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# PMP Pest Management PROFESSIONAL

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# CRYPTIC CRITTERS

2018 Bed Bug Management Supplement sheds light on trends, obstacles and opportunities.

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# The softer side of bed bug control

By **Tommy Powell** | Technical Field Specialist, MGK



**POWELL** is an entomologist and MGK technical field specialist. He may be reached at [thomas.powell@mgk.com](mailto:thomas.powell@mgk.com).

**A**lthough bed bugs are not a known vector for disease, they have become one of the most feared pests since their comeback more than a decade ago. As a leader in professional bed bug control, MGK has performed extensive social intelligence research on consumers' feelings about bed bugs — and these insects elicit an extremely strong emotional response. We've heard consumer statements such as "Scared to sleep," "Verge of nervous breakdown" and "PTBBS – Post Traumatic Bed Bug Syndrome."

Pest management professionals (PMPs) should understand these reactions, and be careful of common pitfalls that can arise with strong emotions. For example, never identify a bed bug problem from bites on a customer, no matter how convinced he or she is. This can end up biting *you* in the end! Reactions to bites can vary significantly from person to person, and careful inspection is key to identifying a problem.

Additionally, don't play the blame game and guess how a customer got a bed bug infestation. You don't want an angry relative or hotel manager calling you after your customer unleashes his or her frustrations.

You likely have a good idea of how to treat for bed bugs. Plenty of resources are out there to develop a great treatment protocol, including MGK's free bed bug protocol poster (please email me at [thomas.powell@mgk.com](mailto:thomas.powell@mgk.com) to request a poster). I'll use this space instead, then, to discuss the softer side of bed bug control:

**1. The first step is pre-treatment, centered on customer communication.** Listen carefully to your customer; this is a great opportunity to build a strong relationship by showing empathy and understanding how scared he/she could be.

**2. Communicate your treatment plan and expectations to the customer.** This includes removing clutter, laundering clothes and bedding at high heat, and ensuring your tech will be able to treat all necessary areas. You should always explain why you want customers to do their part, and how important this cooperation is to achieving control. Explain that bed bug treatments often require multiple visits and continued cooperation from the occupants.

**3. Clearly state how long customers will need to vacate the premises to allow your technicians to perform quality work.** We've all experienced a customer "offering to help" after unexpectedly returning home early. It's important that your techs have uninterrupted time to complete their jobs, and bed bug work is time-consuming enough in the best of circumstances.

**4. Explain to the customer what he/she should expect when he/she returns home.** Your tech will move the mattress off

the bed, dismantle the bed frame, remove all drawers from the dresser, and more. You should set the expectation with customers early on that the condition of their homes will not be the same as when they left. When emotions are already riding high, unexpected changes in their living spaces could result in a strong reaction.

**5. Listen to the customer to help with your inspection.** Remember that bed bugs stay close to their food source (your customer). I've inspected many homes where the main bedroom is not the biggest problem area, because the customer slept elsewhere to escape the bed bugs. Before treatment, ask whether your customer has been sleeping in another room or on a couch. Where do they spend a lot of time sitting?

With this strong communication plan in place, your bed bug jobs will go much more smoothly. Even the best protocol can result in poor customer satisfaction if you ignore the personal side of bed bug control. I've personally saved many hours of time on bed bug jobs by following these steps, and I hope they improve your success rate. For any questions about the personal or technical side of bed bug control, you can always reach out to your MGK sales representative, or email [Brands@MGK.com](mailto:Brands@MGK.com).



## Bed bug control calls for compassion

A caring attitude may help boost your pest management revenue.

By Diane Sofranec | PMP Managing Editor

**O**f all the pests that invade customers' structures, bed bugs (*Cimex lectularius*) often carry a stigma unmatched by even cockroaches and rodents.

"People tend to be horrified when they find out they have a creepy, night-stalking parasite," says John Komor, president of Johnny Bugs in North Port, Fla. "Gaining their business is as simple as showing you empathize with them and their plight."

Pest management professionals (PMPs) who show compassion toward prospective customers may earn their loyalty and general pest control business.

After all, professionals know bed bugs often are no reflection on the people whose homes or businesses they inhabit. Bed bugs are out for blood; they don't care whether their victims are rich or poor, dirty or clean, intelligent or uneducated.

"Offer reassurance that you want those pests dead as badly as they do, because there is nothing fun about finding and destroying bed bugs for you, either," Komor adds.

Bed bug business is increasing for Johnny Bugs, and Komor expects that trend to continue. Komor says he strictly adheres to a simple, yet thorough, assessment and treatment protocol that continually reinforces value to customers. But that's not the only way he builds the bed bug segment of his business.

"The secret to gaining business from do-it-yourselfers is to spend a lot of time in a company shirt," he says. "I am constantly asked questions by people looking for DIY help."

He tries to steer them to professionals who have more training, field experience and tools to eliminate bed bug infestations before they get out of control.



### SUCCEED WHERE OTHERS FAIL

Because prospective customers do not have years of training and experience, PMPs often gain new customers when people try, but fail, to eliminate bed bugs themselves. After 23 years with Clark Pest Control in Lodi, Calif., Account Manager Foster Brusca has seen his share of customers like these. He has been dealing with bed bugs head-on in the San Francisco Bay area for the past 14 years.

"Bed bug service calls continually come in, and we are finding more times than not that we are being called upon to fix a bed bug infestation that either a customer could not control with self-treatments, or that another company failed to get under control," he says.

Brusca, who has built a large customer base over the years, says he and his team strive to provide service in an ethical, professional, responsive and caring manner.

Clark Pest Control markets its bed bug management services to commercial and residential customers. It offers existing and prospective commercial customers an educational seminar each year, where experts share their knowledge on



FOSTER BRUSCA

bed bugs, as well as the legal ramifications of dealing with the pest.

But the education extends to technicians, too. There's an ongoing learning curve for bed bug control, and PMPs must be willing to put in the time and energy to learn about the latest research and management methods, he says. The company uses the most up-to-date techniques available for bed bug management and general pest control.

"There is no end in sight for bed bugs — no sign of these cryptic critters slowing down, never mind 'disappearing' again," he says. "This insect is continually adapting. PMPs need to be ready for anything."

### STAYING POWER

Ralph Citarella Jr., BCE, president of Bayonne, N.J.-based Bayonne Exterminating Co., says he believes bed bug control will continue to be lucrative for his company — and the pest management industry — for quite some time.

"I do not see a silver bullet on the horizon, considering the nature of the pest and its extremely close association to humans," he says. "Of course, there will be ebbs and flows in business volume, but this problem isn't going to just go away."

The company handled its first bed bug job in 2001, he says. Because the company is located in a densely populated urban area outside of New York City, with a high proportion of immigrants, Bayonne Exterminating experienced the rising tide of bed bugs early on.

For difficult infestations, the company has used canine inspections hand-in-hand with treatment teams. Its basic bed bug control service features an integrated mechanical, chemical and cultural program that includes a three-month warranty and a minimum of three treatments. For



RALPH CITARELLA JR.

multi-housing accounts, it's a cooperative program, Citarella says, as technicians try to educate both residents and landlords.

"The integrated control measures, warranty period and informational aspect of the program really sets us apart in the industry in general, and our market in particular," he adds. "We've worked hard fine-tuning this program over the years."

Citarella says bed bug management opens up the company to new clients and markets, and provides business year-round.

"We've had several customers, both commercial and residential, hire us for bed bug services — only to add on general pest control or other services afterward, as they were impressed by our bed bug control program," he says.

Companies looking to expand or develop bed bug management services should focus on maximizing profitability and ignoring gross sales volume, Citarella advises.

"It's also important to minimize liability, and I think one of the best ways to do that is through constant education of both staff and clients," he says. Making sure contracts, prep sheets and other information are sound, properly delivered and verified also is critical.

"It's scary how often bad bed bug scenarios go to litigation," Citarella says. "Develop a sound control program, and deliver it. Do not deviate from your standard procedure based on a client's desire to save a few dollars. It is much better to walk away from a bad client than compromise your service or reputation."

For Sandy Honess, president of Ladybug Pest Management in Delmar, Del., bed bug control has been lucrative since she started offering it in 2010. Her team, she says, is successfully positioned as bed bug specialists.

Typically, two technicians take

## Customers may need 'treatment,' too

Although bed bugs do not spread disease, they may have lasting psychological effects on the people who have them.

An entry in *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners* addresses the impact bed bugs have on mental health. The stigma associated with these pests is very real for those who have them, as they may experience shame, social isolation, fatigue and depression.

The article, which is titled "Bed Bugs: Current Treatment Guidelines" and was published in June 2017, says bed bugs are known to cause anxiety, emotional distress and sleeplessness. Extreme reactions may include the exacerbation of previous mental health issues, psychiatric hospitalization, or suicide. In addition, visible bed bug bites may affect a person's self esteem and ability to work.

In some cases, treatment may be needed for the structure and the customer. Pest management professionals should stick with what they know and refrain from attempting to diagnose their customers. — D.S.

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on every bed bug job so they can lift mattresses and move furniture. Plus, it helps to have another pair of eyes during an inspection. They create Bed Bug Action Plans for each customer, and always recommend proactive procedures and tools, as well as treatment and control options. The company is known for having a quick customer response time.

“Because my husband, Frank, and I are the owners and in control of our time, we can offer service after-hours or on weekends if necessary,” Honess says.

Customers include local hotels and other hospitality organizations, as well as apartment communities. The company offers bed bug educational training and workshops for hotel staff, and landlords and tenants in rental communities.

“In the beginning, we did not have thousands of dollars for advertising, so we sent a lot of mailings to hotels and property management companies,” recalls Honess. “We offered free demonstrations with our bed bug detection beagles.”

Now, the company’s website and Facebook page generate interest from prospective customers in the area. “Many of our customers say they prefer working with a local small business,” she says. “We always try to go the extra mile and give each new customer a little gift basket with a lot of goodies. Folks seem to like that personal touch, and I enjoy making the baskets.”



Sandy and Frank Honess pose with Dolley and Dixie, two of their bed bug-detecting canines.

Bed bug management and bed bug detection canines have enabled Ladybug Pest Management to find its niche in the pest control market.

“We believe bed bugs are here to stay. Travel and immigration add to the surge,” Honess says. “Unless a silver bullet is developed, we will be battling bed bugs until we retire and/or sell our business.”

Despite PMPs’ best efforts, bed bugs will not be wiped out of existence any time soon. Some archeologists believe bed bugs have been around for at least 3,550 years. Beating these little bloodsuckers will take time, education, cooperation and compassion. PMP

You can reach SOFRANEC at [dsfranec@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:dsfranec@northcoastmedia.net) or 216-706-3793.

## 10 tips for tackling bed bugs

**1** Keep up with recent technology and advances in bed bug control — be it practical experience, equipment or chemicals — and educate the customer on bed bug biology. — *Rosana Aure, Owner, Wilroe Pest Control Services, Bacoor City, Philippines*

**2** Do not start treatment until the customer leaves the property. PMPs wear proper personal protective equipment for a reason. — *Jerry Hoke, Owner/Operator, Hoke Pest Control, Portage, Mich.*



**3** Follow up to make sure the bed bug problem is solved. — *David Hersh, President, Hersh Exterminating Service, Hermitage, Pa.*

**4** Always keep the customer informed during each phase of treatment, and never dismiss a customer’s concern. — *Terri Williams, Owner, Exterm Inc., Orlando, Fla.*

**5** Educate customers to help them avoid future problems with bed bugs. — *John Byers, Owner, Warrior Pest Solutions, Mount Pleasant, Mich.*



**6** Don’t make promises you can’t keep; manage expectations. — *John Long, Owner, Bug Free Pest Control, Fort Wayne, Ind.*

**7** Avoid callbacks by taking a look at other areas that may be infested. — *Darrell Seelinger, Owner, Oakland Pest Control, Macomb, Mich.*



**8** Provide the customer with detailed preparation instructions. Do not perform a treatment in a structure that has not been properly prepared. — *Foster Brusca, Account Manager, Clark Pest Control, Lodi, Calif.*

**9** Do not allow landlords, superintendents or management company representatives to act as a go-between for tenants and PMPs. — *Ralph Citarella, President, Bayonne Exterminating Co., Bayonne, N.J.*

**10** Keep records — including photos — of the bed bug infestation and living conditions. — *Dee McCauley, Vice President, Diamond State Pest Control & Termite Co., Camden, Del.*

PHOTO: SANDY HONESS

## Mike's SWAT Team combats bed bug infestations and preparation with CrossFire by MGK

**M**ichelle LeDune is practiced in overcoming challenges. Her entry into pest management began with the biggest a person can endure.

After losing her husband unexpectedly more than five years ago, LeDune took over the pest management company he began in 1983 and made it her own. Leveraging her background in property management and a re-evaluation of the company's products, LeDune transformed Mike's SWAT Team Pest & Termite Control. The company, which is based in Phoenix, Ariz., now primarily services multi-family housing — and reflects her desire to always improve.

"I'm always looking to have the quickest chemical for the most effective knockdown, especially for bed bugs," says LeDune. In addition to a product that would eliminate bed bugs quickly, she also needed to find something that would solve her biggest challenge in multi-family housing: residents' compliance with preparation requirements.

With LeDune's standard bed bug treatments, residents need to pack up all loose household items that could encounter the treatment chemical, in addition to linens and clothes, prior to treatment. CrossFire by MGK, which can be applied directly to mattresses and other labeled surfaces, requires less preparation.

LeDune was excited to hear about CrossFire from her MGK representative, Matt Kenney. She began testing the product prior to its release in 2016. "It has been easier for technicians to treat properly and get all of the cracks and crevices, hiding spots, harboring areas — because

you can spray on almost anything," she says.

Mike's SWAT Team now uses both CrossFire Bed Bug Concentrate and CrossFire Aerosol, offering treatment with the products as a service upgrade option, \$200 more than the company's standard fogging treatment. It's the service LeDune recommends.

"CrossFire is a knockout chemical — it starts working effectively immediately," says LeDune, who also appreciates that she doesn't smell an odor or experience any greasy residue on surfaces after an application.

### Fit for the toughest jobs

LeDune uses each new product personally before handing it over to her technicians. "If there was a bed bug treatment to be done, I was the one going over to treat it with CrossFire," she says of her earliest experiences with the product.

One of her first trial runs with CrossFire was a terrible infestation. A three-room apartment, which had bed bugs for more than three months, was in such bad shape that live bed bugs were eating the dead ones and falling off mattresses, according to LeDune. She completed

the application of CrossFire herself and had a technician return an hour later to dust.

The technician told LeDune the apartment looked like a crime scene. "In just an hour, I killed so many bed bugs with that chemical," she says. "I knew CrossFire was going to be what we wanted to use."



Michelle LeDune

### A competitive differentiator

Mike's SWAT Team has developed a reputation for effective bed bug management. LeDune often receives calls from multi-family properties that receive regular treatments from her company's two main local competitors, but come to her looking for aggressive bed bug treatment for difficult infestations.

LeDune attributes the word-of-mouth promotion to her well-trained technicians and CrossFire.

"CrossFire has decreased our callback rates," she says. After conducting each initial treatment, her technicians return within one week for a follow-up inspection to ensure the job is done. They evaluate the situation and apply spot treatments with CrossFire aerosol as needed.

"We rarely have to retreat anything, because it works that fast and that good," she concludes. "It's that strong."



# Revenue generator

Bed bugs are good for business, *PMP's* 2018 Bed Bug Management Survey shows.

By Diane Sofranec | *PMP* Managing Editor

**B**ed bugs arrived in the United States with the colonists who first inhabited this great nation, according to the National Pest Management Association (NPMA). Since that time, their prevalence has surged and waned. For instance, in the 1950s, high-tech advances, such as washers and dryers and vacuums, reduced their numbers. But by 2000, bed bugs were back in a big way — and they've been a growing source of revenue for pest management professionals (PMPs) since.

Indeed, about three-fourths of the PMPs surveyed for *Pest Management Professional's* (*PMP's*) exclusive 2018 Bed Bug Management Survey report the number of bed bug jobs in 2017 rose compared with the number of jobs in 2016. Nearly as many survey respondents expect revenue from bed bug control jobs to increase in 2018.

## CUSTOMER CHALLENGES

Working with customers can be a challenge. Some don't comply with pre-treatment preparation instructions. Others continue behaviors — knowingly or unknowingly picking up infested furniture, associating with others who have infestations, etc. — that undermine treatment efforts. A whopping 78 percent of responding PMPs report having walked away from a bed bug job because a customer would not comply with preparation instructions.

To effectively combat bed bugs, PMPs need customers to properly prepare for treatment. Cooperation does not always come easy, however. So it's no surprise that one-third of survey

respondents say they believe most lawsuits and claims related to bed bugs are the fault of uncooperative residents of infested dwellings.

## LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS

Slightly more than half of the PMPs asked maintain they are somewhat concerned about bed bug litigation. Yet only 22 percent of survey respondents hired an attorney with pest management knowledge to help their companies create a bed bug-specific service contract.

PMPs have reason to be concerned. A lawsuit filed by a lingerie model against a hotel was just one of many bed bug cases to make headlines recently. She alleges the hotel in which she stayed had bed bugs that left marks on her body so severe she was unable to work. Her lawsuit, which is pending, also alleges she suffered emotionally, experiencing embarrassment and shame. The hotel defended itself, stating a pest control company immediately inspected the room in which she stayed and found no evidence of bed bugs or any other pests.

Plenty of tools are available to PMPs who battle bed bugs. The overwhelming majority of those asked rely on pesticides. Effective bed bug management may lead to additional general pest control business and solid referrals. Keeping up with the latest treatment options and communicating with customers is critical. Thorough inspections and follow-up service calls that lead to successful treatments can boost your company's reputation, too. **PMP**

You can reach SOFRANEC at [dsofranec@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:dsofranec@northcoastmedia.net) or 216-706-3793.



## Taking the bite out of bed bugs

Pest management professionals may help take away some of the stress that comes with bed bug infestations by educating customers on bed bug behavior. Only thorough inspections will reveal the presence of bed bugs. Refrain from making a diagnosis based on bite marks, and advise concerned customers to seek medical attention.

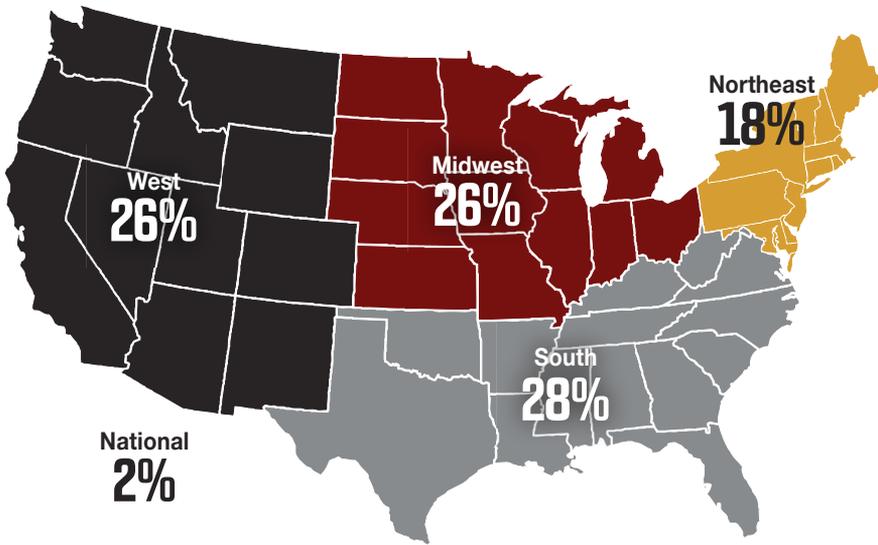
- Bed bugs bite, but do not spread disease.
- Bite marks may take as long as 14 days to appear on skin.
- Bed bug bites look similar to mosquito and flea bites.
- Bite marks may not appear on some victims.
- Biting bed bugs inject an anesthetic and an anticoagulant, which is why victims don't know they've been bitten.
- Bed bug bites may be itchy; constant scratching may cause skin infections.
- Bed bug bites can cause allergic reactions, such as swelling at bite sites.
- Bed bug bites are best treated by applying antiseptic and by taking antihistamine.

— Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

# Bed Bug Management Survey

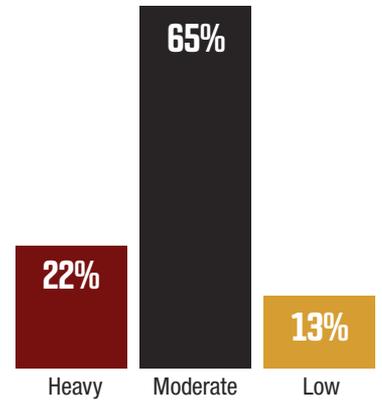
SOURCE: PMP ONLINE SURVEY WITH 104 RESPONDENTS

## AREA OF OPERATIONS



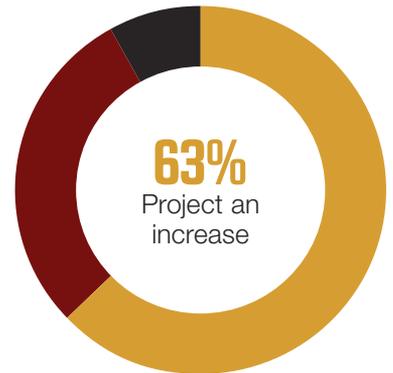
**WEST:** AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY  
**MIDWEST:** OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, MO, IA, ND, SD, NE, KS  
**SOUTH:** AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV  
**NORTHEAST:** CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NJ, NH, NY, PA, RI, VT, D.C.

## BED BUG PRESSURE



## NUMBER OF BED BUG JOBS

2018 Projections vs. 2017 Actuals



**29%** Project their number of bed bug jobs to be flat

**8%** Project a decrease

**Bed bugs are resilient; they can withstand temperatures ranging from almost freezing to 122 degrees.**

SOURCE: NATIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

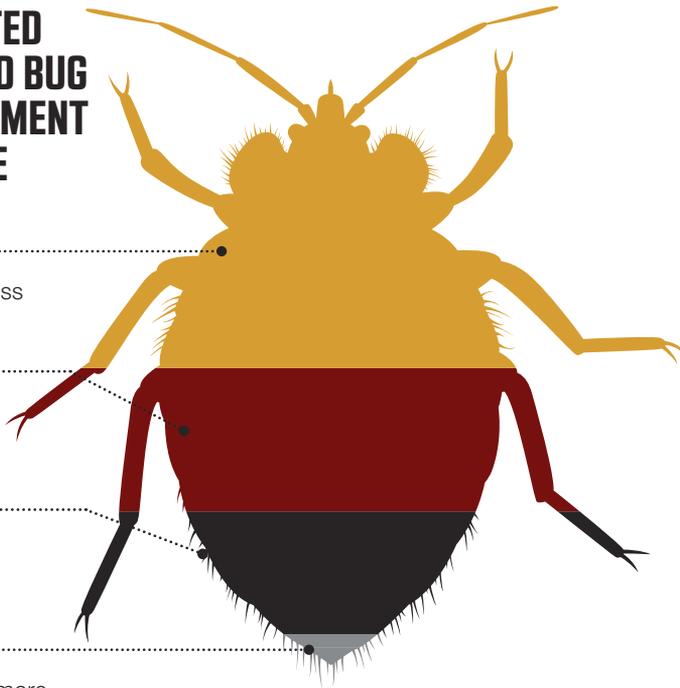
## PROJECTED 2018 BED BUG MANAGEMENT REVENUE

**53%**  
\$49,999 or less

**21%**  
\$50,000 to \$99,999

**20%**  
\$100,000 to \$999,999

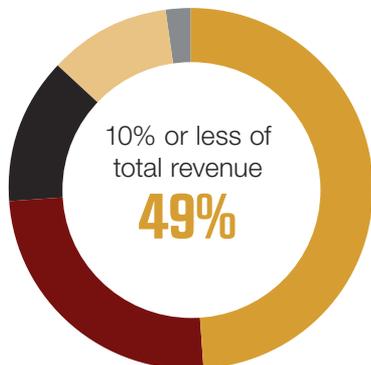
**6%**  
\$1 million or more



ART: ©ISTOCK.COM/ALYSEKALEXANDER/JOHN/LEMONSEED

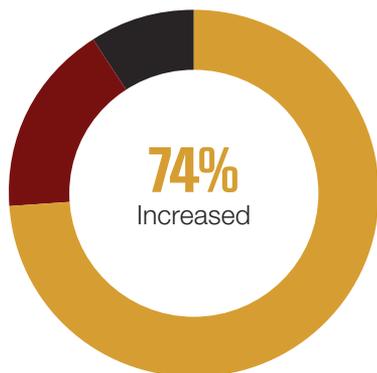
# 2018 BED BUG MANAGEMENT SURVEY

## PERCENT OF TOTAL 2017 REVENUE GENERATED BY BED BUG MANAGEMENT



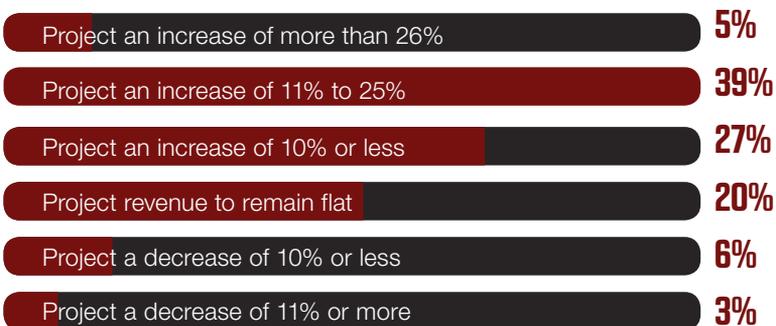
## NUMBER OF BED BUG JOBS

2017 vs. 2016



## BED BUG MANAGEMENT REVENUE

2018 Projections vs. 2017 Actuals



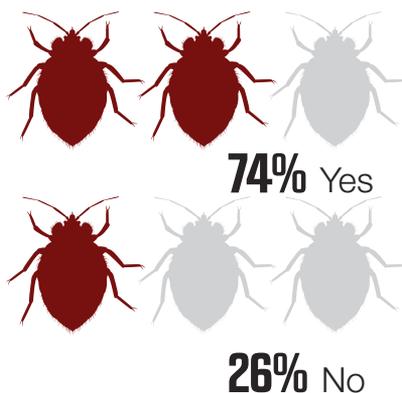
## WHICH TYPES OF BED BUG JOBS TYPICALLY COST THE MOST?



Do you include mattress and/or box spring encasements as part of your comprehensive bed bug management program?



Do you differentiate bed bug job pricing based on infestation severity?



## CUSTOMER COOPERATION

Have you ever walked away from a bed bug job because a customer did not or would not follow your prep instructions?



**A bed bug typically will feed on a host until filled up, usually 5 to 10 minutes. After feeding, bed bugs will find a secluded place to hide for five to 10 days to digest its meal, mate and lay eggs.**

SOURCE: NATIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

ART: ©ISTOCK.COM/BET\_NOIREZ/JOHNVLKONSEED

# WHAT DO YOU CHARGE TO TREAT ...

A single-bedroom apartment/condo involving a severe bed bug infestation?

A severe bed bug infestation spread across several apartments/condos (per unit)?

A severe bed bug infestation spread across several hotel rooms (per unit)?

\$299 or less	<b>10%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>23%</b>
\$300 to \$599	<b>36%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>41%</b>
\$600 to \$899	<b>29%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>18%</b>
\$900 to \$1,199	<b>11%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>11%</b>
\$1,200 or more	<b>14%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>7%</b>



Do you offer ongoing bed bug monitoring services?



Do you offer preventive bed bug inspection services?

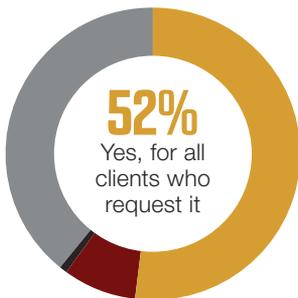


### Resident Liabilities

One-third of PMPs say they believe most bed bug-related lawsuits and claims are the fault of uncooperative residents of infested dwellings.



## DO YOU OFFER CURRENT CLIENTS *FREE* BED BUG INSPECTIONS?

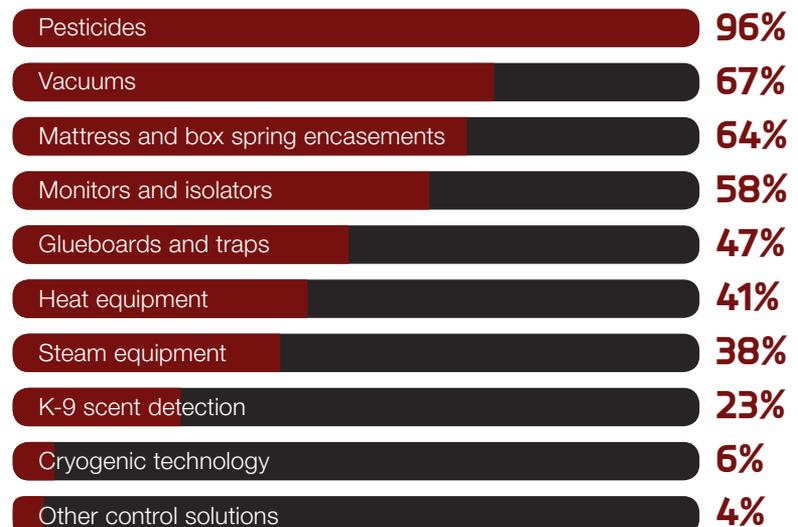


**8%** Yes, but only for annual general pest control customers

**3%** Yes, but only for accounts that have had bed bug infestations

**37%** No

## WHICH BED BUG MANAGEMENT TOOLS DO YOU USE?



ART: ©ISTOCK.COM/KATRYNABALASEWICZ/WILDUNINGARTS/PROSSTIVASJOHNWLEMONSEED

# THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

## IN BED BUG CONTROL IS HERE



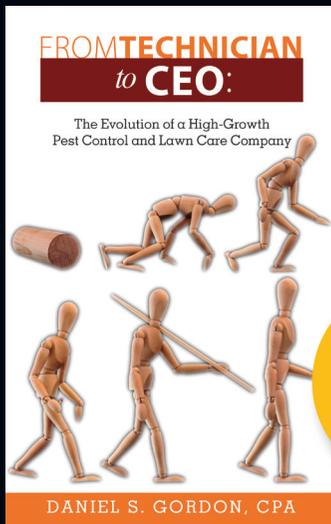
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# From Technician to CEO: The Evolution of a High-Growth Pest Control and Lawn Care Company



## A GREAT READ ABOUT A SECOND-GENERATION PMP AND HIS PATH TO BUSINESS GROWTH.

This book is about the journey of Peter Hall, a second-generation pest control operator and lawn care professional who grew up amid his family business, went off to college and returned home to eventually take over the family business. While growing up, he watched his father work diligently to make a modest living for his family. At school, Peter studied several facets of business, including management, accounting, finance, marketing and operations. His professors used the case method to teach, using successful high-growth, highly-profitable companies as subjects. After learning about the strategies employed to expand these model companies, Peter believed he was in a position to move his family's business on a high-growth trajectory. But what tools would he need to make this happen? Do the lessons he learned in the classroom translate to a realistic strategy that can be used to grow a company that will dominate the market, creating above-average income and providing long-term wealth for his family?

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# BUGS BE GONE

Pest control in homes and other buildings

"Bugs Be Gone" is an illustrated guide designed to assist pest management professionals (PMPs) and consumers — PMPs' residential and commercial clients and prospects — in basic structural pest identification, control and exclusion.

## BUGS BE GONE

- \* 234-page paperback (5.5 inches x 8.5 inches) published in late-2012
- \* Dozens of pest and infestation photographs and diagrams
- \* Key species breakdowns by pest type
- \* Biology and behavior information
- \* Potential public health threats
- \* Potential structural and food stores damage
- \* Identification tips
- \* Control and exclusion technologies and techniques
- \* Integrated pest management (IPM)
- \* How PMPs can help

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