



Scratching the Itch

Russ Jundt (left) and Tom Olson (right), co-owners of Mosquito Squad, understand what it takes to successfully market mosquito control services.



Successful Strategies for Selling Mosquito Control Services

When Tom Olson and Russ Jundt were looking for the perfect business to break into, mosquito control was not the first thing that came to mind. They knew they wanted to be in an industry where they dealt with homeowners and where the service they sold was for a problem that seemed unsolvable. As it turns out, mosquito control was the perfect fit.

The Minneapolis-based entrepreneurs became the first franchise for Mosquito Squad, a division of Outdoor Living Brands, a national franchise company that provides consumers with outdoor

living services such as deck building and landscape lighting, in 2006. Since then Mosquito Squad has sold more than 100 franchises throughout the United States.

Olson and Jundt spoke recently at the 3rd Annual M.I.S.T Conference, sponsored by MGK, and offered pest management professionals in attendance insights on structuring, marketing and selling mosquito control services. The following is a summary of their presentation on how to make mosquito control services, including misting systems and backyard barrier treatments, a profitable addition to your existing pest control services lineup.

SPREADING THE WORD

According to Olson and Jundt, for any new business venture to be successful,



even for an established company, it must be *scalable* and *saleable*. You have to speak the language of the customer (see related sidebar at right) and be willing to look at your marketing and sales efforts differently.

They encourage PMPs and Mosquito Control Professionals involved in selling mosquito control services to ramp up their marketing efforts and not leave any stone unturned. "People ask us why we are in so many places and we tell them it is all part of our strategy," said Olson. "You have to get the word out about your services because if consumers and new business referrers don't know about you, you won't stay in business for long."

The two employ numerous avenues of promotion to get the word out to potential customers including phone and face-to-face sales, community outreach, networking, trade alliances, social media (YouTube, Facebook and LinkedIn), public relations and their website (www.twin-cities.mosquitosquad.com).

DRIVING SALES, WHILE BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Once the marketing efforts begin to yield inquiries and requests for proposals, it is time for the face-to-face appointment with the customer. Mosquito Squad separates its face-to-face appointments into two categories: *trade alliances* and *on-site consumer appointments*.

Trade alliances, which account for 20 to 25 percent of Mosquito Squad's business, focus on partnering with similar consumer-oriented industries such as landscapers, landscape architects, deck builders, pool cleaners or irrigation contractors. (Olson and Jundt are co-founders of Conserva Irrigation.) They reach out to these industries since they work with customers on creating and enhancing outdoor living spaces, spaces where mosquitoes can be a problem.

Olson and Jundt said trade alliances have helped them expand their marketing reach and provide mutual benefits for both parties. For example, landscape architects have built the specs for misting systems into their designs and contracts. It helps the architect increase their revenue, while at the same time moving product for Mosquito Squad.

The same goes for the pool installer or pool cleaning contractor. "The longer the family can enjoy the pool, the longer cleaning services are needed and the greater the referrals are that someone else is going to buy a pool," Jundt said.

The Benefits of Trade Alliances

- Increases your sales force without hiring staff.
- Allows your marketing dollars to go further.
- Provides greater brand awareness.

- Others can close the deal for you.

Working with trade alliances, like any other business partner, requires a little leg work ahead of time and Olson and Jundt said to keep the following items in mind:

- Know your trade alliance partners' business. Do some research on their company history, service offerings and capabilities, service area, and target customer.
- Sell them on how mosquito control

Cleaning Up Your Language

Using the proper terminology when marketing mosquito control services and interacting with customers can pay big dividends.

When Tom Olson and Russ Jundt of the Mosquito Squad of Minnesota first jumped into the mosquito and tick control market, they found out there was a language barrier with customers. Initially they were talking pesticides and toxicity, but customers were talking about safety, sustainability and kids.

How did they solve the language barrier? Simple, they listened more than they talked, asked three key questions and acted on what they learned.

The first thing they learned was that they waited too long to hire staff to handle inbound sales calls. Their resistance to hire stemmed mainly from their enjoyment of selling and feeling they could not effectively train someone else to do the job as well as *they* could.

"What we learned is that it's easier to duplicate yourself than we thought," said Olson. "The vast majority of incoming calls boil down to several simple questions: 'What are the services you offer? What is the price? How long have you been in the business? And how quick can you get here?'"

"If you can train your people to answer those questions effectively, we've discovered the close rate is 80 to 85 percent."

Another key nugget of information the pair learned was that 70 percent of callers to their office were women and they had a story to tell about their mosquito or tick problem.

"If a male customer calls, he wants to know how it will be done in as few words as possible," said Olson. "What we found with female customers is that they want to explain their mosquito or tick problem and ask about safety."

As a result, Mosquito Squad has hired women to take incoming calls because they found women simply communicate better with customers and help create the needed level of expectation. That expectation is that Mosquito Squad will create an environment where the customer, their family and guests can enjoy being outside without the threat of mosquitoes joining in on the fun.





systems can benefit their customers.

- Bring promotional collateral materials or a mock-up with their logo on it – show them you are ready to put their company brand in the spotlight.
- Send business in their direction when you get questions from customers about needing services they can provide.
- Develop a relationship with your trade alliance partner. Take them golfing or out to lunch every once in a while; it is not always about business.

When it comes to the face-to-face appointment with the customer, Mosquito Squad makes sure they do their homework. It all starts with the pre-qualification process and Mosquito Squad uses the following guidelines for this process:

- Identify the right market – 25 to 65 years old, own the home or property, are employed earning \$75,000+ and have children at home who like to play outdoors.
- The customer has invested and uses their outdoor living space (i.e. patios, porches, swimming pool, etc.)
- The potential customer understands what is required financially for the program you are proposing.
- Remember to ask for the sale; you will lose 100 percent of the sales you *don't* ask for.

“We aren’t going out there just to grab leads,” said Olson. “We want to talk with customers who are truly serious about enjoying their yard and have an investment in their outdoor living space.”

One thing Mosquito Squad looks for in every face-to-face appointment is having both decision makers at the meeting. This provides you with the following advantages:

- Being able to properly and completely explain the program and its benefits.
- The ability to overcome objections and ask why the potential customer feels that way.
- Set the level of expectations when it comes to service, and demonstrate

The Mosquito Squad 5 T's For Mosquito Control



The experts at Mosquito Squad offer solutions for homeowners who want to enjoy their outdoor living spaces and not worry about mosquitoes biting them, their children or guests. Here are their Five T's that homeowners can follow to prevent mosquitoes from taking over their treasured outdoor living space.

- 1. TIP.** Reduce standing water to eliminate mosquito threats, including those in children’s sandboxes, wagons or plastic toys; underneath and around downspouts, in plant saucers and dog bowls. Other hot spots include tarps, gutters and flat roofs.
- 2. TOSS.** Remove excess grass, leaves, firewood and clippings from yards.
- 3. TURN.** Turn over larger yard items that could hold water like children’s portable sandboxes or plastic toys.
- 4. REMOVE TARPS.** If tarps stretched over firewood piles, boats or sports equipment aren’t taut, they’re holding water.
- 5. TREAT.** Have a mosquito elimination barrier treatment done around your home and yard. Using a barrier treatment at home reduces the need for using DEET-containing bug spray on the body. Mosquito Squad’s treatment eliminates up to 90 percent of the mosquitoes and ticks on a property.

While generally a nuisance, mosquitoes and ticks can carry dangerous diseases such as West Nile Virus and Lyme disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that nearly 300,000 Americans have been sickened with West Nile Virus since it arrived in the United States 11 years ago.

(Source: Russ Jundt, Mosquito Squad)

your expertise in the area of mosquito control.

- Close the deal and have them sign on the dotted line.

SET YOURSELF APART

Following the Boy Scouts long-standing motto of “Be Prepared,” Olson and Jundt make sure they cover all the details of the sales process, big and small, before they step foot on the customers property to deliver their sales proposal. The “to do list” they work off includes the following:

- Research the property using Google Earth, Zillow.com or Go iLawn to find out if they have a pool, playground, water features, etc.
- Do a mock up for their backyard – it sets you apart from the competition.
- Arrive promptly and dress professionally (i.e. a company logo shirt).
- Sell on value.

- Price yourself accordingly and fairly; remember it is a small world and consumers talk.
- Build in room for a discount.
- Include add-ons rather than just dropping the price. Add-ons can include a remote or offering to service their neighbor’s yard (with permission of course) before your party.

Olson and Jundt also encouraged PMPs who are considering adding mosquito control services to their service lineup to become the local SME – *subject matter expert*. Much as being the rodent or termite expert, knowing mosquitoes and ticks, back to front and A to Z, is a must.

Customers are looking for information and a reliable, experienced professional to eliminate their mosquito problems, and an opportunity exists for PMPs who dedicate the necessary time and resources to successfully add mosquito control services to their offerings. ✎