

# digDIFFERENT

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*Think outside the bucket*

## PRODUCT FOCUS 18



# DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

Hydrovac operator takes  
a unique approach  
to business success 8

## SHOP TALK:

TIPS TO BUILDING A  
BETTER WORKPLACE CULTURE  
14

## TECH PERSPECTIVE:

ENSURING ONLINE CHAT WORKS  
EFFECTIVELY FOR YOUR COMPANY  
16



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# Contents

JANUARY 2021

*Think outside the bucket*

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FOCUS: Pumps and Blowers



## COVER STORY

### 8 **PROFILE: VACUUM EXCAVATION Different by Design**

Novel approach to excavation efforts gives Canadian contractor a competitive edge.

By Ken Wysocky

#### ON THE COVER:

West Coast Hydro Services operating swampers Scott Williams (left) and Mac Willson use the company's Foremost Industries hydrovac unit to expose utilities on a job site near Port Kells, British Columbia. The company, located in Port Kells, has eight employees and services all of British Columbia and Alberta. (Photography by Sami Grewal)

## FEATURES

### 18 **PRODUCT FOCUS: Pumps and Blowers**

By Craig Mandli

### 16 **TECH PERSPECTIVE: Connecting with Customers**

Don't let your fingers get ahead of your brain if you add a chat service to your website.

By Kate Zabriskie

## COLUMNS

### 4 **BELOW THE SURFACE: Getting More Social**

Start putting your pictures, phones and computers to work to advertise and highlight your company.

By Cory Dellenbach, Editor

### 13 **SMART BUSINESS: Being More Assertive**

Assertiveness doesn't come naturally to everyone, but these tips will help you communicate like a leader.

By Liz Uram

### 14 **SHOP TALK: Improving the Workplace Culture**

The keys to success are simple but improvement requires real action.

By Ken Wysocky

## IN EVERY ISSUE

### 6 **@digdifferent.com**

Visit daily for new and exclusive content.

### 20 **The Latest: Products**

This Issue's Feature: Connection process makes HDPE more convenient

By Craig Mandli

### 21 **The Latest: News**

### 22 **Happenings**

## NEXT ISSUE: February 2021

FOCUS: Pipe Installation, Repair, Inspection and Rehabilitation

- Profile: Sewer Experts (Commerce City, Colorado)
- Smart Business: Tax relief for paid leave



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MANY POTENTIAL  
CUSTOMERS IN  
YOUR AREA.

## Getting More Social

### START PUTTING YOUR PICTURES, PHONES AND COMPUTERS TO WORK TO ADVERTISE AND HIGHLIGHT YOUR COMPANY

BY CORY DELLENBACH, EDITOR

**E**veryone has an opinion on social media. You either love it or hate it, there doesn't seem to be a happy medium.

I use social media often. I use Facebook for connecting with family and friends, Twitter to follow the news, and Instagram has been there to share photos and, lately, to help with work-related items. Yes, work.

I have found a lot of success in connecting with contractors like you on Instagram. I enjoy seeing the job site photos many contractors post of work they are doing. It's also an easy way to reach out and start a conversation. Sometimes I'll ask contractors about the work they are doing, what hydrovac unit is being operated, or about the directional drill shown in their photos.

#### WORK TOOLS

Contractors like Chad Porter and his company, West Coast Hydro Services, have found how valuable social media can be. There isn't a day that goes by that West Coast Hydro Services isn't posting what job they are doing on Instagram.

Porter is a newer user to the social media platform, but he quickly learned how powerful it could be. Soon after posting as West Coast Hydro Services on Instagram in May 2020, he started getting phone calls from current customers and new customers.

Porter says the company, which is profiled in this issue, has picked up 12 to 15 new customers since he started using Instagram.

If you use it correctly, social media can be an important tool for any company. It's a way to reach many potential customers in your area. All you need are a few keywords, interesting subject matter, and consistency.

#### CONSISTENCY

Being consistent with the social media you post for your company is probably the most important. I've seen Facebook pages and Instagram pages of companies that haven't been updated for a number of years.

When a customer goes to one of those sites looking for information on your company and they see you haven't done anything since 2017, that's not a good first impression of your company.

Set a schedule for yourself or your staff. Make sure to post at least three times a week in order to start building a following. Take a few random pictures of your trucks or crews on job sites, take a picture of the outside of your office, just be more active on social media.

#### TAKE THE NEXT STEP

If you don't think you can handle posting to social media yourself, look for firms that specialize in social media advertising. These days there are a lot of public relation companies that do that type of work.

It might not pay off immediately, but in the long run you'll see customers calling and hiring you because they see the quality work you are doing on jobs thanks to those photos and stories you are posting on Facebook and Instagram.

If you're already doing this, I'd like to hear from you. What made your company stand out on social media or to your customers? You can email me at [editor@digdifferent.com](mailto:editor@digdifferent.com) or call 715-350-8436. I'm also on Instagram at @coryeditor and on Facebook you can find *Dig Different* at [www.facebook.com/DigDifferent](https://www.facebook.com/DigDifferent).

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## Advertiser Index

January 2021

Bald Eagle Pellet Co. ....	7	 Rival Hydrovac Inc. ....	7
 Custom Truck One Source .....	5	 RODDIE, Inc. ....	15
GapVax, Inc. ....	23	 Sonetics .....	24
Infinity Tool Mfg. ....	back cover	<b>Marketplace</b> .....	22
Milwaukee Rubber Products, Inc. ....	17		
Radius HDD .....	2		

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## **EXCAVATION SAFETY**

### **Digging Damage of Utilities Increases**

This online exclusive takes a look at the most recent DIRT Report, an annual analysis by the Common Ground Alliance of the excavation-related damages occurring to underground utilities in the U.S. and Canada. According to the report, there was a 4.5% increase in incidents compared to the previous year.

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## **OVERHEARD ONLINE**

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*How to Effectively Teach a Trainee*  
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## **HONESTY POLICY**

### **The Importance of Workplace Candor**

Most people are told at an early age that if they have nothing nice to say, they should say nothing at all. But adhering to that advice in the workplace can have negative ramifications. When you don’t candidly give employees intel on how they could improve, you send a message that underperformance is OK. This online exclusive explains more.

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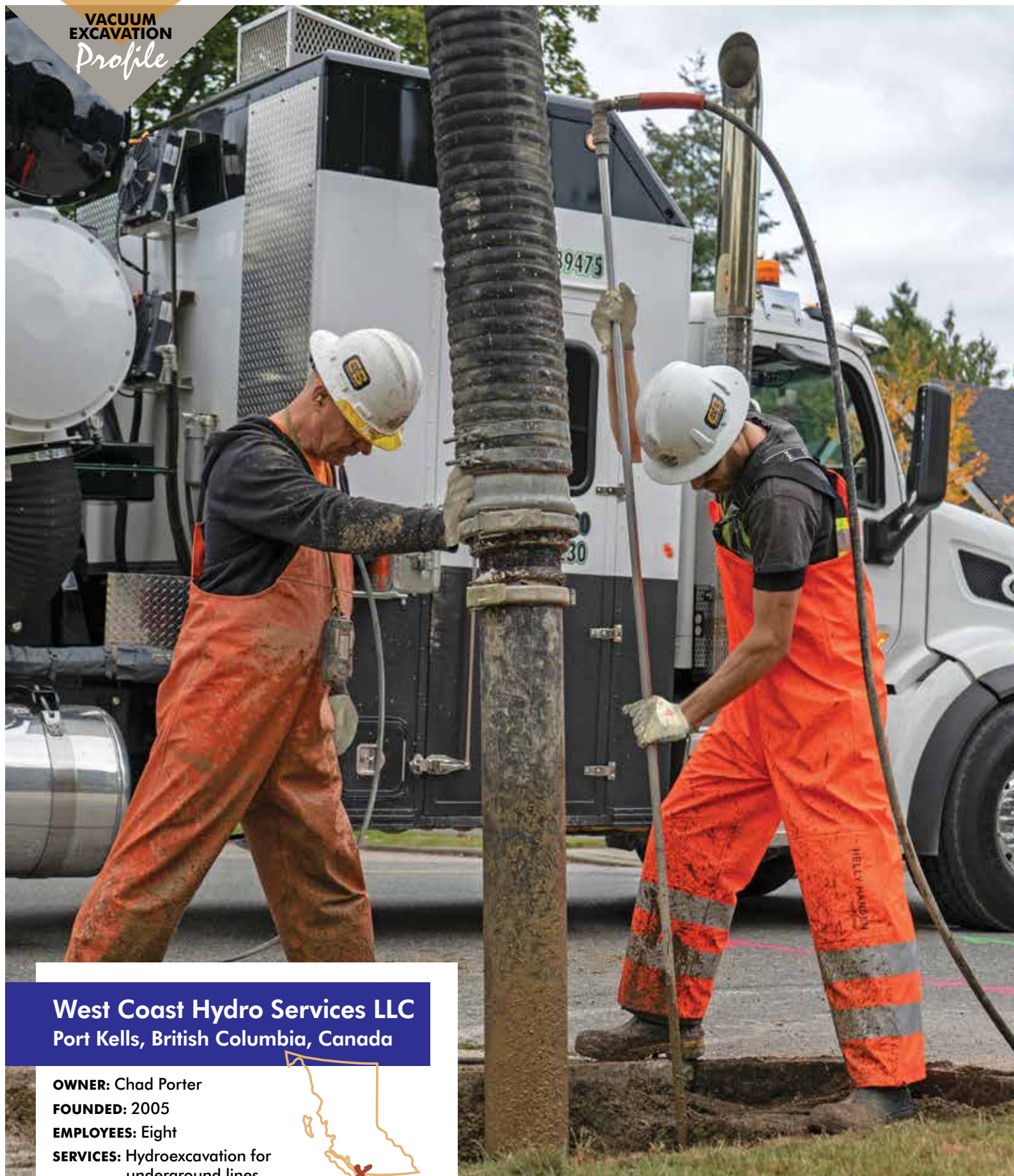


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## West Coast Hydro Services LLC

Port Kells, British Columbia, Canada

**OWNER:** Chad Porter

**FOUNDED:** 2005

**EMPLOYEES:** Eight

**SERVICES:** Hydroexcavation for underground lines

**SERVICE AREA:** British Columbia, Alberta

**WEBSITE:** [www.facebook.com/westcoasthydroservices](https://www.facebook.com/westcoasthydroservices)



West Coast Hydro Services operating swamper Scott Williams (left) handles the vacuum hose while Mac Willson uses the digging wand from the company's Foremost Industries hydroexcavator.



# DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

## NOVEL APPROACH TO EXCAVATION EFFORTS GIVES CANADIAN CONTRACTOR A COMPETITIVE EDGE

STORY: KEN WYSOCKY PHOTOS: SAMI GREWAL

**S**pend some time talking with Chad Porter and one thing comes across loud and clear: The owner of West Coast Hydro Services doesn't fit the mold of a stereotypical hydroexcavation guy.

Take the custom-tailored overalls he buys for his "swampers," for instance, paired with matching hard hats and undershirts. Or the company's gleaming, frequently washed trucks. Or the supersized blowers he specs for his three rigs. Or the Instagram account he regularly updates to market his company's services.

Virtually everything the 44-year-old hydroexcavation veteran does is based on one simple principle: Be different and stand out from the competition.

So far, the emphasis on differentiation has served the company well. Since its inception in 2005, the company — based in Port Kells, British Columbia, a far southern suburb of Vancouver — has grown from one to three hydrovac trucks and from one to eight employees.

And but for the scarcity of qualified labor, a problem to which many contractors can ruefully relate, those numbers would be larger, Porter notes.

"Our business has grown substantially, but we're subbing out a lot of work right now," he explains. "Buying

more iron is the easy part. The hard part is finding guys.

"Everyone thinks they're an operator but they're not," he continues. "Bigger companies can absorb employee screw-ups every week, but I can't. So we're very careful about who we hire."

About 80% of the company's revenue comes from smaller "daylighting" jobs, exposing underground lines while working for municipalities, utilities and general contractors.

"I don't go after the big projects anymore," he says. "I like the bread-and-butter stuff because it's out there every day. There are a lot of big companies out there that chase big-dollar projects, where their guys are gone for six months.

"Then they come home and the company can't get those smaller customers back," he adds. "I like this kind of work because every day you're on a different hole — it's always something interesting and fun. And you're not beating up your trucks every day."

The focus on smaller jobs also leads to some bizarre work, like the time Porter was asked to excavate a cemetery plot so officials could exhume a body for DNA testing for a 25-year-old murder investigation, he says.





West Coast Hydro Services owner Chad Porter (right) stands with operations manager Ezra McKenzie near one of the company's Foremost Industries hydroexcavation trucks.

## Instagram Gives Contractor a Forum For a Marketing Program — for Free

There was a time when Chad Porter, the owner of West Coast Hydro Services in suburban Vancouver, British Columbia, used to make fun of Instagram. But now he's dead serious about its capabilities as a marketing tool.

Porter started dabbling with Instagram in May 2020. Now he frequently posts photos and videos about jobs his company performs. And customers notice.

"They email me and say, 'I didn't know you could do that, too,'" he says. "I've also picked up another 12 to 15 new customers since last May.

"Initially, I thought I was wasting my time," he says. "But now I have more than 650 followers. Some guys I know make fun of me — they call me an Instagram influencer.

"Sometimes hundreds of people will look at a video I post," he adds. "In terms of new business, it has opened up a whole new world for us. And it's all free."

In one case, Porter was browsing on his Instagram account late one night when he ran across a photo of a worker digging under a retaining wall with a shovel, preparing to fix a water-main break. He posted a comment about the photo, noting that it looked like a job for a hydroexcavator.

"I got a response from a guy at the company doing the repair, saying that it was too bad hydrovac guys don't want to work at 1 a.m.," he recalls. "So I

told the guy we work 24/7. He gave me his father's phone number and we were out there the next morning. They've been loyal customers ever since."

Through Instagram, Porter also has developed contacts with hydroexcavating companies all over the world, including firms in Australia, New Zealand, Colombia, China, Russia, Mexico and Italy. They talk about challenging jobs, offer tips on equipment, ask each other business questions and so forth.

To figure out how to use Instagram, Porter says he watched some YouTube videos and also learned just by experimenting. "I'm still getting the hang of it," he says. "I'm learning all the time.

"After a 16-hour day, I now spend another hour or two posting things," he continues. "It builds an awareness of all the different things we can do — sometimes things you'd never think of using a hydroexcavator for."

As an example, West Coast recently received a call from someone who lives in a wealthy oceanside community called Crescent Beach, about 15 to 20 miles south of Vancouver. The caller asked if Porter could clean out a large fish pond at a multimillion-dollar mansion.

"It was a bit of overkill, but we ran 180 feet of hose through a gate and out to the pond in the backyard," he recalls. "There were people standing next to their Ferraris, wondering what was going on."

## DEEP INDUSTRY ROOTS

Porter got an early start in the industry when he quit high school in ninth grade and went to work for an uncle who was a consultant on pipeline projects. By age 18, he earned a commercial driver's license and learned how to operate a hydroexcavation truck.

Over the next 20 years or so, Porter bounced around the industry, working for a variety of hydrovac companies, gaining experience and observing what worked and what didn't work. He made his big move in 2005 when he bought his own rig and started a hydroexcavation company in Kamloops, even though a large, well-entrenched competitor dominated the market.

"I was tired of working for other companies and saw an opportunity," he says. "Everyone told me it was crazy — that it would never work because this other company had been established in the market for more than 30 years."

Porter ultimately sold the company's trucks to his business partner, who was going through a divorce and didn't want to get Porter embroiled. For several years, Porter then ran a franchise hydroexcavation business and operated West Coast as a consulting outfit. That changed in 2009, when he bought a truck and started doing hydrovac work again.

The company's new focus on smaller, short-term projects helped Porter attract and retain employees.

"All of us are in our 40s and would rather not work 17-hour days on a pipeline project," he notes. "My goal is to build a mom and pop operation with a crew of studs — above-average, good guys that know each other and each others' lives. I don't want to be like a big corporation."

## GAINING, RETAINING EMPLOYEES

Investing in top equipment that's efficient and reliable is one way that Porter attracts and retains employees. "When guys see the equipment we operate and how we maintain it, they're more likely to come on board," he says. "Our trucks are gleaming every day. We even clean the tires.

"Customers usually mention how shiny they are," he continues. "They really stick out, which is just another way of differentiating our company from competitors.



Scott Williams (left) and Kate Desjarlais work with the remote for a hydrovac unit.



"OUR BUSINESS HAS GROWN SUBSTANTIALLY, BUT WE'RE SUBBING OUT A LOT OF WORK RIGHT NOW. BUYING MORE IRON IS THE EASY PART. **THE HARD PART IS FINDING GUYS.**"

Chad Porter

"Most times you'd never know our trucks were deep in mud the day before," he adds. "And when they're that clean, it's much easier to spot leaks, too."

The company owns three hydrovac trucks. Foremost Industries built two of them on Peterbilt 567 chassis with a 13-cubic-yard debris tank, a 1,900-gallon water tank and a Robuschi 145 blower (6,450 cfm). One has a water pump built by Pratissoli (a brand owned by Interpump Group of S.p.A.), which generates 3,200 psi at up to 15 gpm; the other relies on a pump made by Cat Pumps (3,200 psi at 15 gpm).

Tornado built out the third rig on a Peterbilt 567 chassis. It's equipped with a 13-cubic-yard debris tank, a 1,500-gallon water tank, a Robuschi 145 blower and a Cat water pump.

Porter also uses blowers to differentiate his company. He says the Robuschi 145 is the biggest blower Robuschi makes and customers appreciate that he brings extra vacuum muscle to job sites.

"A lot of guys have trucks without big blowers," he says. "When customers see ours, they say, 'Wow — that's a real hydrovac truck.'"

Porter also uses Ripsaw rotating turbo nozzles from Hydra-Flex and nozzles made by Suttner America Co.

#### CUSTOM CLOTHING

Another point of differentiation: Rig operators wear custom-tailored coveralls made by Winner Garment Industries Ltd. in Edmonton.

"They send someone out here with a measuring tape," Porter says of the coveralls, which are gray with green stitching. The green stitches complement the company's green and white trucks as well as the green undershirts and green hard hats worn by workers.



Scott Williams using the remote to move the vacuum debris hose into position as he locates utilities along a sidewalk.

The end result is a professional image that also reinforces the company's color scheme/logo, part of an integrated branding effort, he notes.

Porter knows first-hand that the color-coordinated clothing gets noticed. In one instance, a West Coast crew was working at BC Place, a stadium in Vancouver, British Columbia, in preparation for the Grey Cup, the championship game for the Canadian Football League.

"A guy that worked for the general contractor that hired us said, 'We have almost 500 subtrades working in the building today, and you're the only guys with matching uniforms,'" Porter says. "All the other crews looked like a pack of Life Savers — all different colors. But not us. We really stood out."





Mike Flynn uses the digging wand to expose a root bed to assess a potential trench bed in Surrey, British Columbia.

Where does all the marketing savvy and know-how come from? Porter isn't sure. "I just know how to make something look good without over-doing it," he says. "I'm just kind of weird like that."

## HANDS-ON APPROACH

Two other things also help Porter retain employees: Higher-than-average pay and an old-school willingness to get his hands dirty out in the field with his team. Porter believes that employees who are paid well treat equipment better and buy into his keep-trucks-clean mentality.

As for working side-by-side with employees, Porter says it pays dividends when bosses and supervisors are willing to do whatever they ask their employees to do.

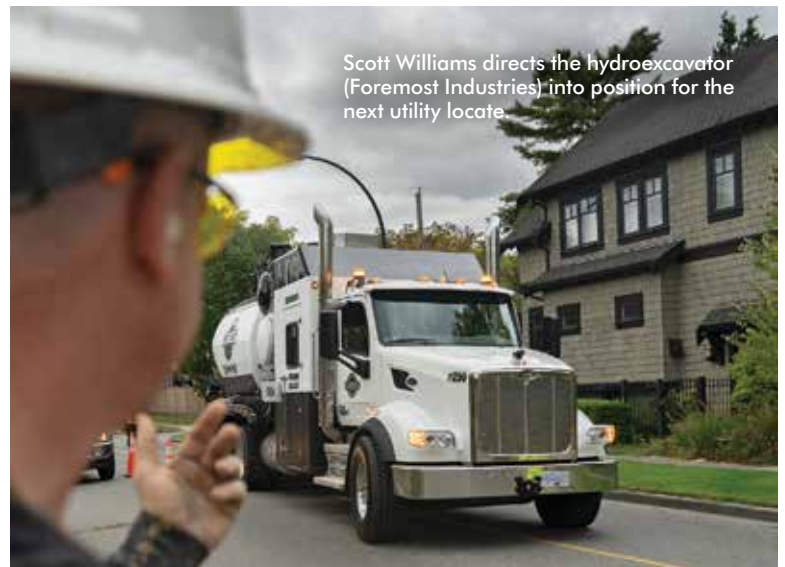
"I've built a good reputation in the industry," he says. "I'm hard on people, but they still respect me at the end of the day. That's because I don't sit in an office all day and bark out commands. I'm still in the truck for 18 hours a day — definitely a hands-on guy. And that makes a 100% difference to my guys."

Porter also believes his passion for hydroexcavating makes a difference to employees. He loves the work because it's different every day, as well as challenging.

"You might be digging a hole every day, but it might be in different kinds of soil or different things you're looking to uncover," he says. "Sometimes it's like playing a video game."

"Some days you just can't find the hole and one of my swampers wants to take the wand and I say, 'No, no, no — I want to find it.' It becomes a challenge. I'm a problem-solver and I take a lot of pride in that."

Porter credits his crew for much of the company's success, noting that a company is only as good as its employees. "Because I'm a hands-on owner,



Scott Williams directs the hydroexcavator (Foremost Industries) into position for the next utility locate.

**"EVERYONE THINKS THEY'RE AN OPERATOR BUT THEY'RE NOT. BIGGER COMPANIES CAN ABSORB EMPLOYEE SCREW-UPS EVERY WEEK, BUT I CAN'T. SO WE'RE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT WHO WE HIRE."**

Chad Porter

sometimes running a truck for 18 hours, day-to-day operations can be hectic," he explains. "But I have a very solid crew of guys that help make it all worthwhile and Mikaya Hampton and Shilow Bennett in our office are the glue that holds everything together."

## ROOM FOR GROWTH

Porter wants West Coast to maintain its slow-but-steady growth track, but points out that scarce labor is a definite obstacle. On the other hand, he doesn't want to grow so big so fast that he can't provide quality work and customer service.

"I have buddies that grew to 400 and 500 trucks and they made millions of dollars when they sold out," he notes. "But ask them if getting that big was worth it, they'll say no. I hear that all the time from guys with bigger companies. I'd rather remain a mom and pop sized operation."

But no matter what size West Coast is in the years ahead, one thing is certain: Porter will keep doing things differently as much as possible.

"Do I have to go out and polish the trucks or buy the guys custom overalls?" he asks. "Not really. I could be just as successful without all that."

"But I want to be different," he continues. "I want people to talk about our trucks and our coveralls and our Instagram posts. What I'm doing definitely is working. When people respond to those things every day, you know you're doing something right." ▼

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# Being More Assertive

**ASSERTIVENESS DOESN'T COME NATURALLY TO EVERYONE, BUT THESE TIPS WILL HELP YOU COMMUNICATE LIKE A LEADER**

BY LIZ URAM

**D**o you ever come up with your best responses an hour after a conversation has ended? Do you ever say to yourself “I wish I would have said...” or “I wish I wouldn’t have said...”? Do you ever get tongue-tied when you are put on the spot?

If you can relate to any of these situations, you can improve your confidence by adding a handful of powerful phrases to your repertoire.

People who communicate with confidence are calm and in control. They strive to be positive and helpful in order to get a good result that benefits everyone. However, it can be hard to keep your cool if you aren’t equipped with the right tools. You might avoid saying the things you should or say things you wish you hadn’t.

Here are five of the most powerful phrases to add to your skill set so you can communicate like a boss in every situation:

## 1. “THAT SOUNDS REALLY HARD.”

Whether it’s the co-worker who vents nonstop about their job, the friend who goes on and on about their relationship problems, or the employee who complains about how overworked they are, they have one thing in common: They don’t want your advice. They aren’t telling you about their problem because they want a solution. They just want you to listen. They are looking for empathy, not advice.

It can be difficult to listen to problems without giving a solution, especially when you know exactly what they should do. Trying to convince them that you have the answer will only lead to frustration and a potential argument.

Resist the temptation to tell them what to do and instead try saying, “That sounds really hard.” You’ll find that using a phrase like this will validate the other person’s feelings and help them move on.

## 2. “WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?”

After you have expressed empathy, follow up with a question such as, “What are you going to do about it?” Most people know what they should do and by nature they will put more energy into their own ideas than yours. Don’t waste your time telling people what to do. Avoid any statement that starts with “You should” or “You have to.” Instead ask them what they think.

This will also reveal whether they have any interest in solving the problem or if they just want to continue complaining. If you sense that they aren’t interested in solving the problem, then you may have to distance yourself. However, if it’s coming from a direct report you will have to deal with it. Negative attitudes are contagious. (See No. 4 for how to address a negative attitude.)

## 3. “I AGREE.”

This short, powerful phrase will stop an argument in its tracks. It’s nearly impossible to argue with someone who is agreeing with you (although some people will try). There is little upside to arguing your point with anyone.

For example, say a team member didn’t complete their work for the day and when you ask them why not they say, “There’s too much work. We’re too busy. I can’t do everything around here.” Simply say, “I agree. It has been really busy around here.”

Once you’ve agreed, then you can follow up with the expected job performance: “I agree; it has been really busy lately. However, you know that our promise to our customers is that every job will be completed on schedule.”

## 4. “I NEED YOUR AGREEMENT.”

Dealing with performance issues can be challenging and, given a choice, many managers prefer the “wait and see” approach. That usually doesn’t work. When someone isn’t meeting performance or behavior standards, a coaching conversation is needed to help the team member get back on track.

The one and only goal of a coaching conversation is to get the team member to agree to improve their performance or behavior. Because many managers don’t have this phrase in their skill set they never come out and clearly state what they want.

Behavioral issues, such as negative attitudes, can be especially challenging but they must be addressed if you are going to put an end to negativity in the workplace. Chronic negativity is a drain on the bottom line and you risk losing your top performers if you allow others’ bad attitudes to go unchecked.

Don’t avoid having these difficult conversations — there is too much at stake. Say, “I need your agreement that you will maintain a professional, respectful attitude in the workplace.” And then hold them to it.

## 5. “I NOTICED...”

The words you use to start off a potentially difficult conversation are the key to a positive or negative outcome. When addressing a performance issue, you’ll have the best outcome if you focus on the observable behavior rather than on the person. Keep in mind that the principles of good communication include being positive and helpful.

For example, when addressing an attitude issue try saying, “I noticed that you don’t seem like yourself lately.” Not, “What’s wrong with you?”

If you choose the wrong words and the other person immediately gets defensive you might as well end the conversation and come back to it later.

Be aware that even if you use all the right words and say all the right things, there is no guarantee that the other person will respond in the same professional way. That’s OK. Communicating like a boss is about taking ownership of what you do and say regardless of the outcome. You are responsible for making the effort. You are not responsible for how the other person chooses to react.

These five phrases will help you remain calm, confident and in control in all situations. Take them out and use them. The more you use them, the more comfortable you’ll get and soon you will be communicating like a boss.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liz Uram is a nationally recognized speaker, trainer, consultant and author. She equips leaders with the tools they need to communicate like a boss so they can make a bigger impact, get better results, and motivate others to do their best. Contact her at [www.lizuram.com](http://www.lizuram.com). ▼



Liz Uram



# Improving the Workplace Culture

THE KEYS TO SUCCESS ARE SIMPLE BUT IMPROVEMENT REQUIRES REAL ACTION

BY KEN WYSOCKY

There's a lot of emphasis these days on building a great workplace culture. Unfortunately, doing so is a lot like following through on New Year's resolutions: Much easier said than done.

But it's not mission impossible, either. And the rewards — ranging from more engaged employees and reduced turnover to increased innovation and improved customer satisfaction — certainly make it a goal worth pursuing, says Heidi Lynne, the owner of Heidi Lynne Consulting in Philadelphia.

Of course, the first step toward improving anything requires admitting there's a problem. And while workplace culture can sometimes feel like a rather nebulous concept that's difficult to quantify, it's nonetheless fairly easy to determine if an organization's culture is healthy, she notes.

"First and foremost, you want to look at turnover — and not just the company as a whole," Lynne says. "You need to break it down by department and if there's an issue, determine what the root of the problem is."

The factors that contribute to high turnover typically are the very same indicators of a poor workplace culture. In short, companies aren't going to win any prizes for workplace culture if they do a poor job of communicating with employees, are driven by gossip and cliques, neglect developmental training, don't provide defined career paths and fail to recognize and celebrate employee milestones and/or accomplishments.

"To me, a good workplace culture is where everyone comes together and feels included, welcome, comfortable and creative," Lynne says. "It's a place where everyone collaborates and feels like they're part of a family — a safe environment where everyone can be their respective selves."

"And it's more important today than ever before, especially in terms of being diverse and inclusive," she adds. "Those things weren't always prioritized before. Everyone must feel included, regardless of their gender and background."

## LISTEN TO EMPLOYEES

A good place to start reshaping a workplace culture is an employee survey, although Lynne says she has a love-hate relationship with them because too many companies only ask generic questions — and then don't act on the results.

"But if you create a survey that asked targeted, specific questions and you plan to use the feedback to improve the overall culture, I'm totally onboard with that," she says.

The questions that organizations should ask can vary greatly. But some generic examples could include asking what employees would do to improve the on-boarding process, how well their managers provide feedback and what three things could be done to improve the organizational culture, she suggests.

Deciding what needs to be changed takes time and effort. Too often, a chief executive officer asks Lynne what kind of programs can be implemented before they even give employees a chance to weigh in, she notes.

"You need to find out what they want," she says. "Employees want to be heard and be valued. You need to take time to ask what's important to them and create a plan around their feedback."

While this may seem obvious, it's not always the case. That's largely because generations of senior managers have built and preserved hierarchical corporate cultures based on control over employees and information. And at the same time, employees have resignedly accepted this arrangement, she notes.

"But there's a new generation of millennials that are speaking up and speaking out, that have needs and demands and refuse to only accept what senior leadership offers," Lynne says. "Senior leaders are starting to realize that employees are assets, that it's not about maintaining a hierarchy, but establishing a partnership."

## HIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

One of the simplest ways to build a great culture is to hire employees

who mesh well with the company's values. Of course, this presumes an organization has a set of core values and not only communicates and emphasizes them regularly to employees, but has managers and senior leadership who uphold them daily, she says.

"You can't just have them only as decoration," she notes. "You have to hire by them, discipline by them and fire by them."

Hiring the right people requires job interviews that delve deeper into candidates' personalities and suss out the quality of their soft skills, as opposed to just the typical behavioral what-would-you-do-if-you-encountered-this-situation type questions. To do this, Lynne prefers asking candidates their personal interests, how their friends would describe them — even how their enemies would describe them.

"You should create an informal environment and ease into things — find some common ground and determine their personalities," she notes. "Then if you see gaps between their personalities and the organization's core values,



**"SENIOR LEADERS ARE STARTING TO REALIZE THAT EMPLOYEES ARE ASSETS, THAT IT'S NOT ABOUT MAINTAINING A HIERARCHY, BUT ESTABLISHING A PARTNERSHIP."**

Heidi Lynne

you can ask more targeted questions, like how would they provide feedback or how they'd react to feedback."

Organizations also need to be wary of how job descriptions are written, as well as scrutinize the overall language used that can create an unwelcoming culture. For example, Lynne says managers often use gender-coded language that makes people feel excluded, especially women and members of the LGBTQ community.

The same can be true for job postings that use words like powerful, assertive and confident to describe desirable attributes. "Those are very masculine words that can dissuade women from applying," she points out.

#### COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Sometimes organizations feel compelled to provide employees with "cool" perks — think foosball or ping-pong tables, video games and craft beer on tap — to improve their culture. That's all well and good, but companies that do so run the risk of putting style ahead of substance, Lynne says.

"I've seen companies mimic their competitors or Google by offering fun perks, but that's not how it works," she says. "If a company gets crummy Glassdoor reviews but offers good perks, what has it gained? It has to go deeper than that."

In the end, what really matters is great communication with employees and leadership that not only talks the talk, but walks the walk. For example, it helps immensely if a company that says it values feedback and wants a feedback-driven culture also has a chief executive officer that regularly walks around and visits with employees instead of remaining secluded in an office, she says.

"Or maybe a CEO that gets a lot of pushback about lack of transparency starts holding town hall events," she adds. Of course, the corollary to that is that CEOs then have to actively act on the feedback they receive — not treat it like yet another half-hearted New Year's resolution. ▼

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# Connecting With Customers

## DON'T LET YOUR FINGERS GET AHEAD OF YOUR BRAIN IF YOU ADD A CHAT SERVICE TO YOUR WEBSITE

BY KATE ZABRISKIE

**C**ustomer: *Hi, I'm having a problem with my bill. I'm being charged more than what I expected. Could someone please help? I'm finding this very frustrating. Thank you.*

Chat Agent: *Hello! Glad you are chatting with me this morning! This is Matt. What can I do for you today?*

Customer to Himself: *Huh? Well for starters, Matt, you could read what I typed before asking what you can do! Furthermore, you can take that smile off your face.*

Website chat communication with customers is becoming a popular alternative for small businesses today, even utility contractors who understand that more consumers would rather tap out inquiries on a keyboard than pick up a phone. Providing exceptional service via chat involves more than simply choosing a technology platform. Chat is a distinct communication channel with its own set of rules, and if you choose to implement a chat system at your company, you need to prepare service representatives to use it effectively.

### STEP ONE

After you've chosen a chat platform, or while that activity is in process, determine who on your team is well-suited to serve customers online. Chat service providers should be able to type, and they should have a basic command of English spelling and grammar. And depending on your location, it may be helpful to have a bilingual representative who is fluent in Spanish to answer questions from Hispanic customers.

### STEP TWO

Once you have a team in mind, identify some rules to guide their chats. The following questions are examples of basic considerations you should know the answers to before your representatives start typing.

- How many chats should an agent handle at once? (In the beginning, nobody should attempt more than one, and even experienced agents shouldn't divide their attention among more than three.)
- What topics can and can't be addressed via chat? Company owner preferences and industry regulations may limit what your representatives can and can't say.
- When will you move customers to a different mode of communication if chat is not appropriate?

### STEP THREE

Sometimes companies implement chat, and the tone of what's typed takes on a stilted or off-brand look and feel. For that reason, it's important to think about what on-brand messaging looks like before rolling out the chat platform.

How should a chat start if a customer has already shared information? What words and phrases align with your brand? What words and phrases should providers avoid?

How should representatives address angry or frustrated customers? In what way should greetings differ?

A good way to start thinking about your company's look and sound is to start chatting. Visit sites that use chat. Think about each experience: what you liked, what you didn't, the brand you felt and so forth.



Kate Zabriskie

### STEP FOUR

Be prepared for the obvious. Anyone who has worked in service usually starts to notice patterns. For example, if the provider is an online retailer, close to the holidays the website may receive more inquiries about delivery times. If the provider is a utility, representatives may realize they receive more inquiries about billing on certain days of the week.

The point is to plan for the expected. Just as telephone service agents in most industries should know how to handle the top 20 or 30 customer requests without having to reference a lot of documentation, the same is true for chat. Consistency is essential. This is especially true when it comes to the basics.

Before being set loose with a keyboard, go through both systems training and role-playing to address common inquiries.

**THE POINT IS TO PLAN FOR THE EXPECTED. JUST AS TELEPHONE SERVICE AGENTS IN MOST INDUSTRIES SHOULD KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THE TOP 20 OR 30 CUSTOMER REQUESTS WITHOUT HAVING TO REFERENCE A LOT OF DOCUMENTATION, THE SAME IS TRUE FOR CHAT.**

### STEP FIVE

Determine the extent to which you wish to use canned responses. Prewritten text has its pluses and minuses. On the plus side, it's quick, it's not written in the moment, and it's had the opportunity to be proofread by one or more people. On the other hand, canned text can sound canned. Furthermore, representatives sometimes choose prewritten responses that don't get to the heart of what a customer is asking.

So what's a small business to do? The answer to that question varies. No matter the option chosen, canned text should sound conversational. If you wouldn't say what's written in the course of natural speech, it probably isn't right.

Chat is supposed to be a dialogue. It's not a brochure, the text from a website, or worse still, verbiage from a policy or legal document.

One way to help maintain a conversational tone is to keep your text short. Long sentences usually equate to a longwinded or unnatural feel.

A good place to source potential prewritten responses is from your representatives' actual chats. If your office is like most places, some people will show a natural gift for chat. Why not leverage their strengths and skills?

## STEP SIX

Learn from your failures and your successes. When service goes wrong, most strong businesses address the shortcomings. Beyond fixing what's broken, the best companies also invest time in figuring out what went right and why. They then replicate the good.

As with any service interaction, chat can go well, or it can go poorly. The key is monitoring, course correcting and standardizing success. Customer service representatives and their supervisors should regularly review chats. What can we leverage? Where are the opportunities? What was on-brand? What was off-brand?

The trick is to systematically ask and answer them. The more methodically you evaluate your chats, the quicker you will capitalize on what works and eliminate what doesn't.

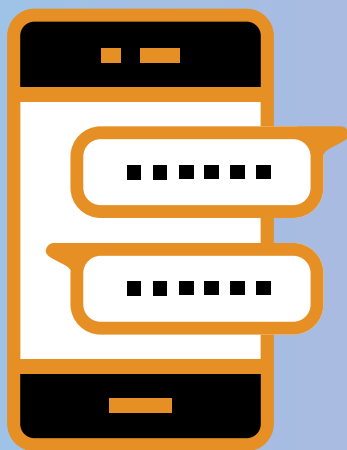
## STEP SEVEN

Chat training is not a one-and-done activity. Needs change, technology evolves, and staff turns over. Ideally, you should focus on one or two best practices a week, evaluate the prewritten text twice a year, and spot-check transcripts daily.

Chat is no longer a novelty, and more customers expect their service providers to offer it. No matter where your business is in the chat-implementation process, there is always room to improve the way you connect through a keyboard.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Zabriskie is president of Business Training Works, Inc., a Maryland-based talent development firm. Reach her at [www.businesstrainingworks.com](http://www.businesstrainingworks.com).



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BY CRAIG MANDLI

## Blower

### National Vacuum Equipment Challenger 1600

The Challenger 1600 high-vacuum blower from National Vacuum Equipment is a 1,600 cfm tri-lobe blower designed for continuous duty at maximum vacuum. It employs uniquely designed rotors to significantly improve vacuum efficiency and reduce mechanical noise. The blower has a ballast air-cooling design and will work continuously in maximum vacuum (typically 27 inches Hg).

800-253-5500; [www.natvac.com](http://www.natvac.com)



## Centrifugal Pump

### Pentair V2 Series

The V2 Series grinder from Pentair is designed with computational fluid dynamics software and has a volute and impeller design that allows shut-off heads up to 185 feet with a single-stage centrifugal pump. This design gives operators the flexibility to change between the standard, high-head and high-

flow design by swapping the impeller and cutter plate, simplifying maintenance and reducing service parts inventory for low-pressure sewage system projects. It is available with an optional quick-disconnect cord for easier servicing in the field, double-row bearings to absorb axial and radial loads and an oil-filled motor for cooler operating temperatures and longer life.

855-274-8948; [www.pentair.com](http://www.pentair.com)



## Dewatering/Bypass Pumps

### BBA Pumps BA150E Trailer Pump Package

The 6-inch BA150E Trailer Pump Package from BBA Pumps is a dewatering pump that provides a capacity up to 2,090 gpm. Due to the large solid passage of 3.15 inches, combined with a grinding wear plate, the pump is also suitable for sewer bypass projects. The completely galvanized trailer is equipped with a large composite fuel tank. The lifting device also serves as a protective cover for pump and engine. The height of the pintle hitch can be adjusted, and the trailer is fitted with all the necessary safety provisions.

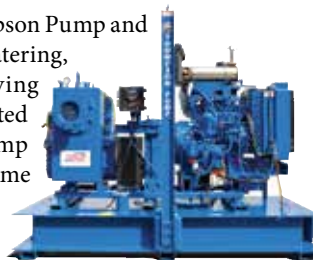
843-849-3676; [www.bbapumps.com/us](http://www.bbapumps.com/us)



### Thompson Pump and Mfg. 6RW

6RW rotary wellpoint pumps from Thompson Pump and Mfg. are designed for wellpoint and sock dewatering, and are suitable to keep air and water moving thanks to their constant suction. With unassisted priming and automatic re-priming, the pump offers high air handling and large water volume capabilities up to 1,400 gpm and heads up to 80 feet; operating speeds up to 2,000 rpm; and a low hp engine for better fuel efficiency — an EPA Final Tier 4 Isuzu engine, with diesel oxidation catalyst after treatment. The pumps also come in 8-inch (8RW) and 12-inch (12R) versions.

800-767-7310; [www.thompsonpump.com](http://www.thompsonpump.com)



## Solids/Sludge Pumps

### Boerger BLUEline

The BLUEline rotary lobe pump from Boerger is a self-priming, valveless, positive displacement pump used to convey viscous and abrasive materials. There are 21 pump models in six series with pulsation-free operation, fully reversible rotation, dry-run capabilities and flow rates up to 7,500 gpm. The pumps are stable and wear resistant with a maintenance-in-place design that allows for all wetted parts to be easily replaced through the front cover without removing the pipe or drive systems.

612-435-7300; [www.boerger.com](http://www.boerger.com)



### Gorman-Rupp SludgeKat

The SludgeKat hydraulic-driven, positive displacement sludge pump from Gorman-Rupp is designed to handle applications involving heavy sludges and slurries. It has 4-inch suction and discharge ports and is capable of flows up to 226 gpm and heads up to 390 feet TDH. Depending on the product being pumped, it can pass up to 2.4-inch-diameter solids without damaging or clogging the pump. Units are equipped with the latest in Tier IV diesel engine-driven technology. Each comes standard with a Department of Transportation-approved wheel kit. The pump end frame can be detached from the unit and when connected to optional 150-foot hoses, provides increased portability around the job site. It is suitable for clarifying pits, wastewater treatment, oil and gas drilling, mud pump applications, environmental cleanup, and a variety of other heavy-duty municipal, industrial and construction applications.

419-755-1011; [www.grpumps.com](http://www.grpumps.com)



## Submersible Pump

### Hydra-Tech Pumps S3CSL

The S3CSL submersible 3-inch hydraulic-driven sand slurry pump from Hydra-Tech Pumps includes a built-in agitator used for stirring up solids. It has hardened alloy wear parts and is designed to be used in applications where settled solids must be put into suspension and pumped away with the discharge water. Primary applications include desilting ponds, lakes and streams; other uses include filling sandbags to prevent beach erosion, cleaning tanks and digesters, or pumping sediment from caissons. It requires hydraulic inputs of up to 10 gpm at 3,000 psi, and when combined with HT11 to HT20 open and sound-attenuated power units, it is capable of output flows to 450 gpm.

570-645-3779; [www.hydra-tech.com](http://www.hydra-tech.com)



## Transfer Pump

### Screenco Systems Patz Shaft Drive Pumps

Patz Shaft Drive Pumps, distributed by Screenco Systems, are vertical pit pumps that can be used in aboveground or underground storage tanks and include choices of single- or three-phase electric motors. They have high solids and grit capacities with large centrifugal pumps and hardened steel impellers. High capacities include the 3333 series up to 500 gpm and the 4444 series up to 1,580 gpm. They can be deployed in depths from 3 feet to 12 feet 8 inches. The 6000 and 8000 series have a three-point hitch with PTO drive and can offer up to 3,500 gpm at depths from 6 to 12 feet. They can be used with an agitator nozzle to mix and pump fast. The 616 vertical prop agitator is capable of mixing at 9,000 gpm, keeping grit and solids mixed at pit depths of 6 to 16 feet.

208-790-8770; [www.screencosystems.com](http://www.screencosystems.com)

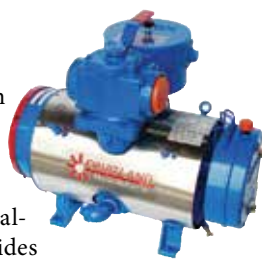


## Vacuum Pumps

### Fruitland 870 Series

Fruitland's 870 Series pump allows high vacuum levels of 28.5 inches Hg and continuous vacuum of 27 inches Hg. Additionally, it is capable of providing 30 psi pressure for offloading. The oil consumed during pump operation is minimal, with only 1 gallon of oil for 18 hours of operation, which provides greater cost savings and reduces environmental impact. Fruitland is less restrictive on the type of oil used in all its vacuum pumps, allowing customers to buy locally available, nonproprietary oil. The pump delivers 510 cfm (free air) through 4-inch porting.

905-662-6552; [www.fruitlandmanufacturing.com](http://www.fruitlandmanufacturing.com)



### Guzzler Liquid Ring

The Guzzler Liquid Ring has a powerful and efficient industrial vacuum system designed to clean up and recover a full spectrum of materials — from solids and dry bulk powders to liquids, slurries and thick sludge — while providing the additional capability of reclaiming hydrocarbons. The filtration system keeps the pump operating liquid clean, resulting in a longer pump life. It can operate effectively in remote or inaccessible locations more than 1,000 feet away, through suction lines up to 8 inches in diameter. Its design makes it virtually maintenance free and allows for quiet operation.

815-672-3171; [www.guzzler.com](http://www.guzzler.com)



### Presvac Systems PV750

The Presvac Systems PV750 rotary vane pump is designed for continuous full-vacuum operation in extreme conditions. It offers 400 cfm at free air, 350 cfm at 15 inches Hg, a maximum vacuum of 27 inches Hg and maximum pressure of 35 psi. Dual fans and twin-ballast ports efficiently cool the pump. The solid housing with deep cooling ribs allows for greater heat transfer from the vacuum chamber. Aluminum fans and shrouding work like a heat exchanger to aid in heat reduction. Multiple manifold and drive options are available for truck, trailer or stationary applications.

800-387-7763; [www.presvac.com](http://www.presvac.com)



### Wallenstein Vacuum 753 Series

The 753 Series vacuum pump from Wallenstein Vacuum incorporates extra-wide vanes that allow up to an inch of wear, designed for longer service life. It provides 422 cfm airflow at 1,200 rpm and is precision-machined to provide vacuum levels up to 28 inches Hg. Options include air, liquid or dual cooling systems where air injection is combined with liquid cooling. A pump-flushing port is included on the top valve for convenient maintenance. The quick-access housing end plate allows for easy internal inspection with no bearings to pull. Oil lubrication is via a mechanical piston pump driven by shaft rotation or available with a sight-feed valve oil regulator system using vacuum/pressure to draw oil with no moving parts.

800-801-6663; [www.wallenstein.com](http://www.wallenstein.com)



## Washdown Pump

### Moro USA washdown/fill pumps

Washdown/fill pumps from Moro USA are manufactured with durability in mind. This is done by crafting the pumps with stainless-steel impellers, a

cast iron or stainless steel housing, and by using an epoxy-coated washdown motor. These pumps also come integrated with a cooling fan to keep the pump running smoothly under all conditions. That not only prevents rusting and overheating, but also keeps the pump intact during freezing.

866-383-6304; [www.morousa.com](http://www.morousa.com)



## Pump Parts/Components

### Dynablast HV420F-12VRED

The Dynablast HV420F-12VRED hydrovac water heater produces 420,000 Btu with an output temperature of 175 degrees F at 5 gpm, making it suitable for colder climates and improved digging in clay-filled areas. All models come with ETL certification for safety, which also includes certification on the coil for higher efficiency and heat transfer, a stainless steel target plate for increased coil life and a design with serviceability in mind with momentary override control. A 19-by-19-inch footprint makes it suitable for compact installations.

905-867-4642; [www.dynablast.ca](http://www.dynablast.ca)



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## THE LATEST: Products

1



### 1. John Deere E-II articulated dump trucks

John Deere's new E-II articulated dump truck models, the 410E-II and 460E-II, incorporate customer-driven features, resulting in greater operator comfort, reduced fuel burn, increased uptime and lowered daily operating costs. The redesigned dump body is wider and has a lowered and leveled rail height to improve material retention. A new side-sheet design makes the load height the same from front to back, while the widened bin provides additional tire coverage and easier loading. Additionally, the bin rail features an angled top, helping to reduce material spillage while traveling. The optional, factory-installed auto lube feature is filled at ground level and takes the guesswork out of lubricating grease fittings. Optional LED lights provide greater visibility in lowlight settings. **800-503-3373; www.johndeere.com**

2



### 2. McElroy DataLogger 7 tablet

The DataLogger 7 tablet from McElroy provides assurance that pipelines adhere to industry standards before going into service. Advanced features on the tablet include more than 14 hours of battery life and a hot-swappable battery option to keep fusion operators up and running. A faster and more powerful processor powered by Android 9 gives the ability to run additional business apps on one personal device. A pre-installed SD card in the onboard storage expansion slot provides a redundant backup of fusion records, so no data is lost. The military grade hardware makes the IP68-rated tablet dustproof, waterproof and shockproof. A 7-inch touch screen offers great readability even in sunlight and can be used with gloves and in wet conditions. **918-836-8611; www.mcelroy.com ▼**

## This Issue's Feature:

### Connection process makes HDPE more convenient

BY CRAIG MANDLI

HDPE is an increasingly popular pipe material. Advantages include a very low temperature impact resistance and a high level of chemical resistance. But the material can sometimes be difficult to adapt into the same configurations that can be found with other pipe materials. With that in mind, **FactionFusion** offers the **Faction-Saddle** — designed to make HDPE more versatile and convenient to use in the gravity sewer market.

The welded HDPE connection creates a long-term solution that is leak free, rootproof and durable, while completely manufactured in the field. According to Collins Orton, a product specialist for FactionFusion, this process makes for an extremely consistent and reliable weld. Each installed connection is vacuum tested during the process and easily verifiable by visual inspection.

"It's a process that takes less than 15 minutes start to finish," he says. "Not only that, the process actually lets the technician visually confirm that they have a good weld."

The mainline pipe and Faction-Saddle are heated at the connection point to fusion temperature. The heater plate is then removed and mating portions of pipe are engaged. Melted plastic will create a seal between the mating surfaces of pipe. Vacuum pressure will be obtained from within the saddle connection by means of a vacuum pump. Vacuum pressure is obtained, causing the external forces of atmospheric pressure to be applied to the saddle in a consistent and unobstructed manner. Without fixtures or clamping devices, the saddle has the ability to equalize and adjust to the most consistent distribution of pressure. The connection is then held under constant pressure while the plastic cools and stabilizes.

Not only can the Faction-Saddle be welded at angles up to 45 degrees, but it can also be welded in smaller spaces than conventional sidewall fusion equipment. "The Faction-Saddle can con-



Faction-Saddle  
by FactionFusion

veniently be welded within excavations," says Orton. "There is no need to dig all the way around the pipe. Just dig down to the side of the pipe where the connection is needed and fusion weld the Faction-Saddle in place."

The Faction-Saddle is a durable, homogenous connection with zero leakage. Equally as important as the saddle itself is the internal bore of the connection, according to Orton.

"Our boring and cleanup tools have been designed to open the connection to its maximum ID while providing a smooth flow line," he says. "Many of these connections will be very closely inspected by a CCTV camera on most projects, so we believe it's important to install a Faction-Saddle every time."

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## THE LATEST: News

### Vacuum Truck Rentals launches online marketplace

Vacuum Truck Rentals announced a new digital platform for selling pre-owned equipment. Vac Truck Depot, which is managed by Vacuum Truck Rentals, offers a single online source for individuals and businesses looking to purchase high-quality, pre-owned equipment. Available inventory includes liquid vacs, combination units, air machines, roll-offs, hydro-excavators, camera vans, road tractors, trailer units, sewer inspection equipment and more.

### Ellingson celebrates 50 years in business

Founded in 1970, Ellingson is an independent water- and infrastructure-management company providing safe, technology-driven construction planning, design and installation services. In the past 20 years, Ellingson has worked to expand its trenchless solutions business and continues to grow its ag business, especially in Minnesota's Red River Valley. The company offers pipe relining with advanced CIPP technology and recently acquired Direct Technology Drilling, adding environmental remediation capabilities to the company's growing portfolio of trenchless construction services.

### Barbco forms Omneity Innovations

In the spring of 2020, Barbco finalized a decision to split its engineering and service departments to create Omneity Innovations, a spinoff company. Omneity Innovations will utilize the expertise within the two departments to focus on con-

tinuing to improve service to its customers. Omneity will provide a wide array of services including engineering, training, technical support, consultation, repair and rebuild for all underground trenchless technologies.

### Bosch Rexroth launches new e-commerce site

Bosch Rexroth launched a new e-commerce portal, buyrexroth.com, designed to provide the easiest access to select authorized Bosch Rexroth products, with the ability for customers to buy products with a credit card and schedule fast delivery — with same-day shipping. Some of the products currently offered on the site include pressure- and directional-control valves and fixed- and variable-displacement pumps for industrial hydraulics applications, a wide selection of axial piston pumps and hydraulic motors for mobile equipment and servo drives, I/O modules, power supplies, HMIs and other electric drive and control products from Bosch Rexroth's automation and electrification portfolio.

### NUCA announces 2020 scholarship program winners

The National Utility Contractors Association announced the winners of the NUCA Foundation for Education and Research 2020 scholarships. The three scholarships awarded are: D.A. Foster Memorial Scholarship, Emily Lyssenko, Coral Springs, Florida; NUCA Four-Year Scholarship, Isaias Martinez, Riverview, Florida; and William & Shirley Burgett Scholarship, Caitlin Murphy, Exeter, Nebraska. ▼

## DOWN & DIRTY

### What's Your Story?

*Dig Different* welcomes news about your tough excavation, pipe bursting, trenching, boring or tunneling job for the Down & Dirty column.

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## Happenings

### CALENDAR

**Jan. 24-29**

**Underground Contractors Association of Illinois Annual Convention**, Aruba Marriott Resort, Aruba. Visit [www.uca.org](http://www.uca.org).

**Feb. 4-6**

**National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA) Annual Convention & Exhibit**, Naples Grande Beach Resort, Naples, Florida. Visit [www.nuca.com/convention](http://www.nuca.com/convention).

**March 25-27**

**Mid-America Trucking Show**, Kentucky Expo Center, Louisville, Kentucky. Visit [www.truckingshow.com](http://www.truckingshow.com).

**March 28-April 1**

**NASTT's No-Dig Show**, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida. Visit [www.nodigshow.com](http://www.nodigshow.com).

Dig Different welcomes your contributions to our Happenings column. To recognize members of your team, please send notices of new hires, promotions, service milestones, certifications or achievements. We also invite your national, state or local associations and organizations to post notices, news items and learning opportunities. Send contributions to [editor@digdifferent.com](mailto:editor@digdifferent.com). ▼



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