

Adding Income & Security Through Added “High-Value” Services



Editor's Note: usually *Cleaner Times* features articles that originate from the perspective of those who are already in the power washing industry and who might be looking for an add-on business to supplement the slow months. This comes from the perspective of one who is adding power washing to supplement the downturn in the real estate market. The article highlights the opportunity that might be present in the home inspection business for those who are already in power washing.

While attending our first Power Washers of North America (PWNA) annual convention and technical seminar this past October in Gurnee, IL, PWNA past president and director and president of Steamaway-Truck and Fleet Wash, Michael Hinderliter, approached us and asked if we would be willing to write an article about our vision for adding additional services for increased profitability. We welcomed the opportunity to share our experience as our way of giving something back to the PWNA and its members for all the valuable information and support we obtained while attending the three-day event.

In September of 2002, Darla and I relocated from southern California to central Indiana. At the time we moved here, we didn't have jobs and really didn't know anyone. We became friends with our realtor, Mike Dean, who helped us find our first home here in Indiana. We had a home inspection done on that home before we purchased it.

Darla and I had spent the past 15 years working in various areas of real estate, which included sales, property management, and financing, and we have seen hundreds of inspection reports. We were not impressed with the report we received on our home. A basic home inspection should provide a home buyer with an independent, unbiased visual examination and overview of the condition of a home they are about to purchase, and it should identify major defects so that the buyer will have the facts to make an informed buying decision. It should include a top to bottom inspection of the home, including the major systems—heating/cooling, electrical, and plumbing—and a written report.

We talked with our realtor and new friend about the need for a good inspector in the area and about us going into the home inspection business. He told us that he would be willing to put his support behind us by referring his buyer clients to us for their inspections. In June of 2003, after a short course in home inspections, we started our 'mom and pop' home inspection business with a referral from our realtor, Mike, and then another one, then another. Our realtor soon told other realtors in his office about our service and they began sending their buyers to us for their inspections. Then our past clients began sending their family and friends to us for their inspections. Then sellers, who didn't always like us when we found defects in their homes, started calling us to inspect the homes they were purchasing.

We also set out to meet every realtor in our service area face-to-face to get to know them and ask for their buyer referrals. We soon added additional services that complemented our inspections and increased profitability. We added termite inspections, radon gas measurement, well equipment, septic systems, and water testing. We were soon doing two inspections a day and things seemed to be going very well.

We had spent the past five and a half years getting to know new people and building relationships. At the same time, we were building our reputation of high value service and trust, which was yielding us a steady stream of referral business. Then in 2008, we began to feel the negative effects of the slowing economy and real estate market. It seemed to happen overnight, the steady stream of real estate buyers weren't there. We realized that we were 100 percent dependent on the real estate sales industry. We began looking for ways to "balance" our business with added service offerings that aren't real estate sales driven, when one of our referring realtors was complaining that he couldn't find a good company to do

power washing of house exteriors, driveways and roof cleanings. We said, "THAT'S IT!" There are unlimited opportunities in the power washing business. Everything needs to be cleaned some time. Our story is still being written. We just started our power washing division with the official kick off coming in spring of 2009.

If you consider adding home inspections to diversify your service business, be sure to check with your local and state government to learn what is

required. More and more states are requiring home inspectors to be licensed and have general liability and errors and omissions insurance. Your state may require that you pass a written exam before issuing a license. A great free resource is the National Association of Certified Home Inspectors website at www.nachi.org.

Jay and Darla Tatman are the owners of Assured Power Wash Solutions, LLC. For more information, visit www.API-Indiana.com/APWS.html. cr

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