



The 2009 Carpet Cleaning Industry Leaders Review

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Horrigan Cleaners Inc. has been in business for so long that it can be said the company has "seen it all." Having no interest in becoming a laborer for the local furniture factories, company founder Thomas C. Horrigan decided to go into business for himself. It was 1921 when Horrigan purchased a small dry-cleaning operation. The establishment was located in downtown Gardner, MA. Thomas was joined by his sister at their mother's request and she retired some 50 years later.

A new dry-cleaning plant was built in 1928 behind the Horrigan family home. The business continued to do well and, in the mid 1940s, Horrigan's only child, Thomas J. Horrigan, joined the company after returning home from the war. One of Thomas J's first decisions was to consolidate the business into one location. In 1948, the downtown building was purchased and most of the equipment was updated, including a new dry-cleaning machine that used perchlorethelene solvent. The business was incorporated in 1952.

Horrigan Cleaners Inc. did well through the 1950s and 1960s and began to diversify into other areas of the cleaning industry, including on-location carpet cleaning. Diversification became necessary as Thomas J. and his wife Frances became the proud parents of six children.

The Gardner, MA, cleaning company is now under the current ownership of Mike, Tim and Patrick Horrigan, and has 20 employees that work in a 10,000-square-foot dry cleaning and rug cleaning facility with revenues in excess of \$1,000,000 a year.

Pathway to success

The Horrigan secret to success is and always has been uncompromising quality wrapped up in uncompromising customer service.

Thomas J's famous line to his sons was always: "Never leave a job if you feel someone else could come in and do a better job." Quality work and top-notch customer service is hardly a secret, but the Horrigan family found it is imperative to the success of its company and it seems to be working since they are celebrating their 87th year in business. Horrigan Cleaners has found that there is no panacea for success. To them, success is a list of ingredients which make up the recipe for success. The list includes a strong and dedicated staff, ongoing education for owners as well as employees, keeping up with the ever-changing industry and networking with peers. Being involved in the various trade organizations has been critical to company success.

Success has also occurred due to planned and controlled growth with diversification when the opportunity presented itself. Horrigan Cleaners has paid attention to customer needs and has risen to the challenge by putting the right people in the right position.

Overcoming challenges

Probably the company's largest challenge in recent years was the lack of ability to grow the company from its old location. The previous facility lacked both space and accessibility. Horrigan Cleaners overcame this challenge by building a state-of-the-art plant that has helped the company to grow and become far more efficient. It was a "nerve racking" decision since the expense was considerable. It was a decision, however, that needed to be made; the result was far better than they had anticipated.

One of the ongoing challenges is being involved in a family business. Fortunately, all involved do get along, but many times it feels like they are running a "three-headed monster" of a company. The Horrigan brothers have been able to overcome these issues with the help of an outside business coach. He continually helps them to see the bigger picture and to stay focused on what's most important.

Advice that works

Horrigan Cleaners says that it is important to get outside influence. The use of a business coach helped the company see what is important in business and to become more focused and therefore more successful. Other advice the three Horrigan brothers offer is to get above the chaos and direct traffic. Hire good people to do the job and then allow them to do it. Work with a plan. Set monthly sales and spending goals. Take the time in January when business may be slow and set up your plan for the entire year. Company meetings that help Horrigan Cleaners continue to grow and succeed include using several whiteboards to record ideas that the company receives from various industry resources.

Often when an idea is written down and seen, it may take a week to more than a year to implement. But, it's always there reminding you of what to do when you have opportunity to implement.

Marketing tips

Horrigan Cleaners has been in business for 87 years and you'd think every potential client knows about them. In reality, they struggle like a five-year-old business to stay in front of the customer. Adopt the philosophy that you're the new guy on the block and advertise to survive. They spend approximately 70 percent of the company advertising budget marketing to existing clients.

Horrigan Cleaners sends out quarterly postcards containing different offers, as well as yearly service reminders. For prospect marketing, the company has identified a specific group of people by age, income, ZIP code and personal interests, and uses a direct-mail campaign of eight mailers throughout the year.

Horrigan Cleaners has just begun a radio advertising campaign and have experienced decent response. They plan to invest more dollars into Internet marketing and have exploited as many free opportunities as possible with search providers such as Google.