

FOR DRAIN AND PIPE CLEANING, INSPECTION AND REHABILITATION PROFESSIONALS

Cleaner®



A Marketing Mentality

Advanced Hydro-Jet wins with sharp promotion and highly professional image and service
Page 24

BETTER BUSINESS

Projecting quality

READER PIPELINES

Gearing up for the recovery

TECH PERSPECTIVE

Useful tools for smart phones

PRSTD STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
COLE
PUBLISHING

A Marketing Mentality

Integrated promotion programs and professional appearance and service help Advanced Hydro-Jet win in a crowded market

By Ken Wysocky



PROFILE

ADVANCED HYDRO-JET & ROOTER SERVICE INC., WADSWORTH, ILL.

OWNER: Clayton Holland
FOUNDED: 2008
EMPLOYEES: 3
SERVICE AREA: Chicago area
SPECIALTIES: Drain line cleaning, inspection, lining
WEB SITE: www.1800gotroots.com



Clayton Holland came into the service business with no formal marketing training, but that hasn't kept him from developing a fully integrated marketing campaign rooted in one basic principle: strong brand recognition.

With a campaign that includes a vanity phone number (800/GOT-ROOTS), targeted radio ads, a well-orchestrated telemarketing program and a Web site, Holland makes it easy for potential customers to remember his company, Advanced Hydro-Jet & Rooter Service Inc. in Wadsworth, Ill. (near Chicago).

His success, based largely on self-taught, common sense principles, shows that effective marketing is by no means too complicated or expensive for business owners to implement by themselves. Holland has also built his business on ethical, customer-oriented service.

Good reads

Holland's lack of marketing background didn't hurt him because he was eager to learn. "I just do a lot of reading," he says. "I constantly read books, magazines, anything I can get my hands on, from the *Wall Street Journal* to *Forbes* and *Money* magazines.

"I just went to Barnes & Noble and picked up a book about strategic marketing to try to understand what's going to appeal to sectors we're trying to service. In today's economy, it's all about the dollar: how much service you can provide for the least amount of money."

It was important for Holland to establish a presence in a crowded market. "I got into the field by doing what a lot of entrepreneurs do: Look to the future and see what customers will need," he says. "I spent a lot of time researching, and trenchless technology made a lot of sense to me.

"I'm a jump-into-things kind of guy. I needed to position myself strongly in a necessity-based service. It was definitely nerve-wracking because it was uncharted territory, but it helped that customers appreciate upfront, honest service."

Upper photo: Clayton Holland, owner of Advanced Hydro-Jet & Rooter Service, sets a Harben jetter. **The company specializes in diagnosing and repairing drains and pipeline problems. Lower photo:** Holland and employee Paul Rickert watch images on a SeeSnake camera from RIDGID after jetting the line. (Photography by Sarah Nader)





Clayton Holland and Paul Rickert saturate a CIPP liner with resin before putting it into the inversion tank on a residential repair.

The cornerstone of his marketing program is the toll-free telephone number. Most customers call because they have roots in their laterals. "I wanted something that would strongly relate to our business and provide easy recall," Holland says. "I've read that people recall vanity numbers 14 times more easily than regular phone numbers. I felt the GOT-ROOTS number would demand attention."

Getting the number wasn't easy. The number belonged to a California man whose grandfather had owned a Pontiac dealership (the digits 468-7008 also spell GOT-PONT on a telephone keypad). The number had been in the family for generations.



Rickert mixes resin for a CIPP lining job.

"I spent six months pursuing it," Holland recalls. "I called the guy every other day and got on a first-name basis with him. I felt having a hotline for customers was that important to the success of my business. One day, he told me it was obvious I wasn't going to stop calling, so he agreed to strike a deal."

Worth the effort

Holland saw a 20 percent increase in service calls when he started using the number and a www.1800gotroots.com Web site. (He also uses www.advancedpiperepair.com). When people hear the number on the radio, they usually don't need to look in a phone book to remember it.

"I just finished a job for a woman who said she heard one of our radio commercials eight or nine months before, and she remembered it," Holland says. "So she typed 'got roots' into a Google search and we were

MORE THAN PROMOTION

A strong promotion campaign gets Clayton Holland's foot in the door for new business, but modern equipment and a professional approach help set his company apart.

"New technology equals new results," says Holland, owner of Advanced Hydro-Jet & Rooter Service Inc. New equipment means less maintenance and repair. It also helps him solve problems faster, and that leads to repeat business and referrals.

"For example, customers can't believe you can cut tree roots using high-pressure water," Holland says. "Hydrojetting technology just isn't that well known. When we get to a job site, we have every tool necessary to solve a problem."

Advanced Hydro-Jet uses a waterjetter made by Harben Inc. (4,000 psi at 18 gpm); a cable drain machine from Spartan Tool LLC for 3- to 10-inch lines; a RIDGID K-375R drum drain-cleaning machine for 2- to 4-inch lines; a Super-Vee handheld drain machine from General Pipe Cleaners; Warthog nozzles from StoneAge Inc.; a SeeSnake camera and NaviTrack Scout pipe locator from RIDGID; and a CIPP lining system from LMK Enterprises Inc. The company also owns a customized 2004 Mitsubishi FE box van and a 2003 Chevrolet 1500 service van to carry CIPP equipment.

Holland believes professionalism and honesty pay dividends. "We wear uniforms because we should look like engineers, not dirty drain-cleaning guys," he says. "Customers hope they're calling a professional, and appearance is a big part of that. You earn their trust right off the bat with things like uniforms and clean trucks."

the first company that popped up. That really illustrates the value of the connection between the Web site and the number."

The Web site generates about eight to 10 service calls each week, mostly residential.

The phone number appears on Holland's service vehicles, and it's common for callers to say they saw it on the trucks.

When customers call, a staff member always asks where they heard about Advanced Hydro-Jet. "We keep very close track of the metrics," Holland says. "We note whether the caller saw one of the vans, or learned about us from a radio ad, the Internet, or one of the small local newspaper ads we run. If

"I got into the field by doing what a lot of entrepreneurs do: Look to the future and see what customers will need. I spent a lot of time researching, and trenchless technology made a lot of sense to me."

Clayton Holland

you're spending money on advertising and not tracking phone calls, you might as well throw darts blindfolded. You need to know the return on your investment."

Radio presence

Advanced Hydro-Jet started running radio ads in 2009. Holland spent about \$50,000 on 15- and 30-second spots, plus occasional five-second weather and traffic updates sponsored by 800/GOT-ROOTS. The ads emphasize the company's 50-year guarantee on pipe lining.

Holland writes the ads, and the AM radio station records the spots. "The ad campaign centers on pipe lining," Holland says. "I wanted to let consumers know there's a way to stop tree roots without digging up a yard. I asked for



Paul Rickert uses the inversion tank to complete a CIPP lining job using technology from LMK Enterprises Inc.

the best price for commercials in the middle of morning and evening drive times, when everyone's stuck in their cars. I ran two commercials a day, Monday through Friday.

"After that, I got a little more aggressive and started doing four or five a day. I wanted to generate as many leads and establish as much of what's known as 'top-of-mind awareness' as possible. In the long run, the business generated by the ads paid for them three times over.

"There will always be a place in radio for us. What's the most popular hamburger joint in America? McDonald's. Why? Because they keep advertising. If I want to keep gaining market share, I'll always need some form of heavy advertising."

Eyes on expansion

Residential work accounts for about 80 percent of Advanced Hydro-Jet's sales, but Holland envisions a larger commercial and industrial presence. He's targeting those accounts with telemarketing. That takes perseverance. When he's not in the field, Holland is often using the Internet or phone directories to unearth leads, or he's on the phone trying to drum up business with property managers at apartment complexes. Sometimes it takes two or three calls just to find out who's in charge of plumbing.

"Everyone is trying to save money, so getting a price sheet in front of someone in charge is key," he says. "That lets them see that they can save by hiring a professional service. It's a slow go. Not every call turns into work, but I'm planting seeds. A lot of times, I end a conversation by saying I'm sure that they already have a contractor, but if that contractor doesn't answer the phone, give us a call, because we will. We'll be there when you need us."

Holland isn't afraid to try something different. In January, he had his logo printed on coffee cups, which he stuffed with Godiva chocolates, a company



Clayton Holland and Paul Rickert with the company's 2004 Mitsubishi FE box van, used to carry CIPP equipment.

"It's important to address the root cause of a problem, then make a repair that saves the customer money in the long run."

Clayton Holland

brochure and two business cards. Then, working off a list of property management companies, he dropped off the mugs with receptionists or anyone around who would take them.

"I wished them a Happy New Year and told them to have a good day," he says. "It actually generated leads. Those mugs float around the office. Now we handle drains for three management companies, and every new commercial customer gets a coffee mug with two business cards inside.

"Doing this also generates word-of-mouth business. A guy who handles 200 apartment units probably knows a guy who handles 500 units. I always emphasize that I'm not there to sell them something they don't need. I'm only here to provide good service. Building trust with customers is essential to word-of-mouth growth."

Heavy workload

An expanding customer base means Holland and his two employees get spread thin at times, especially during periods of heavy rain. "We run pretty crazy at times," he says. "Proper scheduling is the key. When someone calls, the first words out of our mouths are, 'Is this an emergency?' Sometimes we just get a line draining and tell the customer we'll come back the next day." To balance the workflow, Holland pushes customers to consider scheduled maintenance.

No matter how crazy things get, he puts customer service first. It's his policy to return phone calls in 15 minutes. At the job site, he thoroughly examines the situation and asks about the building's history, especially if there has been an ongoing problem.

"It's important to address the root cause of a problem, then make a repair that saves the customer money in the long run," Holland notes. "We recently got hired by a hotel because of this approach. Other companies apparently weren't doing that. They were just fixing the problem, then waiting for it to occur again. It's much better to offer a long-term solution. It's all about building relationships."

Service diversity

It helps that Advanced Hydro-Jet offers a full array of services: hydrojetting, line inspection, pipe bursting, pipe lining. "The key to our success is not being like everyone else," Holland says.

Pipe lining is getting easier to sell as people become more educated about it. To help sell it, Holland uses a laptop computer to show before-and-after video clips of a repaired pipe. He offers a 50-year warranty on any lining work.

“Lining is still almost like witchcraft to a lot of people,” Holland says. “They’d rather just dig up the old pipe and replace it. For us, lining is just another tool in the toolbox. If there’s a job with, say, a new \$20,000 concrete driveway with a lateral running right down middle, lining is definitely a valuable option.

“But for a customer with just a few shrubs and a 50-foot shot to the street without any obstacles, it’s not always the most economical solution. If nothing else, the 50-year-guarantee pretty much seals the deal.”

Getting commercial

Looking ahead, Holland wants to establish 100 commercial accounts. As of April, he had four. His mission every week is to make 100 calls and fax out just as many corporate price sheets, then make follow-up calls.

“Until I get a call from them, they hear from me every two weeks,” Holland says. “I try not to be a nuisance. I try to get it on a personal level – ask them what I have to do to do business with them. When they have a drain problem, I want them to think about my business.” ■

MORE INFO:

General Pipe Cleaners

800/245-6200
www.drainbrain.com

Harben Inc.

800/327-5387
www.harben.com

LMK Enterprises Inc.

815/433-1275
www.performanceliner.com

RIDGID

800/769-7743
www.ridgid.com

Spartan Tool LLC

800/435-3866
www.spartantool.com

StoneAge Inc.

866/795-1586
www.stoneagetools.com