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Termite Inspection Challenges and Considerations for Slab Buildings

Slab construction presents a unique challenge for subterranean termite inspectors. In finished structures, the vast majority of termite entry points are hidden from the inspector’s view. To make matters worse, slab construction lends itself to unique conditions conducive to termite. Recognizing and understanding the common issues encountered during the inspection of slab homes will allow inspectors to prepare for and meet the challenges associated with these structures and be able to provide a more thorough inspection for subterranean termites.

BROWN MARMORATED STINK BUGS: GOING NOWHERE FAST

By Lynette Leighton

Brown marmorated stink bugs, Halyomorpha halys (Hemiptera: Pentatomidae), have made quite the stir as an agricultural and urban pest, skyrocketing to become perhaps the top invasive species in over half of the United States as of Fall 2011. During the past decade they have found a plethora of host plants to feed upon, places to overwinter, lack of natural predators, and milder climates coupled with a tenacity for hitchhiking through many parts of the country. Hence, their newly widened distribution and their increased propensity to drive homeowners and PMPs crazy with their odd overwintering-nuisance behaviors.
One year ago I told you that in order to ensure that the value NPMA offers the industry as a whole, and our members’ businesses in particular, continues to be relevant and dynamic, the association was initiating the process of creating a new, future-oriented Strategic Plan.

Over the past year, we have sought input from our members in a variety of ways—to include an online survey, in-depth focus groups, and active visioning meetings—in order to understand how our current services are meeting your needs—and what new directions we need to consider as we move forward. I am extraordinarily pleased to provide you with an update as to the activities that have taken place since we embarked on this journey.

Through our online survey and focus groups, we learned that the majority of members—nearly 50 percent—indicated their primary reason for joining NPMA was to access association benefits, followed by those who wanted to support the industry and its stewardship, gain credibility with current and potential customers and participate in state association activities. Members identified government relations activities as the most valuable service offered by NPMA. Ninety-two percent of respondents believe membership in NPMA enhances their credibility; 60 percent believe the NPMA affiliation is important to their customers; 77 percent believe they have the opportunity to influence industry policies through NPMA; 80 percent believe NPMA supports their business’ growth and 94 percent believe they are exposed to new ideas and areas of expertise through involvement in the Association.

So, what do we do with this information? In February and July of this year, the NPMA Board of Directors met to review detailed survey and focus reports and develop a series of goals to better align the association with our members’ needs and wants. To that end, the following goals were identified:

- **GOAL 1: Be the Definitive Source for Education, Information, and Resources for Pest Management Professionals**
- **GOAL 2: Strive to Proactively and Positively Affect Regulatory and Legislative Outcomes for the Pest Management Industry**
- **GOAL 3: Promote the Importance of Professional Pest Management and Strengthen the Public’s Perception of the Industry**

Now it is time for NPMA staff to roll up our sleeves and develop our tactical roadmap. Thank you to those of you who have contributed to this important process by sharing your thoughts on a survey or participating in a focus group. If you have not yet shared thoughts of relevance, I invite you to email me directly with any input you’d like to offer.

Finally, I’d like to take a minute and invite you to attend PestWorld 2012, NPMA’s annual convention and exposition, October 17–20 in Boston. Over 3,000 pest management professionals, researchers, and industry suppliers and distributors from across the globe make the annual trip to the industry’s single best opportunity to meet, get to know, and learn from your industry peers, leaders, and suppliers. It’s a not-to-be-missed event and I hope to see you there! Be sure to visit www.npmapestworld.org to register today. «
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BY LYNETTE LEIGHTON

BROWN MARMORATED STINK BUGS:
GOING NOWHERE FAST
BROWN MARMORATED STINK BUGS (BMSB), *Halyomorpha halys* (Hemiptera: Pentatomidae), have made quite the stir as an agricultural and urban pest, skyrocketing to become perhaps the top invasive species in over half of the United States as of Fall 2011. They are an invasive species originating from the Eastern Asian region, and are believed to have entered the US in Pennsylvania in the late 1990s by way of cargo ships. Since then, they have found a plethora of host plants to feed upon, places to overwinter, lack of natural predators, and milder climates coupled with a tenacity for hitchhiking through many parts of the country. Hence, their newly widened distribution and their increased propensity to drive homeowners and PMPs crazy with their odd overwintering-nuisance behaviors.

What do they look… and smell like?
Adult BMSBs are about ½ inch in length, marbled brown in color, and are the typical “shield” shape like most other stink bugs. They are easy to distinguish from other stink bugs due to alternating light and dark bands on the antennae, as well as alternating light and dark banding around the rim of the abdomen which is visible even when the wings are folded on the back.

As the name suggests, BMSBs do possess scent glands on the dorsal surface of the abdomen and the underside of the thorax. They release a putrid odor when threatened or in aggregation. The scent slightly varies from person to person, but can generally be described as a lightly piercing rotten smell akin to ground coriander.

Biology and Behavior
Researchers throughout the Mid-Atlantic region are still trying to understand the biology and behavior of this invasive pest.
However, homeowners, researchers, and PMPs alike noticed a boom in population during 2010 and 2011, when studies conducted by the USDA-ARS Appalachian Fruit Research Station determined there had been at least two generations of BMSBs. The mild winter experienced by the Mid-Atlantic region this year may account for another increase in population this summer, especially since the BMSBs have become even better established through much of the region and are branching out.

Unlike most other overwintering pests that seek harborage in structures around Halloween or before the first frost (whichever comes first with the drop in temperature), BMSBs usually begin entering homes between mid-August through mid-September. While most homeowners never even know of the presence of overwintering pests, such as wasps and lady bird beetles, BMSBs make sure to be noticed by never entering a full dormant state. Rather, they wander around inside the home and seem to pop up in random places (ie, on the living room lampshade, by the kitchen window curtains, on top of a basket of clean laundry, etc.) and cause great despair for the unlucky homeowners who feel like they are living in a bug-infested home. On the bright side, BMSBs do not actively search for food, water, or mates while they are overwintering. It is not uncommon for homeowners to find a dozen or so BMSBs on an exceptionally warm winter morning, especially if the sunlight has warmed a wall.

Complications of the Pest
BMSBs differ from most of the pests dealt with by the pest control industry in that they have a large presence as an agricultural pest; agricultural fields most likely serve as population reservoirs during April through August when BMSBs are outdoors, while the vicinity to residential neighborhoods and other buildings allow them to escape the difficult winters. However, BMSBs seem to have successfully established populations in urban environments as well due to their generalist approach in host plant selection—they feed on over 500 species of plants that bear some form of fruit or nut. Simply put, they are an agricultural pest from April through August and an overwintering and nuisance pest from September through March.

BMSBs do not transmit any diseases or cause damage inside the home. While the sight and smells of thousands of BMSBs agitates most, if not all, homeowners who are also spending extended periods of time indoors during the winter months, crop producers face measurable economic losses due to damaged produce. Apple growers in the mid-Atlantic region have reported crop yield losses of up to 90 percent in 2010, and many organic farmers are also struggling to keep the pests in check without losing their organic certification.

Management and Control
BMSBs do not become a structural pest until late summer when they begin invading homes in droves, seeking harborage. Stink bugs are often attracted to homes due to structural guidelines and the proximity of the host plants they feed upon during the warmer months. There is no silver bullet for culling a population of unwanted invasive pests. However, a preventative combination of physical and chemical measures may aid in assuaging a desperate homeowner.

If a particular account is prone to experiencing stink bug invasions, inspect and start physical exclusion measures once the stink bugs have left and before they re-enter. It is best to seal potential pest entry points in the form of cracks around windows, doors, light fixtures, siding, utility lines and boxes, and around chimneys from inside and outside the home. The best way to seal such openings is by packing stainless steel or copper wire mesh into the gap and sealing it with high quality silicone sealant. If the gap is large enough for a pen to fit through, then it should most likely get sealed in some way. It is best to alert the client of any gaps that may be too large to seal for the scope of pest management services. A good technician will take into account the types of trees on the property and the proximity to the home in order to assess possible entry into the home through the attic. When doing physical exclusion, it is important to find cracks and crevices high and low. This takes time and patience.

Chemical measures can be taken during the months of August and September, which is a little before and around the time BMSBs begin entering homes. Spot treatments with a wettable powder...
or microencapsulated insecticide should be made to and around all potential entry points on the exterior of the building; around windows, doors, soffits, awnings, attic vents—any inflection point or edgeline around the home. Time is most critical in having an effective preventative chemical treatment. It is recommended to set appointments for preventative stink bug treatments during the summer months so the PMPs and homeowners do not miss the narrow window of opportunity.

Interior chemical applications are not recommended for living areas such as kitchens, family rooms, and bedrooms. However, limited interior treatments can be done in voids such as attics on a case-by-case basis, especially if a home is under massive stink bug siege. Spot treatments with liquid residuals can be made along the inside of window frames and vents in the attic, and especially on the edges of the chimney column, if needed. Physical exclusion is still the best option in preventing BMSBs from entering the home, especially if the technician observes any light or air penetrating through gaps in the framing of the attic area. One NPMA member company in the mid-Atlantic region has experienced a nearly 90 percent

**IF A PARTICULAR ACCOUNT IS PRONE**
to experiencing stink bug invasions, inspect and start physical exclusion measures once the stink bugs have left and before they re-enter.
success rate in preventing and reducing stink bug activity through a combination of interior and exterior chemical applications during the 2011 season. Most of their success is attributed to the ability to plan and schedule treatments in advance, and the thoroughness of the technicians.

So what now?

Pheromone traps have shown a lot of promise in terms of curbing the BMSB population in agricultural environments during the spring and summer months. As with chemical treatments, the timing and placement of the traps seems to be most important based on studies conducted by Dr. George Hamilton of Rutgers University, especially if adapting the pheromone traps for residential use. A YouTube video went viral last summer when a homeowner created a stink bug trap and catcher out of a soda bottle and an LED light. Though pheromone traps and light traps show promise, more research is needed in order to confirm the efficacy of such devices.

The best approach to preventing stink bug activity is to get the homeowners involved with maintaining the home via physical exclusions, and leaving chemical applications in the hands of the professionals if necessary. BMSBs do not damage structures or pose a threat to human health and chemical treatments may oftentimes be expensive due to the labor involved in conducting a thorough inspection and treatment. Pest entry points that go unnoticed can ultimately result in treatment failure, and there is nothing we can do once the BMSBs are inside aside from removing by hand or vacuuming and waiting for them to leave so we can start sealing up the house.

Lynette Leighton is a technical intern for NPMA, and will be starting her Masters program in Pesticide Policy at Yale University in Fall 2012.
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BY JIM FREDERICKS, Ph.D.

Q My customer told me she has flying cockroaches in her house. Sure enough, I found what appeared to be German cockroaches that were capable of flying. Is this possible or am I dealing with something different?

A You are definitely dealing with something other than a German cockroach. The Asian cockroach has become widespread throughout many southeastern U.S. states since the late 1980s, and the adults are nearly identical in appearance to the German cockroach. However, the Asian cockroach has longer wings than the German cockroach which allows it to be a strong flier. Asian cockroaches spend a majority of their time outside, in shaded areas with leaf litter, and feed on honeydew produced by aphids. They are most active during the evening and are attracted to light-colored or bright surfaces, which is the main reason why people may find them inside their homes. The main route of entry is via an open window or door.

Physical exclusion via sealing gaps along window and door frames will further aid in keeping the Asian cockroaches out. Decreasing the level of moisture around the exterior of a structure decreases available habitat for these roaches, and will help curb the population. If possible, using sodium vapor lights for exterior lighting will also deter Asian cockroaches.

Indoor applications are not recommended since Asian cockroaches are primarily residing outdoors, and it is fairly rare for them to establish a population indoors. Exterior spot treatments with liquid residual products have proved to be effective. Target application sites should be areas these roaches would most likely use to gain entry into the structure, such as around window and door frames, around utility line and pipe entry points, and light fixtures. Granular bait scattered around the exterior perimeter will also aid in controlling the population.

Q We understand bats are beneficial critters, but we have been struggling for the past couple years with them coming into a customer’s attic. What can we do to prevent them from coming into the home?

A It is illegal to kill bats in most states because they are protected. Young bats are born between April through August, which can make any type of removal and exclusion work difficult especially if there are young bats that are not ready to leave the attic. The best time for bat proofing is during September through March after the young bats have learned to fly.

It is important to first focus your efforts on safely removing the bats by constructing a one-way exclusion net around the entry points that are used by the bats. Bats are very small, and only need about 3/8” gap to slip through.

Once the bats are out, physical exclusion work can begin, which often takes the form of replacing pieces of siding or flashing, sealing gaps with caulk or mortar (ie, where the chimney attaches to the house itself), and securing a mesh screen behind attic vents and soffits. Exclusion work should be done on the inside and outside of a structure. Bats follow air currents, so if there is any light or air penetrating into the attic space between the wood frames, windows, or vents, use those as clues to potential entry points that must be sealed.

Q More and more of our clients are becoming concerned about the brown widow spider. How toxic is their venom and what can we do to control them?

A Brown widow spiders are becoming more widespread throughout the southern regions of the U.S., from California to Florida, and even up to Ohio and Michigan. Their
coloration varies from light tan to dark brown, with variable markings of black, white, yellow, orange, or brown on the back of their abdomens. Their spiky tan colored egg sacs are more easily recognizable compared to the smooth white to tan surface of most other spider egg sacs. The brown widow’s venom is twice as potent as that of the black widow. However, brown widows do not inject as much venom as the black widow and are less likely to bite since they are more timid.

Brown widows primarily nest outdoors on the undersides of patio and lawn furniture, playground equipment, garbage bins, and other structures and items that offered horizontal support and underside access, according to a recent study completed by Dr. Richard Vetter from University of California, Riverside. Only on rare occasions, brown widow spiders were found in garages or sheds, usually if the door was left open for easy access.

Sanitation such as the regular maintenance of outdoor items, reducing clutter in storage areas, and disposal of debris and piled materials around the exterior of a structure will aid in reducing brown widow habitats.

Sanitation such as the regular maintenance of outdoor items, reducing clutter in storage areas, and disposal of debris and piled materials around the exterior of a structure will aid in reducing brown widow habitats. Exterior perimeter treatments may aid in preventing the spiders from entering a structure, but it is best to inject pesticide dusts or aerosols into holes and crevices where the spiders are likely to reside.«
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TERMITE INSPECTION CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR SLAB BUILDINGS

Note: This library update is intended to describe recommendations for performing inspections for subterranean termites in slab buildings and not intended to describe the practices required for a full wood destroying insect inspection. Some states have additional requirements for termite inspections. Check with your state lead agency (ex: department of agriculture) for details.

Slab construction presents a unique challenge for subterranean termite inspectors due to the fact that only a small portion of the structure is visible for inspection. In finished structures, the vast majority of termite entry points are hidden from the inspector’s view. Cracks in the slab are typically obscured by floor coverings, and expansion joints are hidden by walls and baseboards. To make matters worse, slab construction lends itself to unique conditions conducive to termite infestation including wooden grade stakes and form boards in contact with soil and wooden door frames embedded in the concrete that are in contact with the soil.

Three Basic Slab Types
In order to provide an effective termite inspection under these difficult circumstances, it is important to understand the three basic slab types that are encountered in the field. Having the ability to recognize the type of slab will help the inspector visualize potential termite entry points associated with each construction type and help guide the inspection.

BASIC EQUIPMENT
- Flashlight
- Probing tool
- Graph paper
- Measuring device

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT AND OTHER HELPFUL TOOLS
- Boroscope
- Moisture meter
- Inspection mirror
A monolithic slab consists of a single continuous pour of concrete to create both the slab and footer, resulting in no expansion joint around the perimeter of the foundation.

A supported or suspended slab extends over top of the foundation wall and rests on top of the footer. The bottom of the slab may be visible from the exterior of the structure, resting on top of the foundation wall. In many cases, the exterior siding may obscure this inspection point, or the slab may rest only partially on top of the foundation wall.

A floating slab does not rest on top of a footing, instead it rests directly on grade with an expansion joint separating it from the footing. The expansion joint provides direct termite access from beneath the slab to the interior of the structure. The expansion joint may be hidden from the inspector’s view by wall coverings. In some homes, a floating slab can be identified if an exterior door threshold can be removed to reveal an expansion joint underneath.
The Exterior Inspection

The exterior inspection on a slab building is similar to performing termite inspections on structures with crawlspace or basement construction. The inspector should carefully inspect the entire exterior foundation wall for evidence of mud shelter tubes, which provide a conduit over the foundation from the soil to the structure. Shelter tubes, live or dead termites and other evidence of infestation (including damage) should be noted around the exterior of the structure. Termites and their evidence are often encountered around or near the perimeter of the structure; however, these might not be considered evidence of infestation of the structure itself. Only termites or evidence found in or on the structure should be considered a structural infestation. It should be noted, however, that the client should be alerted if termites are found within close proximity of the structure and treatment can still be recommended. Please note that many states have differing subterranean termite reporting requirements. Inspectors should always check to make sure they are in compliance with local regulations for termite inspections before completing a report or making recommendations.

In addition to visually inspecting the exterior of the structure for evidence of termite infestation, the condition and location of the exterior siding should be noted. Does the siding/brick veneer/synthetic stucco extend below soil grade? If so, termites could be entering the structure underground behind the siding, remaining completely hidden to the inspector or property owner.

Check the perimeter of the building for additional conditions conducive to termite infestation and alert the client regarding their presence. Situations including (but not limited to) improper grading, pooling water, wood debris, and excessive moisture can create ideal microhabitats for termites, increasing the likelihood of infestation.

Interior Inspection

The exterior inspection is important; however, the inspection process does not end there, the interior inspection is equally important and much more challenging. The most difficult challenge facing inspectors in slab structures is the lack of visual access to the construction components that are in close proximity to common termite entry points. Unlike crawlspace or most basement construction, slab buildings typically have finished interiors obstructing the inspector’s view. Carpet, tile, baseboards, wallpaper, drywall, and paneling are just some examples of the commonly encountered obstructions that make interior inspections on slab buildings difficult.

**DON’T FORGET TO LOOK FOR TERMITES IN THESE PLACES:**
- Mulch
- Landscape timbers
- Stumps
- Abutting slabs/patios/decks on grade
- Planters
- Columns
- Fences
- Under splash blocks beneath gutter downspouts
A termite inspection is not limited to the ground floor of a building. Although subterranean termites are most commonly encountered on the lower levels of a structure, aerial colonies may be present in upper levels, especially when sufficient moisture is present in a structure due to roof leaks or other moisture sources. All baseboards and doorjambs in the structure should be tapped (sounded) with a blunt instrument (often the handle of a large screwdriver). The experienced inspector will often be able to locate areas of wood that need additional inspection (often by probing the wood with the opposite end of the screwdriver) based on differences in how damaged wood sounds compared to intact wood. In addition to looking for mud shelter tubes and termite damage, the inspector should check windowsills, spider webs and ceiling light fixtures for signs of termite swarmers (alates).

The inspector should be on the lookout for any wood structural components that extend into the slab. Stair horses, door jambs, form boards and support columns put in place before the slab was poured may extend below the concrete and remain in contact with soil. These areas should be carefully inspected and brought to the client’s attention as potentially troublesome conducive conditions. In addition to these challenges, other construction elements should be carefully inspected in slab buildings including utility penetrations and bath traps. Occasionally, access panels to inspect bath traps are not present and must be installed in order to successfully perform an inspection of these areas. Hot water tanks and furnaces are often installed in awkward locations and are an obstruction found in nearly every structure. Inspection mirrors are often needed to inspect behind these common obstructions. An increasingly common obstruction is hardwood floors installed over slabs. These floors may be “floating” directly on top of the slab, or may be built on top of a sleeper floor. In either case, inspection and subsequent treatment of these floor types are difficult.

Recognizing and understanding the common issues encountered during the inspection of slab homes will allow inspectors to prepare for and meet the challenges associated with these structures and be able to provide a more thorough inspection for subterranean termites.

*Special thanks to the members of the NPMA WDO Division for their work developing this article.*
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It’s a TRIPLE play-value, quality and savings with these 3 great products from CSI!
If you’re like most businesses with an online presence, chances are you rely heavily on online search rankings to drive traffic to your website. Consumers are becoming ever more reliant on Google, Yahoo! and Bing search results to dictate the next step in their search for products and services. At the same time, those major search engines are finding new and different ways to both identify legitimate sites and weed out spam from cluttering their results pages.

Navigating the world of SEO can seem daunting at first. However, once you see the results, in the form of your website creeping up the results page, it can become an addictive exercise in seeking out the best way to reach both new and existing customers through search engine rankings.

The SEO Basics
Search Engine Optimization is the practice of improving and promoting a website to increase the number of visitors the site receives from search engines. While there are many tactics available that can help boost website traffic, such as purchasing pay-per-click online ads, “Organic SEO” is the process of incorporating keywords and backlinks into your site’s content, and continuing to keep the site updated with new, optimized material at all times. These fairly simple steps will make a website more recognizable to search engines, such as Google, Yahoo! and Bing, thus allowing them to identify the site’s content as relevant and useful to their users.

Keywords, Backlinks, and Repeat!
The first step in a successful SEO plan is to identify the top words and phrases, or keywords, people will use when searching for your business. Keywords are what we type into the search bar when looking for products and services on a search engine, and identifying those keywords is an essential first step in optimizing your site. For example, consider you run a business that sells sunglasses. While an obvious goal would be to hold the top result when users search “sunglasses,” that’s probably not the keyword that will drive the most traffic to the site, given there are likely millions of websites selling sunglasses online. Instead, identify more specific keywords that incorporate details unique to what your business has to offer, such as “sunglass shops in Southern California” or “men’s black Ray Bans.”

The key to selecting the most successful keywords is to conduct thorough research by utilizing online tools, such as the Google Adwords: Keyword Tool, to find and test the terms and phrases that will generate adequate search results without being so competitive your site will fail to rank at all. Once the top keywords are identified, distribute them throughout your site on a variety of pages to enable search engines to pick them up easily, and frequently.
Backlinks should be thought of as qualifiers for your site, as they can legitimize it in the eyes of a search engine that is constantly looking to eliminate spam from its’ search results. When it comes to utilizing backlinks, think quality over quantity. Finding authoritative, useful sites within the pest control industry to link to can be a simple way to increase your search ranking. Consider linking to NPMA’s consumer websites such as PestWorld.org, PestWorldForKids.org and WhatisIPM.org to start.

Once you have identified keywords and backlinks and incorporated them into your site, it is essential to continue the process to ensure your search ranking remains consistent or, even better, improves. Keep your content fresh, timely and most importantly, relevant for your users. Stay up-to-date with the changes and additions Google, and the other top search engines, implement by monitoring tech news sites, like Mashable, that constantly report on the latest news and tools that may help your SEO plan remain successful.

SEO News and Updates

For those who have been in the SEO game for years, finding and implementing new and innovative ways to increase a site’s traffic can be an arduous task. Luckily, Google’s search results are no longer just a straightforward listing of suggested sites. They are now comprised of maps, social network links, images, videos and more, creating both a need, and an opportunity, for business owners to consider more than just the traditional SEO tools and tactics when working to push their website toward the top of the list.

Think Local: Most notably, the addition of Google Places has greatly affected localized search queries and provided a new opportunity to link a website to a geographic area, improving the likelihood that those searching for a business in a specific region will find yours. To take advantage of this perk, you must first claim your Google Places business listing by adding detailed information like a business description, phone number, address, keywords, hours of operation and more. Claiming your business on similar local tools on Yahoo! and Bing and linking to legitimate online reviews from popular sites such as Yelp and CitySearch can further improve your rankings.

Be Social: A business’s social media presence can have a great effect on its’ search engine ranking. Not only can an active social media profile on Twitter, Facebook or Google+ be a useful tactic in an overall marketing plan, but it can also greatly increase your website traffic. The key lies in the level of engagement your social media followers show with your accounts—Facebook “likes” and “shares” and Twitter “mentions” and “retweets” count in your favor and the more your fans and followers interact with your profiles, the better. Ensure an active and engaging social media presence by creating relevant, useful and interesting status updates and tweets that your audience will feel compelled to respond to.

Capture it on Camera: Take advantage of Google’s ability to pick up videos and images in search results by creating video and image libraries on YouTube and Picasa. Be sure to identify the files using relevant keywords to help maximize the chance they’ll appear in search results. The more useful content you provide, the more opportunities you create for a search engine to find your site and share it with a new audience. As with all online content, however, make sure those videos and images are relevant and helpful to those searching for your business.

Go Mobile: Consider the fact that a large percentage of those searching for your business are likely doing so from their mobile device. Review your site’s content and design to ensure it’s mobile-friendly and keep in mind that someone searching from their iPhone, Droid or other smartphone may be using different keywords than they would when using a laptop, desktop or tablet. It may be worth designing a mobile-enabled version of your website for those folks to ensure they are able to find you and find your site useful.

The Bottom Line

A successful SEO strategy is one that is constantly changing to keep up with the increasing updates and additions to the online world. Making SEO a priority can help you increase visitors to your website and ideally, introduce your business to a new audience with the click of a mouse. By doing your part to ensure you are making it as easy as possible for search engines to find you, you can rest assured those new customers will find you, too. ☛
SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PEST CONTROL PROFESSIONALS: IS YOUR BUSINESS LIKEABLE ON FACEBOOK?

BY JOHN WAYNE ZIMMERMAN

The core of Facebook marketing comes down to really one question: do they like me? It may sound simple and elementary, but that is a basic human question, and is at the heart of what makes social media so powerful. That question gets answered in the number of fans you have and how much they engage with your fan page.

What makes a likeable business? The question that a consumer will ask regarding your business on Facebook is this: will this company care more about making a profit than my well-being?

Great products and services help influence people to like businesses but it’s the people behind the business that really make the business likeable. Not a logo, or a cool product—although these are important, too.

Think about the pest control sector. Do people really like pest control companies? They surely don’t like the bugs and pests, but they can become evangelists of your company if you take great care of them and show them you are a company that is authentic and compassionate.

Consider what it was like in the 70’s and 80’s when someone entered a family-owned business on Main Street. The attendant at the counter was likely the owner, and when someone entered the store, they treated like they were the most important person in the world because—they were. The owner’s livelihood depended upon the customer’s patronage. So, they got to know their customers in what they needed and what was important to them. At the heart of it, the companies that do the best in social media treat their fans in this same manner.

Here are some ways you can create raving fans and ultimately create trust with them:

■ You can congratulate fans for any successes they may post with a big thank you, a happy birthday, or happy anniversary.

■ You can supply fans not only with a short answer to their question, but a link to a page on your website, blog, or video that talks more in-depth about the topic they asked about.

■ If a fan has posted a question, and you don’t know the answer. Ask all of your fans the same question to see if the greater audience might know.

By developing relationships with your fans online, you will get to know them and that will make the difference in creating loyal fans.

Keeping It Real

Be authentic. No one likes to be treated in a patronizing or pretentious manner. I see this happen on Facebook all the time. The voice of your business on Facebook is one that people will follow and see every day.

Don’t be dry when you respond to comments on Facebook either. Encourage your employees to show some personality online. Give them the freedom to connect and bond to that individual who just reported she was having a problem.

Let’s say a customer is having a rough time and posts this on your fan page:

Customer: “I’m having a really crappy day. Your site sucks. I haven’t been able to access my account all day long and no one has gotten back to me since 9am this morning. It’s now 5pm. I hate your company. Have you ever seen or experienced this type of response?

Business: “I’m sorry to hear that you are having an issue with your account. Are you sure you are typing in the right password? Please call our customer care center and we’ll be happy to get to the bottom of your issue. Hours are M-F, 9-5pm.”

Would this response empower, or further anger that customer? Put yourself in their shoes.

Here’s how I recommend responding:
**Business:** "I understand crappy days, it’s been a crappy day here too with the site going down and no one has been able to access their accounts. Email me your phone number and I’ll call you right away. I’ll personally handle this for you and make sure you get taken care of.”

Can you see the difference? The first one is very canned and corporate and the other is very personal and social. Put this into context of how you might handle different situations with your customers. What are they calling or writing about? How can you serve them in a way that is most impactful?

**Empathizing**

You should know that your Facebook Fan page is mostly for your customers. The purpose of the page is so fans can communicate with a community of users who are interested in your business and voice their praises and challenges.

Here are some ways to get focused on fan empathy:

- Let them know what you can do to help.
- A fan posts that they used a competitor of yours and their problem is now worse than ever.
  
  **Business:** 'Yes, we agree that they are terrible.' **Wrong.**
  
  **Business:** 'I’m sorry to hear that. Let’s connect and I’ll get this resolved for you and anyone else that might have the same issue.' I’ll even offer you a discount for your trouble. **Right!**
- Don’t get angry.
- A fan posts that your company is irresponsible for using toxic chemicals when you spray.
  
  **Business:** 'Would you rather have roaches?' **Wrong.**
  
  **Business:** 'I’m sorry you feel that way. I hate it when chemicals are misused. I wish all companies used as much care with chemicals that we do. **Right!**

You can communicate by replying on the Fan page itself, or by messaging them directly when privacy is appropriate. Address each message as soon as you can to maintain a good standing with your fans.

**It Takes Time and Commitment**

Getting people to Like your Facebook Fan page is going to take some time and constant effort. It won’t necessarily happen overnight with a single campaign.

Make sure you give yourself a realistic time period, at least three months or more, before you evaluate the performance of your Facebook marketing. With consistent effort, you should be rocking out to Facebook marketing in no time. Within a year, you should have a large fan base with an interactive audience, and conversions to customers.

It’s also going to take a strategic plan, the right training for your team, and being immersed in Facebook marketing to really make a difference. Using these tools in this article will definitely make a difference. Consider hiring a social media company, or having your employees take a training program like “Facebook Mastery,” a program my company offers to get businesses started the right way on Facebook.

Remember to stay agile. Facebook is constantly changing, and so are the needs of your customers. Stay present and adjust when needed.

Have fun with this. Think of Facebook like a really fun party where all of your favorite people are present at your house. Be a great host and when they go home for the night, you will be the talk of the town, and they will be loyally yours. «

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John is a founder/Chief Rocket Scientist at eRocketFuel, a marketing agency that guides businesses through the new world of social media marketing by defining social media strategy, social media training, and offering full social media management. He is also the author of The Complete Idiots Guide to Facebook Marketing. John has owned several successful businesses and has trained over 25,000 professionals on social media marketing in the last year. John can be reached at 630-618-6105 or email him at john@erocketfuel.com.
Companies across America employ four generations at a time—many working side by side. For everyone to get along and be productive, employers and employees alike should understand exactly what has created the generations. Contrary to popular belief, it’s not age … necessarily. It’s generational reference points. And these points have shaped all of our values, attitudes and behaviors.

The reference points that determine each generation are significant events (involving people, places, things) and conditions (economics, labor, sociology) experienced during formative years. These points leave indelible impressions, change ways of life, alter values and beliefs, and create attitudes.

Take a moment to reflect upon the generational reference points—the pivotal experiences—of your own formative years:

- Did you grow up during a European war, experience the Great Depression and have a real ice box?
- Did you live through "drugs, sex and rock ‘n’ roll" and the civil rights movement? Were you watching on a black-and-white TV when Neil Armstrong took man’s first step on the moon?
- Did you participate in the women’s liberation movement? Were you a latchkey kid? Did you own a pet rock, wear a mood ring and watch Watergate on a color TV?
- Have you had a computer since you started kindergarten? Did you watch Rodney King’s beating on a flat-screen and learn that Waco is more than a city in Texas?

Each of these generational reference points has created distinct values and attitudes within us. The impact of these values and attitudes on behavior at work is unprecedented. Echoed throughout our nation’s workplaces are phrases like: They’re slackers! They have no work ethic! They think they’re entitled! Or inversely: They’re too old! They can’t relate! They have no idea what my life is like! Not only do these stereotypes cause conflict, they also limit our beliefs and understanding of the distinct strengths and benefits each generation brings to work.

Let’s take for example Jessica, a 27-year-old valued employee with energy and ideas to spare, who works for Henry, a 60-year-old project manager looking to retire in two years.

Thinking he was maximizing productive time, Henry began scheduling meetings before and after work hours. But Henry began noticing Jessica wasn’t “herself”—her energy was waning, and she wasn’t offering ideas as readily as before.
When confronted, Jessica explained that her job was impeding her ability to keep her life in balance. She had things to do in her “off” hours—early exercise, night classes and dinners with friends. Those things re-enthuse her, giving her energy to spawn ideas.

Realizing other team members may be feeling the same way, Henry moved the meetings back to work hours, and ultimately watched productivity soar among his entire team.

Awareness and understanding of the significant impact each generation’s reference points have on shaping lives are critical to anticipating the collision of values, attitudes and behavior toward work.

Here’s another example. Boss Bill hails from the Boomer generation, micromanaging everything. Employee Josh, a Gen-Xer, likes to know what’s expected of him but then be left to do his thing. Imagine the conflict when Bill continually interrupted Josh’s work with his excessive questions.

Ultimately, both Bill and Josh had to modify their styles, beginning with in-depth conversations about what they both require to be their most productive. They compromised by adding checkpoints, so Bill could feel confident the work was being accomplished, and Josh could do his work without constant interruption.

If you want to know more about generational gaps and symmetry, and how to maximize natural inclinations to increase productivity, attend Beyond the Generation Gap, Beyond the Collision at PestWorld. Not only will you trip down memory lane, you will learn how to appropriately hire, motivate and manage the four generations, so your company is more energized and profitable.

Mary Kausch belongs to a Casper generation and is St. Louis’ Generational Guru. She has helped Bridge the Gap for more than 13,000 employees across America, getting them Beyond the Collision! Her expertise with multigenerational workforces has helped employers and employees understand the dynamics of their workplaces. Mary knows what it takes for you and your company to simultaneously thrive. Feel free to contact Mary at 314-409-6622, mary@hretc.com or www.hretc.com, or follow her on Twitter @marykausch.
Driving is one of the most dangerous things we can do while at work. Vehicle crashes are a leading cause of both work related injuries and fatalities worldwide. Although some unsafe driving conditions can result from drivers that multi-task coupled with those that are constantly rushing, experience fatigue, or encounter other distractions behind the wheel that can be controlled, circumstances such as weather cannot be. It’s important for Pest Control companies to be proactive and take the correct steps to educate yourself or your drivers on adverse weather safety tips and provide proper training to help prevent collisions. In this article, we will discuss safety tips and procedures to avoid collisions in inclement weather.

Inclement weather can be tricky to drive in, especially when you’re driving in something unexpected like hail, sleet or torrential rain. When driving in inclement weather, it’s important to always take a defensive stance. These defensive driving tips for driving in inclement weather will help you to keep you and your vehicle safe.

Get your vehicle ready for storm season. Don’t wait until after the first sign of bad weather to have your battery, belts, hoses, radiator, oil, lights, brakes, tires, exhaust system, heater/defroster, wipers and ignition system checked. Inspect your tires each time you fill up the tank. Look for bulges and tread wear. Check air pressure frequently in winter climates as it decreases in cold weather. Keep your fuel tank sufficiently so that you can make it to a safe haven and avoid problems with frozen fuel systems. Make sure you have sufficient windshield washer fluid in the reservoir at all times. You should also have emergency supplies such as triangles, jumper cables, food and water in the vehicle. Make sure that all of your windows and mirrors are clean. Clear snow, ice and other debris from the roof, hood, and lights. After starting your vehicle, wait for the fog to clear from the interior of the windows so you will have good visibility all around.

Adjust your speed for the conditions that you are driving in. The slicker the conditions, the more speed needs to be adjusted. It is critical that tires retain firm contact with the road at all times. Increased speeds can cause hydroplaning and greatly lengthen required stopping distances.

Allow enough space between you and the car in front of you. When the road is slick or covered with snow you want to make sure that there’s enough room and time for you to brake or get out of the way when you need to. Giving yourself an out is a good idea and can be the difference between sliding to the shoulder and having a critical crash. It’s also a good idea to be conscious of the cars around you. Knowing if there’s a car behind you or to your sides can be important when deciding where to turn if you’re trying to avoid an accident.
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Use your lights and wipers. The number of people that refrain from doing this is alarming. Remembering to utilize safety features should be actions that you consider even before you step into the car.

Periodically checking your headlights to ensure that they are working properly is an important measure in driving safely in inclement weather. Driving with one headlight, or even worse, no headlights or taillights can be detrimental when other drivers are having a hard enough time seeing you through the rain, sleet or hail. Checking your headlights and turning them on, even if you see only a few droplets of rain, is a basic way to stay safe. In cases of heavy fog, remember to never use your bright lights and turn on fog lights if your vehicle is so equipped.

In cases of torrential rain and high winds, stop your car in a safe area away from trees and power lines. Do not drive through standing water when you do not know how deep it is. Stay in your car if you see lightening as a vehicle provides better protection from lightening than being out in the open. Do not try to outrun a tornado or other high wind types of storms. Whenever possible, exit your vehicle and move indoors to a safe location. If there are no buildings nearby, position yourself under a bridge, in a ditch or near a concrete structure such as a culvert whenever possible.

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JANUARY 17–18
2013 EASTERN CONFERENCE
Atlantic City, New Jersey

JANUARY 31– FEBRUARY 1
2013 SOUTHWESTERN CONFERENCE
Albuquerque, New Mexico

FEBRUARY 12–13
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