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NO MINOR FEAT

Adding hydrovac services and other new tech drives company growth 10



PRODUCT FOCUS 22

SHOP TALK:

DEVELOPING A LOGICAL PROCESS TO TRAIN YOUR CREWS 14

SAFETY FIRST:

TIPS TO STAYING SAFE WHEN ON THE ROADSIDE 18

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Contents

APRIL 2022

Think outside the bucket

digDIFFERENT

FOCUS: Software, Fleet Management, Field Service, Task, Asset Management, Office; No-Dig Show Issue



COVER STORY

10 **PROFILE: VACUUM EXCAVATION No Minor Feat**

Tri-state contractor expands from traditional excavation equipment to include hydroexcavation machines and opens new opportunities for the company.

By Giles Lambertson

ON THE COVER:

MJ Minor Utility Contractor laborer Ted Ball Jr., uses the digging wand to pothole to locate the waterline, while shop foreman Matt Bunce operates the wireless control box for the Vactor 2100 unit. The company acquired the Vactor 2100, built on a Kenworth chassis, from Jack Doheny Company. MJ Minor, based in South Dakota, covers a full range of hydroexcavation work as well as camera inspection, jetting of sewer and storm sewer infrastructure, and installation and repair of water, sewer and septic systems. (Photography by Britton Hacke)

FEATURES

21 **Dig My Rig**

This issue features Northstar Hydrovac Inc. of Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada.

22 **PRODUCT FOCUS: Software, Fleet Management, Field Service, Task, Asset Management and Office**

By Craig Mandli

24 **SUCCESS STORIES: Software, Fleet Management, Field Service, Task, Asset Management and Office**

By Craig Mandli

16 **SMART BUSINESS: 6 Tips for Better Money Management**

This advice may seem elementary at first, but small companies can always benefit from a review of foundational business principles.

By Peter Bellotti

18 **SAFETY FIRST: Protecting Your Crews on the Roadside**

Tips for practicing good job site safety when the work zone comes into contact with public roads.

By Jessica Banner

COLUMNS

8 **BELOW THE SURFACE: Diversifying to Pull in Customers**

Ensuring your company shines over competitors is going to be important as projects and jobs start coming up.

By Cory Dellenbach, Editor

14 **SHOP TALK: A Winning Algorithm**

Teaching staff why you do things the way you do will help them better learn the job and the business.

By Anja Smith

IN EVERY ISSUE

9 **@digdifferent.com**

Visit daily for new and exclusive content.

20 **The Latest: Products**

This Issue's Feature: Hole opener's maintenance-in-place design keeps contractors on site

By Craig Mandli

25 **Happenings**

26 **The Latest: News**

NEXT ISSUE: MAY/JUNE 2022

FOCUS: Utility Locating and Surveying; Safety and Education

• Profile: Black Hydrovac LLC (Hamilton, Virginia)

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Advertiser Index April 2022

| | |
|---|---|
| Bitco Insurance Companies 21 | Pressure Lift Corporation 25 |
|  Cat Pumps 2 |  Rival Hydrovac Inc. 5 |
| Ditch Witch West 5 |  RODDIE, Inc. 19 |
| Forbest Products Co. 23 |  Subsite Electronics 3 |
|  GapVax, Inc. 27 |  TRUVAC by Vactor Manufacturing, Inc. ... back cover |
| Kondex Corporation 17 | United Rentals, Inc. 7 |
|  Milwaukee Rubber Products, Inc. 17 | Vactor Manufacturing 15 |
|  National Vacuum Equipment, Inc. 6 | Marketplace 24 |

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Diversifying to Pull in Customers

ENSURING YOUR COMPANY SHINES OVER COMPETITORS IS GOING TO BE IMPORTANT AS PROJECTS AND JOBS START COMING UP

BY CORY DELLENBACH, EDITOR

I've talked about making sure your company is as diversified as possible to pull in as many customers as possible. Being able to do more than one job at a job site is so important for a company wanting to stand out.

With the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill signed into law last November, it's even more important now to make sure your company is standing out. A lot of municipalities and utilities will likely have some extra spending money for projects and you want to snag up some of those bids.

The infrastructure bill is slated to deliver \$550 billion of new federal investments in infrastructure over five years, touching everything from bridges and roads to the nation's broadband, water and energy systems.

Those last three items — broadband, water and energy — are things most of the contractors featured in this magazine work with. So this could be a very big thing for your company.

MAKING YOURSELF VALUABLE

I've preached on it before, but it's so important to know when it's time to diversify and bring on added services to help your company grow.

No one knows that more than the folks at MJ Minor Utility, featured in this issue. The company, based in North Sioux City, South Dakota, started by offering just traditional excavation services. Now, 18 years later, MJ Minor does a full range of hydroexcavation work from potholing to water main breaks and utility locating.

The company also does camera inspection and jetting of sewer and storm sewer infrastructure, installation

and repair of water, sewer and septic tank underground structures.

The leadership team at MJ Minor realized they needed to do something to cater to more of their customers' needs and pull in new customers to help the company grow and succeed in the future.

PUSHING YOUR TEAM

If your company isn't able to expand services, there are other ways you can make your company stand out to potential customers.

The first is making sure that your crews out there working are doing what is required of them and going above and beyond for current customers.

Most bid requests have references on them, so those looking to hire you could reach out to your current customers and ask how you've performed for them. You don't need any negatives on those reports.

Ensure the work being done by your company is up to the standards that you expect. If not, you need to evaluate what isn't working and make a change — whether it be better training for the crew, better equipment, or just an overall different process of completing the work.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

What do you do to make your company stand out for potential customers? Have you added services to help or do you advertise a certain way? Let me know by emailing me at editor@digdifferent.com or calling 715-350-8436.

Enjoy this issue! ▼

I'VE PREACHED ON IT BEFORE, BUT IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO DIVERSIFY AND BRING ON ADDED SERVICES TO HELP YOUR COMPANY GROW.



HIT A HOME RUN?

Here's your chance to feature YOUR company in these pages.

Tell us how you solved that tough excavation problem with a creative solution. Send a note today to editor@digdifferent.com or call 715-350-8436



TO THE RESCUE

Vacuum Trucks Prove Valuable in Emergency

Vacuum trucks aren't only useful for things like potholing underground utilities. Read about this incident in which they were a helpful part of a rescue operation of a farm worker trapped inside a large grain bin in Iowa. digdifferent.com/featured



PROTECTING PROFITS

Do You Need a Fuel Surcharge?

Don't let rising diesel and gas prices due to inflation woes, oil production interruptions and chaos in the world upend your profitability. Here's some advice on how to handle this key operating expense so that it doesn't have too much of a detrimental effect on your bottom line.

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OVERHEARD ONLINE

"A NEGATIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A NUMBER OF VERY REAL, BOTTOM-LINE PROBLEMS — HIGHER EMPLOYEE TURNOVER, LESS PRODUCTIVITY, AND EVEN A DECLINE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS."

Eliminate Negativity From Your Workplace Culture
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HARD DIGGING

Tips For Excavating Frozen Ground

Spring is on the way, but depending where you are, you may still be dealing with some signs of winter, including frozen ground conditions. That can make excavation work more challenging, but being equipped to overcome it is worthwhile as it extends your window for taking on work and thus boosts revenue. Consider these suggestions.

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NO MINOR FEAT

TRI-STATE CONTRACTOR EXPANDS FROM TRADITIONAL EXCAVATION EQUIPMENT TO INCLUDE HYDROEXCAVATION MACHINES AND OPENS NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COMPANY

STORY: GILES LAMBERTSON PHOTOS: BRITTON HACKE

One of the so-called “tri-state” areas in the U.S. is around Sioux City, Iowa, where the Missouri River and a tributary, the Big Sioux River, carve out jurisdictions, with one area called Iowa, another called South Dakota and a third, Nebraska. Whatever you call it, MJ Minor Utility Contractor has it covered.

The contractor digs into the soils of the region using powerful hydroexcavators or, as needed, traditional excavation equipment. If a pipe or fiber optic line or other buried infrastructure is down there in the ground, MJ Minor can efficiently expose it for repair or replacement or simply to pinpoint its location for avoidance.

The company operates out of North Sioux City — the South Dakota community, not to be confused with South Sioux City, Nebraska or Sioux City in Iowa. The region is generically referred to as Siouxland and all of it constitutes the stomping ground for the 19-year-old company.

Until recent weeks, it was a frozen stomping ground. The average high temperature in Sioux City in January is 31 degrees; the average low, 11 degrees. That range doesn’t allow for a lot of thawing, so carving out a trench or daylighting a congested underground utility site always is a frigid task until spring temperatures return. With pressurized hot water, however, it is a doable one.

SOMETHING NEW

MJ Minor got into hydroexcavation after establishing itself as a traditional digging company. Launched in 2003, Minor focused on sewer, water and septic tank installations and repairs. It replaced fire hydrants and sewer laterals, digging into the soil to lay new infrastructure or fix the old.

The company still offers those services on commercial and residential properties as well as new construction projects. It maintains a fleet of equipment to do the work. Its CASE Construction machines include a 1650K dozer, two 821 wheel loaders, a CX210 excavator, two skid loaders and a 660 trencher. A pair of Bobcat mini-excavators round out the earthmoving machinery. “CASE and Bobcat equipment have worked for us and we stay with them,” says Matt Bunce, shop foreman.

After five years of traditional utility excavation work, however, MJ Minor discovered hydroexcavation. “Nobody had seen anything like hydrovac,” says Scott Jones, general manager. “It was new; the company tried it and the work has been growing ever since.”

Jones wasn’t there in 2008, joining the company in 2020, but he has been in the plumbing industry for 40 years. During that time, hydrovac trucks came into their own as excavation tools.

Introduced to the technology, MJ Minor saw the future and expanded its fleet of equipment. Besides the traditional earthmoving machinery, the company's five-acre equipment yard in North Sioux City now has a pair of pump trucks including "Big Red," a Presvac unit on a 2020 Peterbilt industrial pumper with a tilt bed/rear door. Parked there is a Spartan Ultimate Urban Warrior jetter mounted in a Ford 450 Transit cargo van. It can produce 12 gpm at 4,000 psi to clean sewer lines and storm sewers.

More to the point, the company has purchased two Vactor 2100 hydrovac trucks with 12-cubic-yard debris tanks and water pumps that can spew water at 2,500 psi at a rate of 80 gpm. These high-pressure water excavating machines — calling them examples of "cutting-edge technology" is almost a play on words — are used for a suite of services.

Each job involves moving dirt without threatening adjacent pieces of infrastructure. Ponderous as the trucks are, the working end of the hoses running from them are capable of removing packed earth with almost surgical precision, as Minor crew members have learned.

The surge of pressurized water blasting from the nozzle would seem a threat to old pipe or fiber optic lines, but operator care eliminates the risk of damaging vulnerable infrastructure. "I suppose if you directed a 2,000 psi flow against a line long enough, you could damage it," Jones says. "We've never done so."

Some of the more common uses of hydroexcavation in Siouxland are



It's all hands on deck as MJ Minor Utility Contractor general manager Scott Jones pulls the hose out to assist with potholing work.

MJ Minor Utility Contractor North Sioux City, South Dakota

GENERAL MANAGER: Scott Jones

FOREMAN: Matt Bunce

YEARS IN BUSINESS: 19

SERVICES: Full range of hydroexcavation work from potholing to watermain breaks, utility locating, camera inspection and jetting of sewer and stormwater infrastructure, installation and repair of water, sewer and septic tank underground structures

SERVICE AREA: Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota

EMPLOYEES: 9

WEBSITE: mjminorutility.com

"NOBODY HAD SEEN ANYTHING LIKE HYDROVAC. IT WAS NEW, THE COMPANY TRIED IT AND THE WORK HAS BEEN GROWING EVER SINCE."

Scott Jones



The team at MJ Minor Utility Contractor includes, from left, Ted Ball Jr. and Tony Verdin, laborers; Matt Bunce, shop foreman; Mark Bauer, operator/laborer; and Scott Jones, general manager. They are shown with the company's 2020 Presvac vacuum truck.

work on residential properties has slowed "for no particular reason," says Jones, but hydroexcavation jobs continue to proliferate. They now account for 60% of the company's business.

Industrial clients are a staple customer. These include a Tyson Foods plant, a GELITA USA gelatin production facility, a CF Industries ammonia manufacturing complex, a Royal Canin animal food facility and an AGP grain processing plant. Lines, pipes and disposal tanks are rife in the properties, and hydrovac solutions are regularly called upon. Municipal governments in the tri-state area also keep MJ Minor vac truck crews busy.

A VERSATILE TEAM

Jones has eight employees to help him with all this work. If not in the field, he is preparing bids and performing other administrative activ-



Scott Jones, left, general manager, and Matt Bunce, shop foreman, believe in cross-training their crew to provide employees with versatility and cover their varied needs.

locating lines, digging holes for piles, creating service pits for work crews, slot trenching and blasting out test holes for directional drilling projects. "Locating a line is the job we most often are called to do," says Jones, "or digging to find and fix one."

The force which the 300 hp truck engines and pumps emit is considerable. MJ Minor's Vactor 2100 vac trucks have cut 30 feet deep into the ground before the force and vacuum lift began to be spent. When faced with excavating a hole at a distance from a truck, MJ Minor has run a hose out 220 feet and successfully cut away and removed soil.

The general manager says he's run into his share of surprises on calls. While some obstacles to an uneventful job are anticipated, others pop up. On one occasion, an MJ Minor crew went to a job site near a train station expecting to complete a trench cut in two days. However, fiber optic lines entered the picture and the crew spent two weeks removing dirt with both mechanical and hydrovac machines.

Having a variety of customers lets the company absorb slowdowns in one area or flex and accommodate a rush of work in another. Currently, jetting

"KEEPING THE EQUIPMENT RUNNING SMOOTHLY IS TO OUR BENEFIT AND THE CUSTOMERS' BENEFIT. WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT EQUIPMENT BREAKING DOWN AND THE CUSTOMER DOESN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT A JOB BEING COMPLETED."

Matt Bunce

ity in the company's 800-square-foot office next to a 20,000-square-foot shop where Bunce works on machinery. Though major repairs to equipment are relegated to a manufacturer, Bunce performs routine maintenance.

"Keeping the equipment running smoothly is to our benefit and the customers' benefit," Bunce says. "We don't have to worry about equipment breaking down and the customer doesn't have to worry about a job being completed."

MJ Minor crew members are cross-trained as much as possible. Which means that one of the experienced hands can climb on a mini-excavator and trench, push dirt with the dozer, or deftly control the potholing hose on a vac truck.

Jones says the versatility of the work holds the employees' interest. The company does enjoy relative longevity among crew members, with employees being with the company three years, five years, eight years and so on, Jones says, mentally scrolling through the ranks.

As elsewhere across the construction and heavy equipment industry, finding qualified people can be difficult. Jones says he is pleased with the people on payroll. "They are serious about their work. They go out and work together well all day."

After the company hires good job applicants, it works hard to keep them, Jones says. "Once they are here, we bend over backwards to see they have what they need to succeed. After we have them on board, we have a good track record of keeping them and keeping them happy."

It doesn't hurt the morale of employees to know that they will be periodically featured in a monthly downloadable newsletter. *The Contractor's*

Matt Bunce pumps out a septic system at a commercial property. Beyond hydroexcavation work, MJ Minor Utility Contractor also pumps out and repairs septic systems, does camera inspections and more.

Chronicle is sent to customers, potential clients and other “loyal newsletter enthusiasts,” according to the company’s marketing consultant, Sara Travis of Sorted LLC.

The November issue of the *Chronicle* spotlights line locating and job site safety and shares a recipe of the month (“Waitin’-On-Turkey Stuffed Mushrooms”). It also features a brief Q&A with Tony Verdin, an 18-year MJ Minor employee who, we learn, does “a little bit of everything” at the company and is an outdoorsman and fisherman.

DISCOVERING NEW TOOLS

This willingness to try new things and adapt to change has been codified in the company’s set of core values. One of them is titled, “Continuous Improvement.” It contains a pledge to pursue best practices and to “embrace new technologies that could make a project better.”

So, what new technology is the excavation and sewer-cleaning company looking into now? It turns out MJ Minor is considering investing in a new inspection camera for its pipeline work. The company is looking at buying an Envirosight Rovver X robotic camera for enhanced imaging of sewer mains.

New machines are fun, but in the end, equipment isn’t what sets MJ Minor apart from other hydrovac and earthmoving companies in and around Sioux City, Iowa, according to Scott Jones. He says the company is a complete package.

“Our experience sets us apart, for one thing. Not everyone can do the variety of work that we do all the time. Plus we are there 24/7 to do the work, as



Ted Ball Jr. connects the water hose from the Vactor 2100 to the digging wand prior to a hydroexcavation job.

needed,” Jones says. “Everyone knows when you call for emergency help in the middle of the night that it won’t be cheap, but our customers also know we are going to get the job done and that we’ll back it up.” ▼

A Focus on Safety

Companies sometimes go overboard in their safety declarations, asserting that being safe is almost more important than making a profit and keeping the doors open. MJ Minor Utility Contractor takes a more reasonable approach, stating, “Operating safely is the most important thing we do.”

That seems to cover both doing right by the workers in the field — where heavy machinery, high-pressure water and unstable excavations routinely place them in jeopardy — and satisfying anyone concerned about the financial health of the company. Accidents, after all, don’t generally add to the bottom line.

The company doesn’t just talk safety, though. Crews have “toolbox talks” every morning to methodically talk about the day’s task, the hazards that might be encountered, and the need to handle equipment as trained. In winter, the threats of cold

weather and icy conditions are always on the front burner of conversation.

Once a month, a longer meeting of employees is held to cover equipment issues and best practices. Those get-togethers are either at the shop in North Sioux City, South Dakota or at a manufacturer’s facility. Want another indicator of safety management? Its hydrovac trucks roll out to each job with at least two crew members, none of this going it alone stuff.

“We have trench boxes and hydraulic frames and all that,” adds Matt Bunce, shop foreman. “We are pretty well set up on safety equipment.” He notes that 100% of company employees have completed OSHA training.

Though the company does its “due diligence,” Bunce says, accidents still are out there waiting to ruin a day and, maybe, a life.

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A Winning Algorithm

TEACHING STAFF WHY YOU DO THINGS THE WAY YOU DO WILL HELP THEM BETTER LEARN THE JOB AND THE BUSINESS

BY ANJA SMITH

Your employees and customers come to you for solutions all day long. Wouldn't it be nice if someone could hand us similar answers to all of our complex business problems?

As much as we want that miracle solution, there is no single formula for success. Formulas follow strict rules, which is why $A+B=C$ works every time. A formula is too simple and our businesses too diverse.

Instead of approaching your business like an algebra problem, consider a more modern approach. A handful of tech companies have changed society with their algorithms. It's fascinating — and a little scary.

I wanted to understand how algorithms worked. Turns out, an algorithm is a logic process. It is more fluid than a formula. Where a formula commonly has one answer, an algorithm has an array of answers. It operates more like a decision tree than a set of rules.

You can love or hate what Google has done to the industry, but you can't deny its influence on us, and the world. All that power started with an algorithm.

I can say to my phone, "Hey Google, how do I live without you?" and my results will be as diverse as a LeAnn Rimes video, a codependency support group, and a relationship advice article titled *17 Signs He Can't Live Without You*. Your results may differ.

Consistent excellence is the bedrock of a successful utility construction business. It leads to a reputation that gets you hired. The best entrepreneurs can deliver, but many shops struggle to sustain excellence as they grow.

But what if we could apply a logical process, rather than a formula, for training our employees? We could keep the nimbleness of a small shop without working ourselves to death as a decision bottleneck in our business.

Here's the cool part: This doesn't mean giving your staff a free-for-all. Algorithms control the set of results. Nothing shows up on Google that the

alphabet company doesn't want you to see. They make the rules in their organization, and so should you.

Don't let the Silicon Valley references intimidate you. This may sound technical, but in reality, algorithms mimic your brain's thought patterns. Your business' logic trees won't be so complex that you need a kid in a hoodie to write the code.

All we are doing is laying out a path for decision-making. You are literally teaching your employees how to think like you. I promise that isn't an impossible task.

MENTAL COMPUTING

We do this mental computing every day. Consider how you get dressed in the morning. You narrow down your options within seconds, processing questions and answers without conscious thought. Is it a workday: Yes or no? Is it hot outside? Is it cold outside? Is it raining? Do you have any meetings scheduled?

Your brain shortcuts these thoughts in a few seconds because getting dressed is a task we've been doing nearly our entire lives. Yet at one point, our parents taught us how to reason our way through the decision. The process got ingrained and now comes easily.

They call this logic sequencing. Teach your staff the mental code you used to process your logic sequence. Over time, you'll be able to stop answering the same questions repeatedly. It's scary to allow employees to make independent judgments. This fear leads to micromanagement or oversimplified policies. Neither is good for business.

If you rely on owners or supervisors to make every judgment call, it creates a growth bottleneck, frustrated workers — and burnt out leaders. Sweeping rules may be easy to implement but lead to customer dissatisfaction. Your company isn't a big-box store or a major corporation. So don't act like one.

ENCOURAGING CRITICAL THOUGHT

Use the algorithm method to encourage critical thought at all levels of your organization. It frees managers' time to focus on the important work rather than putting out fires all day.

Here's how to get started:

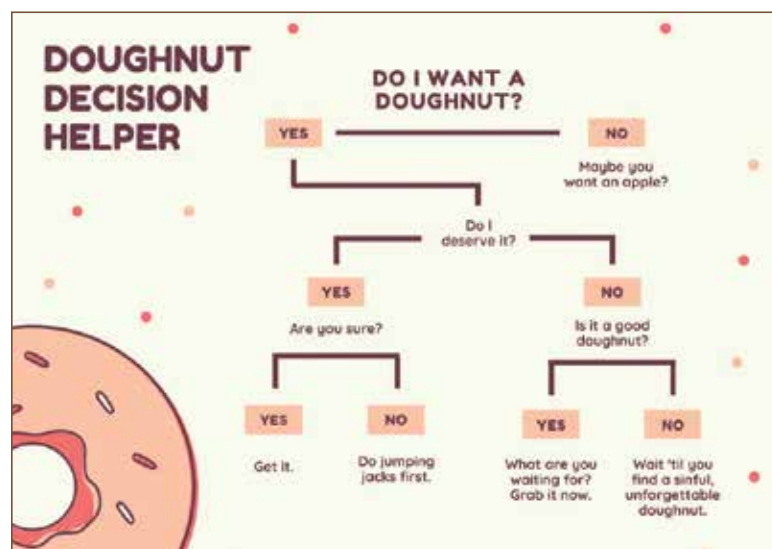
1. When an employee comes to you for help, view it as a training opportunity.
2. Answer their questions, but share your decision-making process with them. Note: Don't expect it to stick the first time! This is not a quick fix.
3. After a while, ask them for their solution rather than answering the question. Probe them about how they got to that answer. Encourage and correct as needed.

If you want to take it a step further, track common questions. For these key processes, document your logic sequence in a flowchart. This will give employees access to your brain, even when you aren't around.

Adjusting to this approach takes some time and effort. If you can get the hang of it, your team will learn self-reliance and you might even take a vacation. ▼



Anja Smith



This example chart shows how algorithms are built. Employers can teach employees why they do something, which will lead to them better understanding the job.

WE MADE THE BEST EVEN BETTER.



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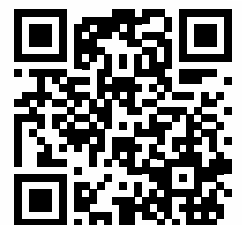
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VACTOR® 2100i



6 Tips for Better Money Management

THIS ADVICE MAY SEEM ELEMENTARY AT FIRST, BUT SMALL COMPANIES CAN ALWAYS BENEFIT FROM A REVIEW OF FOUNDATIONAL BUSINESS PRINCIPLES

BY PETER BELLOTTI



Many small- and medium-sized business owners face a simple dilemma on a daily basis. They are really good at producing and selling whatever it is their business sells, but they don't have the knowledge to be good money managers.

Unlike larger corporations, these smaller businesses often face the challenge of money management on their own, or at least without the help of a huge team of financial professionals. As a result, money management can be pushed to the side as an ancillary thing instead of a focal point of the business.

No matter what their financial background, all business owners know there's more to running a successful business than just creating and selling. To stay in business, you must be able to collect payments to create cash flow and manage all your accounts in the proper fashion.

Money management is simply the processes you follow to handle business finances. This includes setting goals, tracking your expenses and income and budgeting. A good money management plan will help you make sure your business will churn out a profit, and also avoid time periods of negative cash flow.

Certain aspects of money management will also keep your business on sound financial ground, paying all your bills on time and well prepared for expected months of lower income, such as seasonal downturns.

Let's take a look at some best practices for money management and six tips to help you on your way:

1. CREATE A BUDGET

Step one to any money management plan is creating a budget. On this budget should be a list of all your expected income and all your expected profit. A business budget should be projected out as best as possible for an entire calendar year, and then broken down by quarter, month and even week. Plug essential services into the budget, as well as a forecast of your anticipated income.

Creating a budget will allow you to see times of the year when you might have extra money on hand to invest in new equipment, for example, or periods when money might be tight and purchasing might not be a good idea. Having a budget for the entire year will also allow you to make larger adjustments to your operations if need be so you avoid financial pitfalls.

2. KNOW WHEN BILLS ARE DUE

After creating a budget, it's time to know when all your bills are due. Create a chart, spreadsheet or any other form of tracking to know the due dates and amounts of all your recurring expenses. This could include business loans, credit cards and charges for services such as internet and phone. It's

important to pay bills on time to avoid late charges, extra fees and potentially even having essential services shut off.

3. KEEP AN EYE ON SPENDING

It's easy to swipe a credit card or pull from a line of credit when you need to make a purchase to support your business. And while this isn't necessarily a bad thing, it's easy to get overwhelmed and break your budget if you're not tracking all spending.

Every time you incur an expense, record it as a new line item. Even if the purchase is for \$10, it's still important that you get into the habit of tracking it. By staying on top of all expenses, you'll have a better grasp on your business finances and avoid overspending.

4. MANAGE AND TRACK EMPLOYEE COSTS

Employees represent one of your biggest expenses. It's important to keep the cost of your workforce as low as you can — without sacrificing quality, of course. In addition, it's essential to have a good handle on all of your labor costs. The best way to do this is through a time and attendance tracking system. Appropriate software programs will ensure accurate employee tracking, making sure you to pay out only what you should.

HAVING A BUDGET FOR THE ENTIRE YEAR WILL ALSO ALLOW YOU TO MAKE LARGER ADJUSTMENTS TO YOUR OPERATIONS IF NEED BE SO YOU AVOID FINANCIAL PITFALLS.

5. STAY ON TOP OF RECEIVABLES

Landing a new customer is great, but if you don't collect the money associated with the job, was it even worth it? While the volume of work can be a good indicator of how well your company is doing, you only reach a profit if you actually collect on the invoice you mailed or left behind with the customer.

That's why it's so essential to track and stay on top of your accounts receivable. You should aim to keep the number of days you collect money from your customers as close to when you issued the invoice as possible.

There are plenty of accounts receivable tracking tools available. No matter how you decide to track it, though, you should ensure that none of your customers fall too behind on their accounts, and you should vigilantly pursue the money you're owed.

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6. HAVE EXTRA CASH ON HAND

No doubt there are periods when your business isn't performing as well as it did at another point in the year. There are also times when you'll fall short on the anticipated workload and collection expectations. When this happens, you might find yourself in a little bit of a pickle if you haven't planned properly.

It's good to have a reserve of cash on hand to use when the money isn't flowing in as quickly as you need it to. Think of this as your rainy day fund. This extra cash reserve can help cover payroll and other expenses if you're behind on collections, or cover the cost of an emergency expense, such as broken equipment in need of repair or replacement. You should always plan for the unexpected and be able to weather the storm.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Bellotti specializes in business administration, big data and cloud software implementation as sales manager at workforce management software company Mitrefinch USA. Learn more at www.mitrefinch.com. ▼



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A hydroexcavation crew sets up traffic cones around the truck to give themselves space to work and a flagman controls any oncoming traffic. Every roadside zone is different, so there is no one-size-fits-all solution that can be applied.

Protecting Your Crews on the Roadside

TIPS FOR PRACTICING GOOD JOB SITE SAFETY WHEN THE WORK ZONE COMES INTO CONTACT WITH PUBLIC ROADS

BY JESSICA BANNER

The threat of injury is always present in a roadway work zone. As common as these sites are, providing the crew and passersby with a safe job site is not a simple task. Setting up orange cones, having someone direct traffic, and parking machinery as far off the roadway as possible are obvious steps that only scratch the surface when it comes to ensuring safety.

Chuck Ulmer, owner of Ulmer Construction of British Columbia, is passionate about keeping his crew and passersby safe when his company is completing a roadside job.

"The situation is constantly changing. I have to know who is around and adjust to what's happening at any given moment," he says.

Ulmer trains his crew members to keep their eyes open, and he gives them the necessary time it takes to get to know a job site before the actual work starts. He emphasizes that he can't trust the public to pay attention to the changes a work zone has brought about, so he has to trust his crew to keep the public safe.

STARTING WITH A PLAN

The layout of the construction zone is key. A good traffic control supervisor should set up the work zone so that workers have the least possible exposure to injury. Every roadside zone is different, so there is no one-size-fits-all solution that can be applied.

Completely closing the road or rerouting traffic to the opposite side of the road is favorable. Unfortunately, these options aren't always possible, and it's necessary to use some sort of barrier to separate traffic from the work zone. In this case, the traffic control supervisor should set up the zone so the traffic flow is as close to the original traffic pattern as possible.

In the work zone, the crew needs to be adept at recognizing blind areas, able to safely move machinery, and capable of working in a limited amount of space that can be incredibly loud due to passing traffic. When a worker is walking around equipment, making contact with the operator of the equipment is a must. Each crew member has to be aware of what's going on at the site. To that end, one thing Ulmer insists upon for his job sites has to do with removing distractions.

"Phones are pretty much done away with on the job site. Guys have died," he says.

Ulmer says he teaches his workers to constantly evaluate for new hazards and to keep their eyes and ears focused.

COMMUNICATING HELPS

Keeping the public well-informed about the job is an important part of keeping the roadway safe. Many municipalities post signs and send letters

"THE SITUATION IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING. I HAVE TO KNOW WHO IS AROUND AND ADJUST TO WHAT'S HAPPENING AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT."

Chuck Ulmer

directly to the public to inform them of the impact roadside work zones will have on traffic changes or closures.

Ulmer says he understands that keeping the lines of communication open within his crew is vital to safety as well. He has a Monday morning meeting each week where he makes sure crew members know exactly what's going on.

"CONSIDER EVERY TYPE OF PERSON IN YOUR THOUGHT PROCESS WHEN YOU'RE SETTING UP A JOB. YOU HAVE TO THINK OUTSIDE OF THE BOX IN ORDER TO KEEP YOUR GUYS AND THE PUBLIC SAFE."

Chuck Ulmer

"They know what to expect and what tools to take to every job for the whole week," Ulmer says.

Beyond the weekly meeting, Ulmer has individual job site meetings to identify specific roadside hazards. His workers walk the site, and they are trained to make necessary adjustments where they see fit throughout the duration of the job.

DEALING WITH THE PUBLIC

If there is evidence of duress such as barricades being hit or skid marks on the road, the work zone should be modified immediately. However, a problem Ulmer notes is the public's inability to recognize and adjust to changes in traffic patterns.

"They've been going this way for 20 years, and they literally don't see what's been changed," he says.

Ulmer spends as much time preparing his crew to deal with the public as he does preparing them for each work zone.

"Consider every type of person in your thought process when you're setting up a job," Ulmer says. "You have to think outside of the box in order to keep your guys and the public safe."

One of the most important things he trains his workers to do is to catch motorists' eyes so they're sure to be seen. Generally speaking, Ulmer stands by the principle that, "If you have the outside of the job site protected, you automatically protect the inside of the site." ▼

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This Issue's Feature: Hole opener's maintenance-in-place design keeps contractors on site

BY CRAIG MANDLI

A hole opener is a cost-effective way to enlarge a pre-drilled pilot hole or to ensure that the gauge is maintained in a deviated hole. The aggressive tools are made to be worked. Hard. With that comes inevitable maintenance and repair concerns. **Falcon FR Series Hole Openers** from **Century Products** are engineered specifically to allow for versatility and easy maintenance, keeping contractors on the job.

"Typically in the horizontal directional drilling industry, hole openers have welded arm and cone assemblies, so when maintenance or repairs are needed, this type of hole opener would require the unit to be sent off the job site for repairs," says Todd Bielawa, president at Century Products. "But our Falcon FR Series hole openers have a unique pocket design which allows for replacement assemblies to be installed right on the job site with minimal downtime."

These field-replaceable assemblies also allow technicians to easily switch from one cutting profile to another right on the job site. Designed for the 50,000- to 200,000-pound class rig, the Falcon FR is available in 18- to 30-inch sizes, with 12.5- and 17-inch arm and cone assemblies. Engineered to withstand the high rotational torque and pull forces required to fracture rock, the Falcon FR can go from pilot hole to 24 inches in a single pass.

"While excavating has its place in the industry, our product enhances the contractor's ability to use directional drilling, which is more efficient, rather than open-cut excavation," says Bielawa. "The Century Falcon FR line can be

used in the water, sewer, gas, oil or electrical utility fields. With versatile cutting profiles (Milled Tooth, Conical TCI, Chisel TCI and PDC) the Falcon FR allows contractors flexibility in the field for changing ground conditions."

Units include interchangeable jet nozzles and offer active gage and shirttail protection. They feature balanced rotation with multiple point stabilization, a robust self-energized/self-aligning dual pocket joint, a machined solid body welded to the shaft for superior strength, and rear jets which aid in cutting removal and tripping out of the hole.

"Upon an internal and customer review, we selected a design that met our intention and the customer's needs," says Bielawa. "This design was thoroughly tested via FEA simulation along with life cycle testing by a third party off site. The result was a successful product development which has all the versatility of a bolted joint with the strength of a welded joint."

262-820-3600; www.centuryproducts.net



Falcon FR Series Hole Openers from Century Products



Northstar Hydrovac Inc.

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When it's time to get into the hard-to-reach areas of Alberta, Canada, Northstar Hydrovac Inc. pulls out its tracked hydrovac units. Northstar Hydrovac currently has two of these tracked hydrovac units, with the tank built by **Foremost** and the overall unit built out by **Summit Industries**. Each of the tracked units has a 4-cubic-yard debris tank and a water tank capable of carrying 4-cubic-yards. They both have 822 Hibon blowers. According to Northstar Hydrovac project manager Ken Wittig, the company's logo, with a star in the place of the "a" in Northstar, was developed in 1998 when the company was founded and has been modernized through the years. The company has 30 hydroexcavators in its overall fleet. For more on Northstar Hydrovac Inc., go to northstarhydrovac.com.

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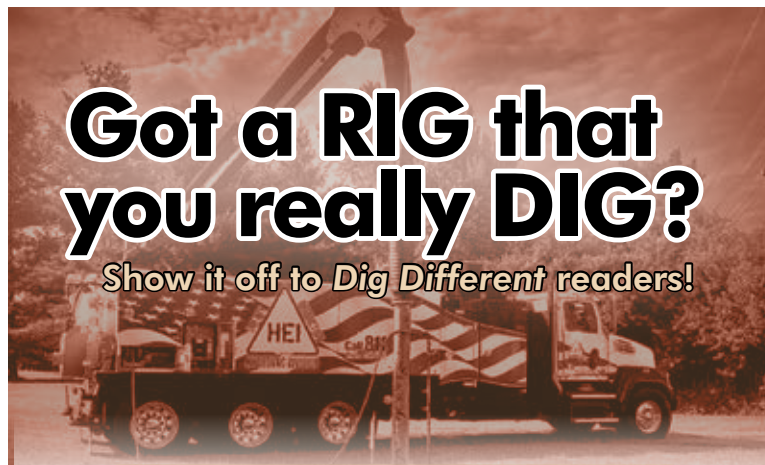
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BY CRAIG MANDLI

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Tracking devices help construction company streamline

PROBLEM

Jans Corporation, a South Dakota general contracting, design build and construction management company, faced a variety of challenges, including a lack of visibility into unauthorized vehicle use, inability to optimize routing and driver behavior to reduce fuel consumption, and vulnerability of its remote job sites to equipment theft. They had no way to be sure that vehicles were being used efficiently, assets were safe at job sites or that fuel and equipment maintenance costs were under control.

SOLUTION

Those problems were resolved with **IntelliShift**. "With IntelliShift, we can look live and see where our vehicles are at, where they're going and who's driving them," says President Brian Jans. "So that's also been very beneficial to efficiency."

RESULT

Jans Corporation cut fuel consumption in half from the prior quarter, for a savings of \$4,500. This was a direct result of gaining the visibility needed to prevent unauthorized vehicle use, ensure the right workers with the right skills have the shortest routes to the job site, and by correcting costly behaviors like excessive idle time. Additionally, improved visibility with IntelliShift increased routing efficiency for field supervisors via real-time vehicle location accuracy and visibility — and provided much-needed accountability. Lastly, with equipment and assets stored at remote job sites, theft was a growing problem — including one incident that resulted in a loss of more than \$10,000 in tools and equipment. After installing one of IntelliShift's tracking devices for non-powered assets on a generator at one of the company's job sites, the generator went missing within two weeks. However, with the tracking device, the exact location was able to be shared with law enforcement and the generator was immediately recovered. **800-887-0198; www.intellishift.com** ▼

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Happenings

CALENDAR

April 4-8

Common Ground Alliance (CGA) Conference & Expo, Anaheim Marriott, Anaheim, California. Visit www.cgaconference.com.

April 10-14

NASTT's No-Dig Show, Minneapolis Convention Center, Minneapolis. Visit www.nodigshow.com.

April 12-13

Wastewater Equipment (WEQ) Fair, Tempe Diablo Stadium, Tempe, Arizona. Visit weqfair.com.

April 22-28

World Tunnel Congress 2022, Bella Center, Copenhagen, Denmark. Visit wtc2022.dk.

May 10-11

National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA) of Iowa Contractor Conference & Convention, Downtown Des Moines Marriott, Des Moines, Iowa. Visit www.nucaofiowa.com.

June 5-8

Electric Utility Fleet Managers Conference (EUFMC), Williamsburg Lodge and Conference Center, Williamsburg, Virginia. Visit www.eufmc.com.

June 19-22

North American Tunneling Conference (NAT), Pennsylvania Convention Center, Philadelphia. Visit natconference.com.

June 27-29

Safety 2022 Professional Development Conference & Exposition, McCormick Place, Chicago. Visit safety.assp.org.

Oct. 8-12

95th Annual Technical Exhibition and Conference (WEFTEC), New Orleans Morial Convention Center, New Orleans. Visit www.weftec.org.

Nov. 2-4

Tunneling Association of Canada (TAC) 2022 Conference, Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Visit tunnelcanada.ca.



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Vermeer Southwest acquires Vermeer Rocky Mountain

Vermeer Southwest acquired Vermeer Rocky Mountain and will become Vermeer Mountain West. Combining these two adjacent Vermeer industrial dealers creates a contiguous network of nine dealership locations spanning the mountain west region of the U.S. Kyle Pieratt, who served as president and CEO of Vermeer Southwest, will continue to lead as the president and CEO of Vermeer Mountain West. The dealership will be headquartered in Chandler, Arizona, with branch locations in eight other states, including New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Montana, Texas and Washington.

Vac-Con announces CMI Equipment as new dealer

Vac-Con announced the addition of CMI Equipment to the Vac-Con dealer network. The distributorship will provide sales, parts and service support to customers located in the state of Tennessee. For more than three decades, CMI Equipment has provided the Tennessee market with the equipment necessary to keep cities, counties and road departments running. CMI will offer the full portfolio of Vac-Con machines including combination sewer cleaners, jetters and hydroexcavators in both trailer and truck-mounted configurations.

Vacuum Truck Rentals welcomes new branch manager

Vacuum Truck Rentals announced Chris Wilson as the new branch manager of its Merrillville, Indiana location. He brings 18 years' experience in the industrial construction and maintenance industries and will oversee the rentals and sales operations of the Indiana location. VTR has a fleet of over 800 trucks and 17 locations nationwide.



Chris Wilson

CASE G Series wheel loaders approved for biodiesel use

FPT Industrial announced that it has approved B20 biodiesel for use in its NEF4, NEF 6 and CURSOR Tier 4 Final diesel engines. This announcement makes all CASE Construction Equipment G Series wheel loaders approved for use with B20 biodiesel directly from the factory.

McLaughlin achieves 100 years of service

McLaughlin, a Vermeer brand, was founded in 1921 and now marks a century of providing solutions for the construction, utility and trenchless industries. In 2012, Vermeer bought a minority interest in McLaughlin, selling McLaughlin's vacuum excavators, utility locators,

pneumatic piercing tools, core saws and auger boring equipment to contractors through the Vermeer dealer network. In 2017, Vermeer acquired the rest of McLaughlin. In 2018, Vermeer purchased Vac-Tron Equipment and integrated the two companies' product lines as Vermeer MV Solutions.

EquipmentShare completes acquisition of six Trekker Tractor locations

EquipmentShare, a nationwide equipment rental company powered by T3 technology, announced that it completed the acquisition of equipment fleet and operations from six

Trekker Tractor locations in the state of Florida including Miami, West Palm Beach, Orlando, Jacksonville, Tampa and Fort Myers. Substantially all of the assets and its operations at the locations will be rebranded and integrated into EquipmentShare's technology platform, including the launch of CASE Power & Equipment of Florida. ▼



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MB Crusher opens new branch in North Carolina

MB Crusher announced they now have two locations in the U.S. with the addition of a new branch in Kernersville, North Carolina. The new facility is larger than the company's location in



Reno, Nevada and offers a warehouse and demo area. It will offer a full line of attachments, parts and units, and maintenance and service staff.

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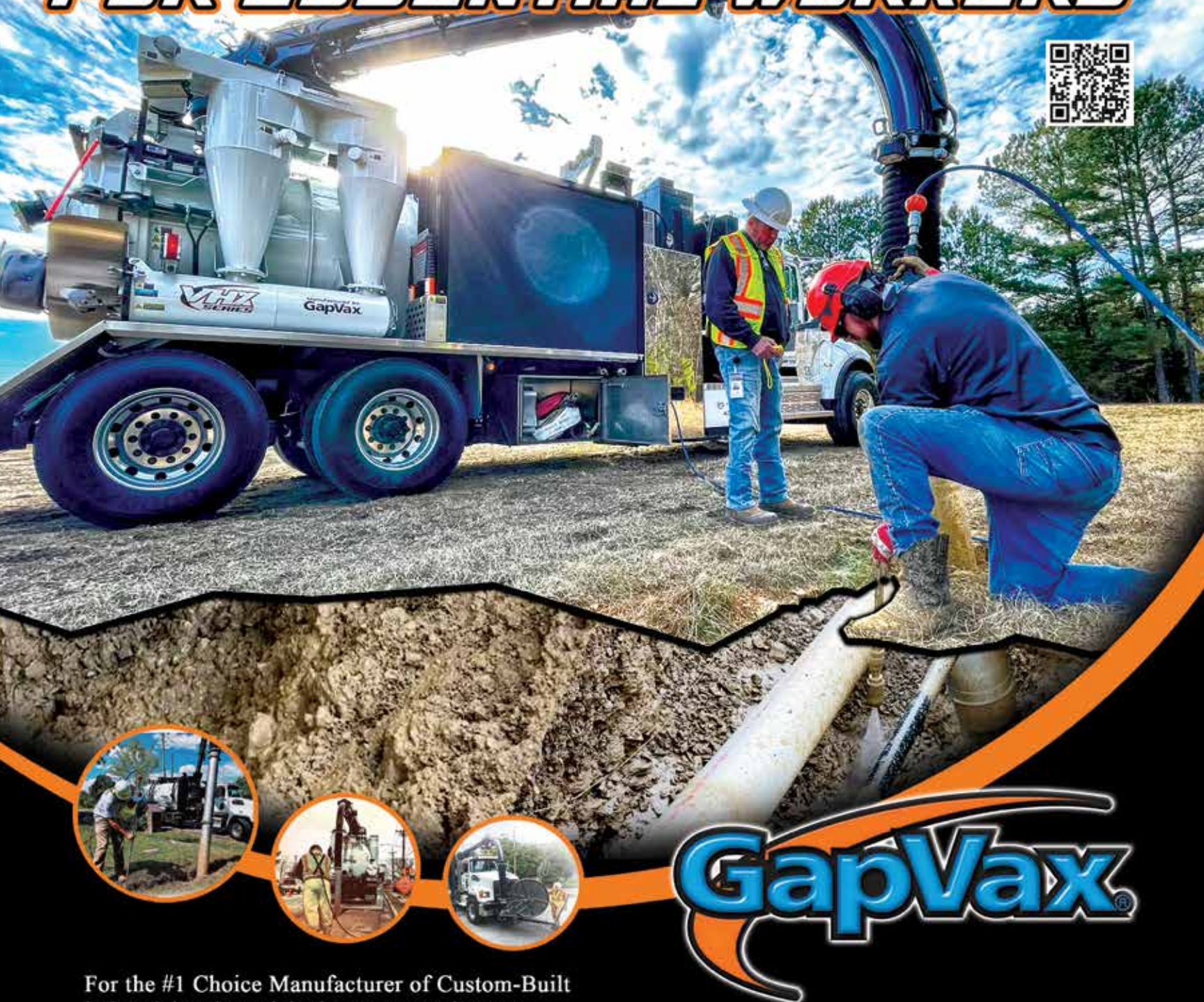
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