's great-uncle, Edward Batzner, who founded the company in post-WWII 1946 and came up with the company's slogan "Bugs in the wall — Batzner gets them all!" Recognizing an opportunity to provide pest control services in a rapidly growing and aging city, Edward opened the company's first office at 12th and North in Milwaukee's old Center City district. Bed bugs, cockroaches, rats, mice and silverfish were the staples early on.

But Edward had another reason for getting the Batzner name out to the public. "My great-uncle was a bachelor and was very interested in politics and advertising," Jerry explains. "He spent his whole career promoting his name and company but never effectively taking advantage of the opportunities that could have been available to him. Hence we had very strong name recognition."

While Edward was busy running Batzner Pest Control, Jerry's father, Al, an aerospace engineer by trade, worked for AC Spark Plug. It wasn't until he was in his late 40s that Al decided to make the career switch. In 1972, Al and wife Gloria purchased the company from Edward, which at the time had been re-named Batzner Pest Destroying. "When (my parents) took over it was a three-person company. So basically they doubled the size of the company on day one," Jerry says.

Jerry was 15 when his parents took ownership of Batzner PM and he first cut his teeth in the business by painting the entire building and organizing the storage facility. At his father's encouragement Jerry pursued a variety of interests growing up. "My parents had hopes for me taking over the business, but they wanted me to prove that I really wanted to do it," Jerry says. "The hardest part for a lot of people that grew up in business where parents grew the business is there was not extreme thought put into transitioning the business. I was fortunate that my father did make plans."

In high school Jerry took a course in pre-pharmacy and set his sights on becoming a pharmacist with a goal of owning a pharmacy. At the same time, Jerry very much enjoyed the family business and possessed an entrepreneurial spirit, so the prospects of someday owning Batzner Pest Management also appealed to him.

Following high school, Jerry attended the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where he pursued a business degree. After graduating from UW-Milwaukee, Batzner tried his hands at a variety of jobs including maintenance work for a property management company and bartending, before returning to Batzner Pest Management full-time in 1979.

FAMILY TIES. In his second stint with Batzner Pest Management, Jerry would gradually learn all aspects of the business, working in capacities ranging from service technician to customer service representative to technical manager.

In 1990, Jerry took ownership of Batzner Pest Management after purchasing the company from his retiring parents. Having observed and having had hands-on involvement in the business for almost 20 years, Jerry had definite plans for growing the company.

"My dad, being an engineer, is very good at analyzing things and because of this background maybe analyzed things more than necessary," Jerry says. "He'll analyze an opportunity in great detail, whereas I'll see an opportunity and act on it and if there are some consequences to pay it's not the end of world. I want to keep moving forward and getting our people involved in the business."

This investment in people has been a major reason Batzner Pest Management has grown. Batzner does not rely on acquisitions for growth;

rather, the company focuses on retaining its existing customer base and steadily growing each branch office by offering "quality service delivered consistently." Batzner Pest Management places considerable emphasis on hiring top-notch employees and providing them with the support necessary to succeed.

Dave Kusnierek, for example, started working for Batzner as a service technician 22 years ago, was promoted to supervisor in 1985, then to service manager in 1988, and currently holds the title of area manager. "Jerry's a very fair and compassionate person to work for. He's challenged me and given me a lot of opportunities — it's the reason I'm still in the industry," Kusnierek said. "People have grown within the company as the company has grown."

An important aspect of this support, has been Jerry's investment in the tools necessary for Batzner employees to most effectively and efficiently do their jobs. For example, Kusnierek notes that Batzner was one of the first companies to use Actisol sprayers when they were first introduced 15 years ago. Computers are always updated and in addition to standard accounting and routing software, the company has purchased software programs to assist in the evaluation of potential employees.

"Jerry is very professional, very aggressive and always tries to stay on the cutting- edge," Kusnierek says. "Everything he does is top notch."

Jerry explains the importance of making these types of front-end investments.

"For example, providing a technician the right products and materials to treat correctly and eliminate the problem even if they are more expensive might cause some financial hardships, but will eventually pay off," Jerry says. "We may get better results from the product, but more importantly we are showing the technician that we believe and trust in him to use proper care and to do the job properly and correctly."

This ongoing investment in his staff is important to Batzner's ability to retain employees, but so too are the company's other perks. Batzner Pest Management offers competitive salaries, benefit packages and a number of awards/recognition programs to make it an attractive place to work. The company honors a salesperson of the month, client support person of the month, and service technician of the month. These individuals are recognized at various company functions and in the company's monthly newsletter.

NAME RECOGNITION. Another driving force behind Batzner's growth the past 12 years has been an aggressive marketing campaign. More than 85 percent of Batzner's accounts are in the competitive commercial sector. As such, Jerry has had to find new and innovative service offerings and also find new ways to get the Batzner name to new as well as existing clients.

The company reaches its markets with traditional advertising such as direct mail and telemarketing, but it also uses a variety of "outside the box" methods. These include recording Public Service Announcements (PSAs), donating to local charities and giving pest presentations at places such as schools and community centers. In addition, Jerry uses the media to increase exposure. He has developed a reputation with local newspapers and television and radio stations as a good, reliable source of unbiased pest control information.

For example, three years ago Batzner hired Christine Venuti part-time as marketing manager. Venuti has been instrumental in taking the company's popular roach race to the next level through her marketing efforts (see story below). For the 2003 race, Venuti sent out press releases accompanied with little insectarians and directions on how to care for cockroaches. Fifteen press releases and insectarians were sent to TV and radio stations and another 45 press releases were sent out to various media outlets. In total, Venuti estimates the event generated \$65,000 worth of free advertising.

Another example of Jerry's innovative marketing has been the introduction of the company's B.A.N. (Balanced As Nature) program. Essentially, B.A.N. was a creative way for Batzner to market itself as an IPM provider. It is a five-step program that is a holistic approach involving all facets of pest management. This program has been "branded" in all of Batzner's marketing materials to reinforce that Batzner PM offers a program that delivers total pest protection and is environmentally conscious.

LOOKING AHEAD. Since taking ownership of Batzner Pest Management in 1990, Jerry has built upon the Batzner reputation for quality that was begun by great-uncle Edward and further fine-tuned by father Al and mother Gloria. In many ways, Jerry is an innovative marketer like Edward and a sensible, detail-oriented leader like Al. It's these characteristics combined with Jerry's own entrepreneurial spirit that have driven the company through its most aggressive growth period.

"To this day, I think my parents are astounded by how much we've grown," Jerry says.

And even though the company has grown significantly, Jerry's been able to find a proper balance in his life as husband to wife Mary (of 21 years) and father to Melissa, 17, Ashley, 15, Jack, 13 and Phil, 10. And while Jerry would like to see one or more of his children carry on the family business, much like his father, Jerry says he will let his children choose their own career paths.

For now, Jerry is content watching his company grow, his employees succeed and further enhancing the Batzner Pest Management legacy. "There's a satisfaction in being able to provide a service to people that solves a need," Jerry says. "There's a lot of opportunities for organizations that deliver 'wow service,' but it requires people who enjoy what they are doing and the commitment of the management and owners to do it. I have the commitment to do it."

Batzner's Core Values

- Always stay current with business-related technology and use it to differentiate ourselves from the competition.
- Continue to develop long-term relationships to insure loyalty and retention.
- Conduct ourselves with the highest level of integrity and honesty.
- Consistently meet and exceed both client and employee expectations.
- Realize profitable growth through operational excellence.
- Foster an atmosphere of open communications.

Racin' Roaches

Since being named president of Batzner Pest Management, Jerry Batzner has continually tried to "raise the bar" when it comes to marketing.

So in 2000 when Marketing Manager Christine Venuti approached Batzner with the idea of doing something to commemorate Customer Service Week, the Batzner Pest Management team came up with the idea of holding a Madagascar Hissing Cockroach race. It was a big success the first year, so the company did it again in 2002. By 2003, Venuti asked Batzner what he thought about expanding the unique event and inviting the media. Batzner agreed that this was a good idea and Venuti proceeded to send out press releases to promote the 2003 cockroach race.

To spruce up the event, Venuti and others built an 8-foot customized track and provided contestants with straws to "encourage" their roaches across the finish line. The roaches were then deposited behind a cardboard barrier at the starting line, someone yelled "Go!" and the barrier was lifted. Most of the roaches saw no reason to prefer one end of the table to another, and so they ambled around the starting line, hissing. Except for roach No. 2. For some reason, roach No. 2 scurried down the track as fast as its shiny black legs could carry it.

In addition to providing Batzner Pest Management employees with a fun activity, the race and accompanying media blitz brought the company an overwhelming public response. In addition to TV coverage from three Milwaukee news stations, ESPN showed a clip of the event as part of its "Top Ten" and Fox News also ran a clip of the event. In addition, articles about the race appeared in the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel and the (Milwaukee) Business Journal.

'Angie's List' Award Winner

In 2003 Batzner Pest Management was a recipient of the "2003 Angie's List Super Service Award," marking the third consecutive year the company won the award. This recognition is based on achieving and maintaining a superior service rating on Angie's List (www.angieslist.com) throughout 2001, 2002 and 2003. Angie's List collects service ratings on local companies from homeowners. Unlike referral-type services, companies do not pay to be on Angie's List, nor can they put themselves on the list. Less than 3% of the companies on Angie's List were eligible for the award and even a smaller percentage of companies were actually awarded the honor.

According to Angie's List, "Batzner Pest Management is being presented this award because we feel that its company's focus on customer service and quality workmanship is evident through the feedback we have received from our members."