

◁ “In summary, the key answer to avoiding claims which may arise from undertaking pre-purchase inspections is to be exceptionally thorough ... as thorough as allowed by circumstances and the willingness of the vendor to move materials or visual impediments ... and carefully and precisely note not only what was observed but why – ideally with back-up evidence, such as photographs – certain aspects of the premises could not be thoroughly inspected and investigated.

“Importantly, if a claim is made, about damage (for instance, termites) to areas which could not be investigated and which were carefully noted in the report, do not admit liability or make any offers which may imply liability.

“If you prepare a professional report, stick by it, and refer the claim with all your evidence, to your insurer,” he said.

Space within this report does not allow us to go into detail about the presentations made by some of Australia’s leading authorities on termite management, general pest management and building inspections. Suffice to say delegates often had to make some hard choices about which sessions to attend because all of the presentations were of the highest calibre.

And suffice to say, those who attended the conference came away with a swag of knowledge about their profession which will enable them to better manage risks to their business and themselves and to build even stronger and more prosperous pest management operations. ■



NEW TECHNOLOGY DRIVES EFFICIENCY

Striving for efficiency and, with it, moving towards a paperless or at least minimal paper office, has driven one of Sydney’s leading pest management companies to not just adopt but embrace new age, customised, service industry software.

Professional Pest Manager (PPM) first covered Ant-Eater Environmental Services way back in 2002 when we talked, largely, about the company’s innovative approaches to promoting professionalism and staff training.

We didn’t know it at the time, but as Ant-Eater was working on refining its technical muscle and service delivery, it was also exploring a new approach to managing its business using digital technology.

At the core of Ant-Eater’s digital adventure, since 1999, has been ServicePRO service industry software, the brainchild of computer programmer, **Keverk Temisgian**.

From its earliest incarnation, ServicePRO has incorporated the key



Dion Alderton (left) presents the winning trip certificate to Termguard’s Neil Matthews.

HEADING FOR HAWAII

Termguard Melbourne has taken out the coveted prize of a trip to attend the PestWorld NPMA – AEPMA Conference in Hawaii donated by Ensystem as part of its recent promotional competition.

Ensystem’s **Dion Alderton** said the prize was presented to Termguard Melbourne’s general manager, **Neil Matthews**.

Neil Matthews said he was “very pleased to win the competition and had every confidence in using Ensystem products”.

However, due to prearranged personal commitments, Neil was unable to attend the conference in Hawaii and nominated Termguard group general manager, **Alan Walker** to attend in his place.

“I know it will be great conference and although I would love to be able to attend I’m glad Alan will be there to fly the flag for Termguard,” Neil said.

Left:
Simon and Kevork Temisgian work through hand-held technology with Customer Service Manager, Annalyn Gulapa.

Right:
Ant-Eater Business Manager, Simon Lean.

elements of pest management industry business management including job booking and scheduling, vehicle and technician tasking and routing, job quoting and costing, and report writing. Before long, it also provided a barcode reading and report writing capability.

The essence of ServicePRO has always been about enabling technicians to become more efficient and independent by using specially programmed office-based computers and hand-held devices to track and manage pest managers' time and report on and sign off on both inspection and treatment jobs.

Over the years, while ServicePRO has evolved to take advantage of wireless connectivity and internet-based functionality, the core software continues to deliver in each of the



original areas of service industry management.

Ant-Eater director and business manager, **Simon Lean**, said he and his team take some credit for the way ServicePRO has developed and evolved. And Kevork Temisgian agrees.

"What has always set Temisoft apart from other software providers is the

degree to which it has been tailored to the specific and exacting needs of pest managers.

"And, we have only been able to learn about and program to meet those needs because we have such a close working relationship with the people who use our products," Kevork said.

"We have always asked our customers what they wanted, what they needed, and what they'd like to see, and then set about designing and delivering programs which would do those jobs," he said.

"And, we've continued to work with our customers, not just training them and guiding them, but evaluating performance and always being on tap to listen to suggestions and ideas to make a good system even better.

"That's why Simon Lean, his co-director, **Graham Williamson**, and Ant-Eater's growing team of technical and office staff ... like the managers and staff of all our other clients ... have become as much a part of



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◁ on-going software development as our own programmers,” Kevork said.

Today, with Temisoft’s help, Ant-Eater is embarking on the next exciting phase of ServicePRO’s development by introducing wireless-based, internet-driven connectivity for its field force of 18 skilled and experienced technicians.

The new instant access, remote communication system is officially called ‘ServicePRO Internet Dispatcher’ but is already becoming more commonly referred to as SPID.

Simon Lean believes that once SPID is fully up and running, Ant-Eater technicians will no longer have to call in to the office to pick up paperwork or SD cards for jobs for the following days or have to call back to the office to download completed jobs and reports.

Instead, wherever they may be across Greater Sydney, they will simply hit ‘send’ or ‘receive’ on their wireless-connected hand held unit ... and onto the next job.

“Importantly, modern commercial pest management requires pest managers to be highly efficient, especially in the key areas of staff and equipment deployment, scheduling, costing, and reporting,” Simon said.

“And, as well as being efficient at booking in jobs, our customer service staff need to know when to remind customers about upcoming services and be able to quickly determine what reports and invoices are required for each customer and in what form they are required.

“From day one, we’ve relied on ServicePRO to help us handle these business management issues. And, as the software has evolved, we have found that it has enabled us to do more business and do it better.

“For instance, with ServicePRO, our customer service team can log the jobs in and determine immediately if they are on contracts or on regular service schedules.

“And, it’s not just for commercial work. Using ServicePRO, we never miss out on carrying out termite monitoring and baiting system checks or scheduled services,” Simon said.

While ServicePRO provides more than adequate rigour, it also enables and facilitates business management flexibility.



Ant-Eater’s Customer Service Manager, Annalyn Gulapa with typical SPID main office screen.

“When someone rings up and wants something done immediately, our staff use ServicePRO to call up where all our people are and when they can be made available. It certainly makes routing and scheduling easier,” Simon said.

Until now, Ant-Eater’s hand helds (used for job processing, inspection and other report writing, quote preparation and also as bar code readers) have not had wireless connectivity.

“With these units, the technicians come in to the office daily or at least every few days to pick up (upload) their jobs for the next few days onto the hand helds and also to download their reports to the office computers.

“However, once we move over to the wireless system, they will only have to come back here to pick up chemicals or other supplies because everything else (current and upcoming jobs and reports and quotes) gets sent or received at the click of a button,” Simon said.

The more things change ...

At the same time as Ant-Eater has been trialling the wireless based SPID system for its technicians on the road, the company has also moved to take advantage of ServicePRO’s new internet-driven system of database management, ‘ServicePRO On-Line’ (SPOL), running ‘on remote’, over the internet.

Instead of being held and processed on-site, with SPOL, client data is stored on secure remote sites around Australia, accessible in real time, on

demand, 24 hours a day, with no worries about having to do backups or losing data.

All that is required to work with the new SPOL is wireless, cable or copper wire (ADSL) internet connection.

“Part of the reason we switched over – from having all our data stored in our server on-site and having the system running from our office – was we got burned ... badly ... by our server crashing and, as a result, having to re-input some of our data,” Simon said.

“We thought we were bullet proof. But, we found we only had to have a power brown out or complete failure and things could really go amiss.

“When the idea of having our data stored by somebody else, off site, was first put to us, we had concerns, because we would be handing over control to a third party.

“But, when we looked into it closely, we concluded we’d be far safer, without the need to worry about doing backups.

“It means we don’t have to worry about power failures and brownouts. If the power goes down, we can still get onto the internet via our battery-charged laptops which means, we can still function – booking in services and monitoring jobs – if all the regular office equipment goes down,” Simon said.

Since “having bitten the bullet and gone for SPOL”, Simon said Ant Eater has only ever gone ‘off the air’ when Telstra suffered a nation-wide outage.

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"Other incidents do occur if an internet connection either between us and the internet or ServicePRO and the server centre become slow or do not function. It is at these times you need the ServicePRO team to rectify any issues.

"Compared with the crashes we used to have with our own system, SPOL has been, reliable with very few issues that cannot be overcome in a short time," Simon said.

"Importantly, wherever we are and whatever we're doing, we know everything is backed up, safe and secure, and that we can get our data, 24/7," he said.

"And, as part of the deal, Temisoft ensures that program updates are automatically built in, after full throttle testing, generally without any involvement from us.

"Today, I guess our most precious piece of hardware is our business quality Cisco router, which gives us contact with the internet server and also with our remote (wireless connected) field team."

Kevork Temisgian said the main dedicated (sub contracted) SPOL server is located in a major data centre in Brisbane and is replicated across a number of other centres.

"The server is massive, with far more capacity than we will need for a long time," Kevork said.

"And, it is super secure. Nobody other than those who are specifically authorised to do so gets to see or use their data and work on their system," he said.

Simon Lean described Ant-Eater's experience transferring over to SPOL as "relatively painless".

"The people in the office would hardly have known if they hadn't been told," he said.

"It was all done over a weekend ... everything backed up and transferred up the line to the remote server over the weekend so we were all systems go on Monday.

"And, everything was tried out earlier using a testing program so all the staff could see what it was like and how it would work, so they were familiar with it before kick off.

"Overall, while we were all more than happy with how ServicePRO was working for us under our own roof, the team regards the functionality of SPOL is even better since being run over the internet."

Of particular benefit to Ant-Eater has been the support it has received from Temisoft.

"They are working on improving the program the whole time. And, the enhancements that are available are always good enhancements," Simon said.

"If you have an issue and you need to ring them up, they are always there, on the spot.

"Most of the time, if something isn't working right, we have found it is more than often a problem at our end ... something we haven't been doing right. But, they have always been there to work us through any teething issues, without fuss, whenever we need them.

"Importantly, if and when a problem does arise, Temisoft can bring our screens up on theirs and we can go through it with them, there and then. The same applies to the hand helds. All our screens can be seen, when we want them to be, and worked through by a Temisoft technician," he said.

User friendliness

One of the keys to Ant-Eater's embracing of ServicePRO and, now, SPOL has been and continues to be the system's user friendliness, especially to technicians and customer support staff.

"As managers, we are simply looking for ways in which our service staff can be comfortable in improving their overall efficiency and the cost-effectiveness of our management and administration," he said.

And this is where the move to a paperless or paper-minimal office comes in, big time.

"We are doing our best to get rid of excessive paper from the office," Simon said.

"And, we are also encouraging our clients to do likewise ... to accept emailed reports and invoices. But some will continue to want real paper for some time, I suspect. And, we have to honour those requests," he said.

"In part, it's about saving trees. But, for our business, it is even more about saving and making the best use of our time," Simon said. ■

iPAD BLOWS THEM AWAY

In the next issue of *Professional Pest Manager*, we will feature a look at how ServicePRO is being adapted to the latest and hottest thing in hand-held digital technology: the Apple iPad.

At the recent RAPID Solutions Conference on the Gold Coast, **Kevork Temisgian** had his new iPad hooked up (via internet) to SPID ('ServicePRO Internet Dispatcher') to show pest managers and building inspectors attending the event how it may look and work.

"It is still only a prototype at this stage," Kevork said.

"But the brilliant, crystal clear graphics and other elements of the on-screen, access-at-a-touch interface blew everyone away.

"Being able to instantly zoom into and move around parts of a building or floor plan and document report findings in real time was both mind bending and mind blowing for every pest management technician who came by our stand to check it out.

"We will be flat out over the next few months working up and adapting our software for use on the iPad and other similar devices which we expect to come onto the market before the end of the year.

"SPID for the iPad will see in what we expect to become something of a revolution in on-the-job digital reporting and task management technology"



(Picture for illustrative purposes only)