

# Not just what you manage, but how

When Jenny and Robert McPherson took up a franchise in the Elite Maintenance Services group in 1984, they envisaged operating a carpet dry-cleaning company, pure and simple.

Wrong! Today, they and their extended family run two Elite franchises: the original business at Burleigh Heads on the Queensland Gold Coast, and another based in the southern Brisbane suburb of Loganholme.

Recently, Jenny and Robert's daughter, Julia, and her husband, Tim, bought the Loganholme pest management franchise and now own and operate it outright, employing two technicians, as well as Tim.

Although Elite continues to provide a carpet cleaning service, its main business, in Queensland's widely acknowledged "termite heaven", is now pest management.

Elite Burleigh employs eight, including Robert and Jenny and Robert's other son-in-law, George Pullen (husband of daughter, Rebecca).

Rebecca has major responsibility for office administration and systems management at Burleigh while Julia handles business administration at Loganholme.

From day one, however, Jenny and Robert decided they would only succeed if they were not only different but seen to be different.

As a result, Elite Burleigh and Elite Loganholme have differentiated themselves on a number of fronts, not the least being the way they have adopted and incorporated their own pest management-specific business management system.

"By February, 1985, we realised a lot of people wanted us to handle pest management. So, we approached Garrards who willingly promised to support us and help set us up," Jenny said.

As a matter of priority, Robert set about obtaining his licence, through the Queensland Department of Health and, after a quick search, found and employed a licensed operator.

Obtaining a licence back in the 1980s was, according to Jenny, fairly basic; "... just a written test, mainly on urban pest control and a little on using arsenic trioxide dust on termites".

## Then came the differentiation

"We found a lot of pest managers had become renowned for slackness

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Rebecca Pullen (left) with her mother and father, Jenny and Robert McPherson.

and not turning up on time. And few, if any, had signwritten vehicles or uniforms. So we figured we could steal a march by being totally professional and reliable," Jenny said.

"Right from the start, if we told a client we'd be there at a certain time, we made sure we were there, on time. And, we also set out to give our clients the best possible service.

"We quickly built ourselves a reputation. And, we've used that reputation to build our business."

Elite has also been a pioneer in professional training and team development.

"We've always put a lot of time and money into attending seminars and training sessions to ensure all of us continue to upgrade our skills, knowledge and credentials," Jenny said.

"And we tend to lead from the front, with Robert, Tim and George all having Certificate IV qualifications in building and asset management," she said.

### Business challenge

Of course, having highly trained, skilled and experienced technicians has been only part of the answer to providing high level, value-added service. Almost from day one, Jenny and Robert found their continually grow-

ing client base and diverse business made booking jobs, job scheduling, job costing, and inspection reporting a major challenge.

"Until 2000, we were doing all our bookings and general business management manually using books and a card system," Jenny said.

"It was what I literally grew up with. It was all I knew.

"However, when Rebecca, came into the business, she felt she could help us become a lot more efficient and productive with a computer-based management system."

Jenny and Robert had actually been talking with Kevork Temisgian, on and off, ever since he first started Temisoft in 1996.

"Back then, though, because my computer skills were practically non-existent, the idea of a computer based management system seemed too scary. In hindsight, this was. But, when Rebecca joined us in 2000, it was like a breath of fresh air," Jenny said.

"With Kevork's help, Rebecca quickly learned how to make it all work for us."

The core of the Elite business management system is Temisoft's ServicePRO, a customised suite of interconnected, complementary software modules designed to provide a

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◁ total business management tool for pest managers.

ServicePRO coordinates all Elite's job scheduling, technician tasking, client recording, contact reminders, and – using RAPID Solutions' paperwork – pest management reporting.

ServicePRO also generates all Elite's sales reports and, through its interface with its MYOB accounting package, invoices and financial data.

The software also provides invaluable information about all Elite's clients and staff, measuring and analysing individual performance and productivity.

"ServicePRO also helps manage our Exterra monitoring and baiting systems, so we don't miss follow-up inspections and that we always check every installation," Rebecca said.

"It also helps ensure we bill appropriately for every service."

Elite particularly relies on ServicePRO's live booking system which Rebecca says is far more reliable and faster than "Mum's old manual system".

"We can see, at the click of a mouse, what our people are doing ... from Ormeau to Mullumbimby. If an urgent job comes up, it's easy to see which technician is best placed to handle it without the risk of double booking," she said.

"When a client calls, we just go into the booking calendar and pull up whatever day and time of day suits them.

"One precaution we take ... because we have at least three of us taking bookings at any one time over five phone lines ... is to always refresh our screens before we confirm an appointment, to make sure another team members hasn't jumped in on the slot we want.

"Existing customers come up easily on screen by typing in the first part of their address. This allows us to easily and quickly check if there is anything else we ought to be looking for or suggesting," she said.

Entering new customer data ... contact details and special requests ... is, according to Rebecca, just as easy.

"And, because we do carpet cleaning as well as pest management, we can easily add extra services under special job lines within each customer screen," she said.

Rebecca said ServicePRO keeps



Kevork Temisgjan (left) and Elite – a strong team.

track on which suburbs technicians are working or scheduled to work and allows Elite to preset or embed travel times as well as average task times for each technician for different types of work.

"Of course, if for one reason or other, a technician is tied up on a particular job for a bit longer than normal, we need to manage the flow-on effects. Once a technician advises he is running late, for whatever reason, we simply move his other jobs along in the queue, on screen, bring up all the affected customers, and then alert them to any delays and make our apologies ... or reschedule if it is not convenient.

"ServicePRO also enables us to easily tag customers. If any need special attention, the technician can be easily alerted as to what to do or look out for."

Rebecca said ServicePRO also enables Elite to measure and monitor productivity and performance, on a whole of company basis, by business type, and for each technician.

"We can see all the operators, measure how much an hour they are earning, and what their daily target is. That is also really good booking-wise because we can go in and make sure they haven't been allocated too much work over a given time frame ... or too little.

"And, at the end of the day, we can easily see how much work was booked; what type of work ... pest management and carpet cleaning ... how long it took; and how much we have taken ... all the figures we need for managing the business," Rebecca said.

On top of all that, ServicePRO's advertising mode also allows Elite to instantly find out where all its jobs have come from.

Rebecca, Jenny and the team say they are looking forward to the next step, "going live on line with our technicians, via their 'hand-helds' using GSM".

"This will make life even easier for all of us ... and more productive and profitable," Rebecca said.

"Once we are all online and connected to our field team via their hand-helds, we won't have to wait until they're back in the office. We'll be able to upload all client and job information, job sheets, and schedules from the office onto each of the technician's PDAs. And the guys will also be using hand-helds both to prepare and download their reports, so client data will be immediately updated on our master files."

But, sadly, all that has had to be put on hold. A few days before *Professional Pest Manager* (PPM) visited Elite, their entire shipment of hand-helds (PDAs) were stolen during a break-in, and now have to be replaced.

"We were all ready to go when we had the break-in," Rebecca said.

"George and I had even tested one of the PDA units out to an inspection of 17 home units, to test the system and make sure everything worked and ready to roll. But now we have to wait until the new units turn up."

### Customised solution

Over the past few months, Rebecca has been working with Kevork to customise their electronic ▷



◁ report paperwork to better reflect and meet Elite's special requirements and to personalise how their new material will look and work.

"It is critical, of course, that any modifications we make to the core RAPIDS' reporting paperwork also meets RAPIDS' needs and complies with all the relevant standards. So RAPIDS have also been involved in this development," she said.

"But that is the beauty of ServicePRO. It is so flexible, as well as being, at the same time, fully compliant. Technicians will not be able to miss completing even one element of a report because ServicePRO's Report Writer checklist simply will not let them.

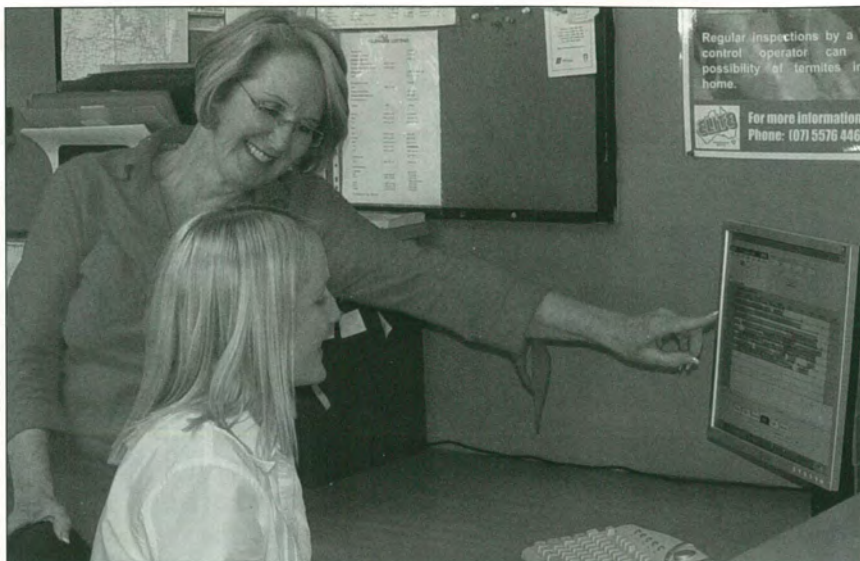
"And, then, once the boys note everything they need to report, they will, in effect, email it back to the office where the girls will check it to make sure all the details are correct. Then we can either email it or post it back to the client, ... I can't wait!"

### Security

But what about security? After all, Elite has only just suffered a break-in.

"Before we introduced computerised management, I have to say we were worried about what might happen if the system went down, or we had a fire or a break-in," Jenny said.

"But Kevork has helped us install



Customer details, no longer on the cards.

very strong backup systems. Part of this is a dual server with a mirror drive, so, if the first drive fails, we have a complete copy to which we can flick over very easily.

"We also back up by automatically burning each day's records and our actual database onto CDs every afternoon and I take these home with me.

"The other good thing is that I can access the system from home. We have the phones diverted through to home at 5pm every day. Some of our customers don't get home until six o'clock and they need to talk to us. This off site access, from home, allows us to provide customers with 24 hour a day service or support if necessary.

"I can go in now and make a booking or change a booking or whatever

we need to do. So that is really excellent, because I like to be able to see what is going on, even on the weekend. I have a live screen via the Internet which is just so easy to use," she said.

In coming months, PPM will report on how the new mobile system is working for Elite.

In the meantime, if a shady individual offers you some cheap PDAs in new condition, don't touch them. They could be very very hot! ■



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## 2006 HACCP Conference

Over 200 delegates involved in food safety from a range of industries, including manufacturing, government, food service, certification, and pest management attended the 2006 Australian HACCP Conference.

The three day conference, billed by Advancing Food Safety Pty Ltd as "the largest annual discussion forum of its kind in the Asia Pacific for all food industry professionals involved in food safety" included training sessions on food microbiology, product recalls, HACCP, and an interactive workshop on food forensics.

Some of the topics covered in papers presented by a wide range of experts from Australia and overseas were: avian influenza; food borne outbreaks and pathogens; National Food Safety Auditor Competencies; X-ray inspection; metal detection; and managing allergens.

For information about the upcoming 2007 conference, please email Michelle Tolhurst at Advancing Food Safety - [conference@haccptown.com](mailto:conference@haccptown.com)