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ETA...

*Outback*

# SUCCESS

Clean service, new products  
fuel Viking Rentals' growth

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# MICRO PRO

Work is a family affair for  
California's A+ Portables

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# TUFF-JON

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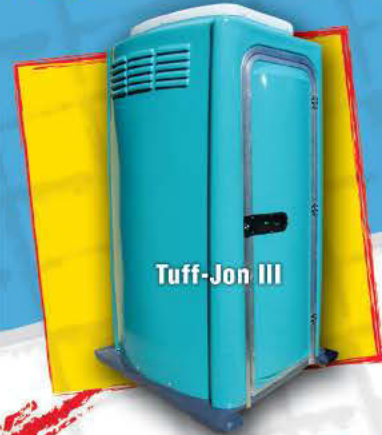
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# PRO

PORTABLE RESTROOM OPERATOR

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## Beware of Content Theft

**WHEN YOU BUILD OR UPDATE YOUR WEBSITE OR CREATE OTHER MARKETING MATERIALS, MAKE SURE YOU HAVE PERMISSION TO USE THE CONTENT YOU POST**

By Jim Kneiszel

**R**ecently I was organizing a magazine story when the owner of the featured contracting company sent me photos from a special event he was serving. Some of the photos looked like they were taken by a professional photographer, so I asked the contractor where they came from.

"I give you permission to use all the photos; they were pulled off the Internet. The World Wide Web is public to all," he wrote back in an email.

I was stunned at this response. Did this gentleman - obviously an intelligent business owner - really believe that anything he grabbed from a website was his to take and share regardless of scope or limitation? His nonchalance and the ease with which photos, stories and the like can be grabbed off the Internet for personal consumption make me wonder if his attitude is widely held in the industry.

### BE WEB WISE

Practically every company working in the portable sanitation industry today has developed a website, and a quality website requires quality content. Just like websites, other marketing materials are becoming more sophisticated as contractors vie for attention from potential customers. Brochures, graphics on the side of service vehicles, advertisements in newspapers, magazines and trade journals ... they all need content to become effective tools to build your business.

The big question is how you develop that content. Maybe you do all the legwork yourself, taking photos of your equipment inventory, writing up descriptions for the types of services you offer and building a website through free or low-cost templates available online. Perhaps you go as far as hiring a local photographer to shoot a team photo for the front page of your website or you hire a professional website developer to build your site.

Or like the contractor described above, do you feel like anything you find on the Internet is fair game to be used for content on your website? Maybe you've pulled a story or a photo that mentions your company and patched it into your website? Or maybe to add some color and interest to the site, you've pulled a photo or artwork from a random website for use on your own?

Your business is operating vacuum trucks and helping customers with their portable sanitation needs. Your bread and butter is not working out the details of what you can or can't put on your website or the side of your truck. But you still need to understand what is permissible in the world of content - whether it is the written word, photos or artwork - to avoid getting into trouble. So I've decided to write about a few areas where I could imagine PROs innocently stumbling into a beehive of legal entanglements over misused content.

### LAWYERS WITHOUT BORDERS

The important rule of thumb is that just because you found it on the Internet doesn't mean you can use it for any purpose. Sure, passing along a joke or a funny photo to a friend is not likely a cause for concern. But as soon as you use content generated by someone else to promote your profit-making business, you might be in for a stern email or a threat of litigation.

Writers, artists, photographers and corporations who employ creative teams are generally unwilling to share what they produce with anyone if they're not getting paid for it. They take a dim view of someone taking their work to generate profit the same way you would feel about providing service for a customer and then not receiving payment.

This is especially a concern if you repurpose the content of a major corporation with deep pockets, and some are notoriously relentless about going after the smallest violations with impunity. The Walt Disney Co., for example, takes copyright infringement seriously, as it frequently pursues companies that use images of its trademarked cartoon characters for advertising purposes. Companies like Disney employ lawyers to protect their intellectual property and they are not shy about doing their job.

And with the Internet, the world is getting smaller and it's getting easier for content producers to find the most minor instances of content theft. You might think it's OK to "borrow" a photo or a logo found on an Internet search so long as it's just to help your small business in your hometown. Nobody will notice or care, right? Wrong.

---

## TECHNOLOGY HAS MADE IT EASY TO DRAG A PHOTO OFF SOMEONE'S WEBSITE AND DROP IT INTO A WEB LAYOUT OR ONTO A COMPANY ADVERTISEMENT OR NEWSLETTER. BUT JUST BECAUSE IT'S EASY DOESN'T MEAN IT'S LEGAL.

---

If you know you're using something without permission, don't build your entire marketing program around that borrowed catchphrase or image. You might find yourself retooling your entire marketing program at great cost to avoid legal trouble.

Here are a few places where you should take great care to avoid using content without permission:

## Truck graphics

Did you ever see the Warner Bros. cartoon character Pepe' LePew emblazoned on the side of a portable restroom service truck? I have. While it might be legal - though some might say of questionable taste - to paint a generic skunk on the back of a truck, you might run into some trouble if Warner Bros. can show a judge that the skunk looks quite a bit like its Pepe'. If you hire a sign company or a graphic artist to design and decal your service vehicles, make sure they have secured permission to reproduce a photo or known character before you drive off the lot.

## Logos

The Nike swoosh is an incredibly simple piece of artwork, but that belies the fact that creating corporate logos is big business. As you search for effective ways to brand your business, make sure your new logo doesn't bear a close resemblance to one you've seen on TV, in magazines or on the Internet.

Hiring a professional graphic artist to produce a logo is a good suggestion for two reasons: First, a well-executed logo will build your professional image and carry your company forward for many years, paying for itself over and over again. Secondly, graphic artists are well attuned to the logo landscape, meaning they'll help you avoid closely duplicating a logo used by another company.

## Photos, music, stories and slogans

While it's not universal, most content you see on the Internet is not free to reproduce as you wish. Technology has made it easy to drag a photo off someone's website and drop it into a Web layout or onto a company advertisement or newsletter. But just because it's easy doesn't mean it's legal. Before you simply take something off a website, ask for permission to reuse the content.

A photographer, writer or artist might have a mechanism in place to pay a small licensing fee for permission to use their content. If you want to find a generic photo or drawing to illustrate something on your website, for instance, there are dozens of clip art and stock photography websites that make a wide range of content available for minimal fees.

If you want something original, look around your hometown for a writer, photographer or artist to produce something unique and memorable. You'll be supporting a local business, and the dollars you spend on your own content now could be money saved from legal challenges down the road. ■

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# Refuse to Engage in a Price War

**DON'T TAKE THE BAIT WHEN A PRICE-SLASHING COMPETITOR FLOODS THE MARKET WITH PORTABLE RESTROOM SERVICE DEALS THAT ARE TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE**

By Judy Kneiszel

Don't think I'm going out on a limb to assume you have not randomly set your prices. I'm going to assume you've based your prices on your cost of doing business plus enough profit to make it worth your while to get out of bed and come to work every day.

And because your prices are based on something real, it is unrealistic to expect you to drastically reduce them. So what do you do when a competitor starts advertising that they'll do what you do for considerably less money? Do you shout, "this means war!" and set your prices lower than theirs?

## **PRICE WARS LOWER VALUE FOR EVERYONE**

Price wars between competitors hurt everyone because they destroy the perceived value of what you do. If you think you can compete by cutting prices for a short time until you win the pricing battle, remember that customers will feel cheated if you return to your previous levels. For example, you know that \$1 burger on the fast-food value menu? Remember when it was \$1.49? I'll bet you'd feel ripped off if the price of that same burger went back up to \$1.49 tomorrow, even though you paid that much for it a few years ago. You now perceive that it's worth only \$1. Customers will apply that same thought process to your business. If you cut your prices by 20 percent, your service will be viewed as being worth 20 percent less, and that will be hard to overcome in the future.

**REMEMBER, BY CUTTING PRICES TIT-FOR-TAT IN A PRICE WAR YOU ARE EITHER ACKNOWLEDGING THAT YOUR PRICING WAS UNFAIR TO BEGIN WITH OR THAT YOU ARE WILLING TO WORK FOR FREE. INSTEAD, FIND A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE ASIDE FROM PRICE AND PROMOTE IT.**

## **AVOID BEING PULLED INTO A PRICE WAR**

We hear from readers on this topic frequently, and understand how frustrating it is. One day a PRO is working away, happily serving satisfied customers, paying the staff, maintaining the equipment, paying the bills and making a little bit of money. The next day, a previously satisfied customer informs you that Joe Blow's Portable Restrooms just blew into town and offered service at half of what you're charging. What do you do?

If you panic and announce you'll beat anybody's price, you risk becoming a non-profit company and your labor will become volunteer hours. Ask yourself how long you'd want to keep that up?

It's a hard piece of advice to follow when you see your customers migrating to the competition, but don't panic and start slashing prices. Give the aggressor time to shoot himself (or herself) in the foot. If you can't make it on razor thin margins, neither can they. Be there to pick up the pieces (and customers) when they go out of business.

That doesn't mean you should sit back and do nothing. When the competition undercuts your prices, consider taking the following steps:

**Don't overreact.** Maybe the competition enacted a temporary special offer because they are in desperate need of cash. Wait and watch to see if it's going to last.

**Don't aid the enemy.** If suddenly you are getting a barrage of phone calls asking price-only questions, suspect your territory is being "scouted" and stop giving out pricing information on the phone without details regarding a specific job.

**Offer more.** Align your business with a complementary service like a wedding planner or event planner or offer additional services yourself, like portable fencing. "One-stop shopping" has value to people.

**Be the expert.** Place ads touting your customer service or offer your expertise to the media. Stress that you offer handicapped accessible restrooms, keep all your restrooms sparkling clean and that your restrooms smell great. Explain how your company disposes of waste in a legal, sanitary way. You are not saying the competition doesn't do these things, but adding value to your services for people who appreciate clean restrooms and earth-friendly practices. The competition is only talking about price, so people who care about price alone are the only ones they are reaching.

**Ramp up customer service and tout it.** Don't cut back on service or buy lower-quality supplies to save a few pennies during this crisis. Rather, stress to customers how you provide impeccable service and use only the highest quality cleaning, deodorizing and paper products.

**Cut prices judiciously.** If you feel you have to cut prices, do it with discretion and make it easily reversible. An example would be limited-time offers, coupons or special pricing for new customers only.

**Build loyalty.** Make switching to the competition undesirable by starting a loyalty program. If customers are in the process of building up points toward getting something free or at a reduced price they are less likely to leave and lose what they've earned.



**Add value.** Find something your business can add to stand out in the marketplace. Be the most unique business in the category.

**Build your brand.** Push your brand name in the market. Brand name businesses stand stronger in a price war. If your name is the first one to pop into someone's head, they'll call you first and then you can sell your service rather than compete with the competition's lowball price.

**GET CREATIVE**

There are other creative ways to fight price battles. We heard of one company that fought back against an aggressive price-slashing competitor by creating a variety of alternate business names and listing them all in the Yellow Pages. Why? When the phone rang five times in a row asking about prices, they could be sure the customer calling cared about price and price alone, and they could subsequently decide not to do business with that customer. Or, if the customer called the five different "companies" and got the same price quote five times, they might be convinced that the price quoted was the going rate for that area and not quibble about paying it. It seems like a lot of effort, but it was worth it to this particular company.

Remember, by cutting prices tit-for-tat in a price war you are either acknowledging that your pricing was unfair to begin with or that you are willing to work for free. Instead, find a competitive advantage aside from price and promote it. A steakhouse does not add a dollar menu just because the fast-food place across the street does. It touts higher quality offerings and service. Differentiate yourself and focus your marketing promotions on those advantages. It could make you a stronger, more profitable company in the long run.

If you've found yourself caught in a price war, tell us what happened and how you responded. Email your price war battle stories to editor@promonthly.com. ■



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# Outback

# SUCCESS

**PROVIDING “DUNNIES WITH DIGNITY,” VIKING RENTALS SPREADS ITS MESSAGE OF QUALITY SERVICE AND AN EXPANDED SERVICE MENU ACROSS AUSTRALIA**

By Ken Wysocky

In some ways, the portable restroom industry is different in Australia. Restrooms, for instance, are called “dunnies.” Restroom trailers are known as “blocks.” And virtually all dunnies feature flush toilets – no drop-tanks or “straight drops,” in Down Under lingo, are allowed in the country.

But something is common to the Australian and U.S. markets: Offering great customer service and clean restrooms – along with providing diversified services – remains a tried-and-true growth formula. For evidence, look no farther than Viking Rentals, headquartered in Brisbane.

The numbers speak for themselves. When co-owner Jim Noort chucked a career as a patent-search consultant and founded the company in 2006, he was the sole employee and owned one service truck and 130 restrooms.

“I drove the truck with one hand, used a mobile phone in the other hand and used a third hand to take orders in a notebook,” he jokes. A year later, he had seven employees and 700 restrooms.

Today, driven by a series of strategic acquisitions and regional expansion, the company – whose slogan is “Dunnies with Dignity” – is a major player in Australia. Viking Rentals employs 35 people, and owns 35 vacuum trucks, mostly Fuso and Isuzus with tank sizes ranging from



The Brisbane-based crew of Viking Rentals assembles in the yard with the company's inventory of service trucks and restrooms. Viking employs 40 people nationally. (Photos courtesy of Viking Rentals)

(continued)

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800 to 4,000 liters (roughly 210 to 1,056 gallons), built by KeeVac Industries Inc. The company also owns more than 4,000 restrooms, mostly manufactured by PolyJohn Enterprises.

"There were growing pains, of course," Noort says of the company, which now gets about 65 percent of its business from construction rentals, 25 to 30 percent from special events and 5 to 10 percent from high-end private parties. "But we managed it quite well. In late 2007, a private equity firm got involved, which removed a lot of the headaches - the financial constraints. Cash is an excellent aspirin."

#### THE A-HA MOMENT

Noort's entry into portable sanitation occurred in a roundabout way. He started his career as a mechanical engineer, designing mobile cranes, forklifts and street sweepers for various Australian companies. But he slowly realized he was better suited to run a company than serve as an employee.

"I had the entrepreneurial bug and knew I was destined to work for myself," he says. "I always found myself looking at things and thinking I could do them better. When you're an entrepreneur, you know it - you can feel it in your bones."

Noort first formed a business with "computer geek friends" that helped companies manage their Internet customer databases. After the .com crash in 2001, he started a new enterprise: helping inventors go commercial with their products. That eventually led him to create a patent-search company - until dirty portable restrooms intervened.

"I was building a house and had to order a restroom for the construction workers. I was pretty disgusted with what they presented. It was terrible," he explains. "But rather than complain about it, I saw an opportunity. I started calling builders and asking them about portable restrooms. Everyone was disgusted." So Noort changed careers again, and within six months, he founded Viking Rentals.

## VIKING RENTALS, Brisbane, Australia

Owners: Jim Noort  
and investors

Founded: 2006

Employees: 40

Specialties: portable sanitation, temporary power poles and fencing

Website: [www.vikingrentals.com.au](http://www.vikingrentals.com.au)

Service area: Most large urban areas in Australia, except Sydney



#### GROWTH STRATEGY

Viking Rentals has grown by following a basic strategy: deliver dunnies on time and set a higher standard for clean restrooms.

"History has shown the construction industry responds very positively to a provider who makes a real effort to deliver products on time and keeps them very clean," he says.

The company boosts profitability by using advanced technology to improve efficiency. Global positioning system units installed in all trucks allow route drivers to respond quickly to emergency requests from customers, and text messaging allows dispatchers to get critical information to drivers without interrupting them during services.

An online Intranet website also increases productivity. Every day, the company requires drivers to log on to the Intranet's website address from home (owning a computer and Internet access is a condition of employment) and relay critical information to the main office.

**"BY MOVING INTO THE EVENTS INDUSTRY AND ADDING OTHER COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCTS, WE EFFECTIVELY DOUBLED THE SIZE OF THE COMPANY. HAD CONSTRUCTION CONTINUED STRONG, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A DIFFERENT STORY."**

#### JIM NOORT

Viking Rentals had four blockage-proof 16-unit shower pods fabricated with a steel frame to serve the growing market of special events customers.



Technician Stewart Cuthbertson services a Viking Rentals restroom unit.





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# “HISTORY HAS SHOWN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY RESPONDS VERY POSITIVELY TO A PROVIDER WHO MAKES A REAL EFFORT TO DELIVER PRODUCTS ON TIME AND KEEPS THEM VERY CLEAN.”

Jim Noort

“This way, everyone is fully informed about everything that happened that day,” Noort says. “If someone calls because a restroom was not delivered, our people in the office know why. In addition, drivers get their next day’s assignment the night before, so they know ahead of time if they need to get started earlier than normal.”

“A lot of our drivers take their trucks home, and with the Intranet, they don’t need to waste time to come to the office to get a run sheet for the day,” Noort says. “I’m very driven by efficiencies. These may all sound like small things, but in aggregate, they’re significant.”

## BROADEN THE BASE

To achieve larger volume and diversify the business, Viking Rentals acquired other businesses that build geographic scope and services. Since 2008, the company has acquired five companies and started new branches in Perth and Melbourne.

The purchase of Elite Portables in Brisbane in May 2009 offers a prime example of diversity

through acquisition. The purchase made sense because Elite’s restroom inventory consisted mostly of PolyJohn units, and it also primarily served the special-event market. Moreover, it provides weekend work, which meshes well with the traditional Monday-through-Friday construction routes.

“Even in a down economy, we still grew the business from 14 to 24 employees in 2009,” he says. “The acquisition contributed strongly to our growth in 2009 and 2010 ... it helped us stare down a decline in housing rentals.”

In 2010, the company acquired Southside Power Poles in Brisbane, renting portable restrooms and temporary power poles, which construction contractors need to bring electricity to the property.

“Here in Australia, people often get power poles and restrooms from the same company,” Noort explains. “The acquisition gave us exposure to the power-pole product line because the company owned about 400 poles. It’s been a good product for us.”

The company further diversifies its services by renting temporary fencing, another complementary business to restrooms and power poles.

In April 2011, Viking Rentals continued the acquisition push by purchasing Nitschke Hire in Adelaide in southern Australia, a one-person company with about 100 restrooms. Like Elite, the company’s primary focus is special-event rentals.

When acquiring companies, Noort firmly believes in the principle of KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid. The company centralizes all business operations in Brisbane, eliminating the need to train additional administrative staff from the acquired company.

“We just have their phones redirected to a special line, so we know when calls are coming from that acquired company,” he says. “I find it takes a lot of the headaches out of an acquisition. The other big element to a successful acquisition is having loyal and trustworthy staff. The downside is you send your best people away to another city, but the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.”

## DIVERSITY KEYS GROWTH

Noort says Viking Rental’s ability to offer more diverse services has been critical to its rapid growth.

“We’d only be half our size if we just concentrated on construction restrooms,” he says. “By moving into the events industry and adding other complementary products, we effectively doubled the size of the company. Had construction continued strong, it might have been a different story.”

To promote its services, Viking Rentals relies on a multi-pronged marketing approach. For the construction field, marketing includes advertising in trade magazines, direct-mail campaigns, and brochures drivers hand out as they run their routes. For special-event rentals, the Internet is the primary marketing tool, and the company also employs a full-time events salesperson who meets with event organizers and promoters, Noort says.

“About 98 percent of our party hires come from the Internet,” he explains. “We spend a lot of time and effort making sure our search

(continued)



These PolyJohn restrooms are placed at Splendour In the Grass, a high-profile Australian music festival.



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"On the other hand, the construction industry is populated with a lot of older men who aren't as Internet-savvy as younger people," he continues. "So a lot of our construction work comes from guys who drive around and see our name and telephone number posted on restrooms."

### NEW REGIONS BECKON

In the future, Noort wants to firmly bolster operations in Perth and Adelaide, and establish a presence in Sydney.

"We have some customers that run festivals nationally, so we want to offer customers a national solution," he says.

Which means providing more dunnies with dignity, delivered on time. ■



The Mega Trough broken down for delivery. The painted corrugated panels form the inside and outside walls of the large urinal unit. The base includes the holding tank.

## MEGA TROUGH URINAL IS THE TALK OF SPECIAL EVENTS

As a former consultant who helped inventors bring to market their new products, Jim Noort, co-owner of Viking Rentals in Brisbane, Australia, knows a thing or two about innovation. And this has helped in the portable restroom industry, as demonstrated by a highly visible product of his own invention: the Mega Trough.

Aimed at handling high traffic volume at large special events, the Mega Trough is, in effect, a giant urinal that runs along the inside perimeter of a 20 by 8 foot, rectangular-shaped structure. It can handle up to 47 men at a time and utilizes a 4,000-liter tank (about 1,057

gallons), which sits below the unit. Crews pump the tank via a 4-inch connection, and cleaning is easy: "Just hit it with a water hose," Noort says.

Fabricated by Viking Rentals out of mild steel plates and sheets of corrugated steel, Mega Troughs minimize long lines and logjams that typically occur outside restroom trailers at large events. The units fold down for easy transport on tilt-bed trucks.

There's no missing a Mega Trough, either, thanks to bold, eye-catching paint jobs created by street-graffiti artists Noort tracked down via the Internet.

"We just thought it would be wild – and they are," Noort says. "It's a bit of a laugh and a talking point for festival organizers."

Aside from minimizing the wait time at restroom trailers, the Mega Troughs (so far the company has built four) also give Noort a competitive edge when quoting prices for special events.

"When we quote up a job, and someone wants 500 restrooms at an event, we can be more competitive because we can offer them, say, 400 restrooms and two Mega Troughs," he says. In addition to reducing costs to its customers, the Mega Troughs take up less space than a row of restroom units, Noort says.

Noort also designed a shower trailer.

"We did it to respond to demand," he says. "Over the last couple years, we sometimes would lose jobs to competitors because we didn't have showers. So about a year ago, we had four 'blocks' fabricated for us."

The units are designed to eliminate clogging that Noort says is common to production shower trailers he's familiar with. A shower trailer drain can get clogged with mud, grass and hair, leading to overflows, Noort says.

The clogging issues are circumvented by eliminating a central floor drain in favor of a central aqueduct. Water from showers runs into the 12-inch-wide aqueduct and waterfalls out of an exposed end into a 100-liter (26-gallon) sump tank, where it's pumped into a 10,000-liter (2,641-gallon) tank.



The Viking Rentals-designed Mega Trough unit is used by concertgoers. The unit can serve 47 men at a time and has a capacity of about 1,000 gallons.

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## Write It Right

**WHETHER IT'S A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW CLIENT OR A REMINDER LETTER FOR A SLOW-PAYING CUSTOMER, SPELLING ERRORS AND TYPOS MAKE A COMPANY LOOK UNPROFESSIONAL**

By Brent Sampson

**R**ecently, an online debate sparked over a blog entry titled, "What is your worse fear?"

While the blog was filled with valuable information, the majority of the responses and feedback focused on whether the proper word was "worse" or "worst." English majors came out of the woodwork to plead their case, camps divided and a prolonged exchange of hostile messages (known as a flame war) began.

Sure, the article garnered a lot of attention, but perhaps not the best kind for the author. Readers were not divided on the subject matter; they were divided on whether or not the writer was proficient in the English language.

The point is, a wrong word devalued the entire article and as a result, discredited the writer. Don't make the same mistake. Below are five tips you can employ to drastically decrease the chance of mistakes finding their way into your business writing, whether it is a proposal, a website, a brochure or a newsletter.

### 1. Utilize an editor.

If your writing will be seen by many – a website or an emailed newsletter – do not make the mistake of relying solely upon a computerized spellchecker, which cannot tell the difference between "worse" and "worst" as both are properly spelled. Use a human editor. The most common mistakes are minor, such as misspellings or incorrect use of punctuation. Other common errors are incorrect word use (their, they're, there; worse, worst, borscht, etc.). A human editor is more likely to notice and correct these kinds of mistakes.

### 2. Get a second and third set of eyes.

Since you are overly familiar with your own work, you are much more likely to miss obvious mistakes because your mind already knows what it is supposed to say, rather than what it actually says. Even if you do not wish to pay a professional, anyone who reviews your writing will find mistakes you invariably miss. When others read your work, they don't have any preconceived notions about your writing. At the same time, human behavior will often motivate them to find fault. Use that to your advantage. In addition to finding mistakes, other people may offer helpful suggestions to make your business writing stronger.

### 3. Come back to it later.

How long do you wait after writing to begin editing? Many writers edit their work as they write it. Not only does this slow down the creative process, it increases the chance that your mind will ignore blatant errors in deference to your intentions. Once your brain thinks a paragraph is free from errors, it tends to overlook any new errors that are introduced during the rewriting process. Put your writing away for several hours, days or weeks (depending on your deadlines) and revisit it later. After some time away from your work, you will be more likely to read the words as they appear on the page, not as you envisioned them in your mind. The mind is error free; the page is not.

### 4. Read your material backward.

Fortunately, you are only familiar with your writing in one direction – forward. Reading your material backward makes it seem entirely different and fools your mind into ignoring the intention and only concentrating on the reality. Furthermore, your critical view of the writing at its most technical level will not be corrupted by the flowing exposition you have massaged into sparkling prose. When you read your manuscript backward, it becomes a collection of words without contextual meaning. The brain has nothing to focus upon other than the words themselves and mistakes literally jump off the page.

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**THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES ARE MINOR, SUCH AS MISSPELLINGS OR INCORRECT USE OF PUNCTUATION. OTHER COMMON ERRORS ARE INCORRECT WORD USE (THEIR, THEY'RE, THERE; WORSE, WORST, BORSCHT, ETC.). A HUMAN EDITOR IS MORE LIKELY TO NOTICE AND CORRECT THESE KINDS OF MISTAKES.**

---

### 5. Read your material out loud.

When you read words aloud, your brain must slow down and concentrate on the material. How fast can you read the following sentence? The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs. Now how fast can you read it out loud? It takes at least twice as long, and those milliseconds sometimes make the difference between a typo that is missed, and one that is caught and corrected.

As a popular Internet posting informed us in 2003, "it deosn't mttair in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a toatl mses and you can sitll raed it wtihuot any porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe." But try reading that out loud and see how far you get.

An extra bonus for reading your material out loud is that you may discover stumbling blocks like awkward sentence structure and choppy dialogue. Strong business writing is not only dependent on error-free prose; it must be crisp and clear.

### A FINAL WORD

You might ask why a column about catching writing mistakes is important to liquid waste haulers who don't profess to be professional wordsmiths. The answer is that potential customers expect you to be proficient in both your work with a vacuum truck and in your business communication. Whether it's fair or not, the accuracy of your day-to-day correspondence and the content of your website reflects on your reputation as a service provider. ■

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# Micro PRO

**SMALL-SCALE LOS ANGELES NEWCOMER A+ PORTABLE SERVICES INC. IS GROWING DESPITE CALIFORNIA'S ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE ECONOMY**

By Seiche Sanders



The A+ team includes (from left) John Manzano, Diana Segovia, Giovanni Dorico, Cathy Dorico, Desteny Segovia, Paul Segovia and Elvis Segovia. (Photos courtesy of A+ Portable Services Inc.)



Paul Segovia (from left), Giovanni Dorico and Cathy Dorico pause during a restroom service stop at a local car show.

**W**hen Cathy Dorico and her business partner, Paul Segovia, launched A+ Portable Services Inc. in 2007, it was with a conservative approach not always characteristic of eager entrepreneurs. But, with a collective 34 years of portable sanitation experience, they had seen others fail by doing too much too soon – investing more than they should have, taking on too much debt, and not anticipating the ups and downs that come with running your own business in an unpredictable economy.

The pair pooled their savings, sold personal vehicles and bought the components of their first pump truck, a 2000 Ford F-450 with a 650-gallon waste/250-gallon freshwater tank, which Segovia and his uncle built out themselves.

“We didn’t want to finance anything because we didn’t want to start with huge debt,”

Dorico explains. “We got fortunate because someone was selling one of the tanks, and we bought the chassis. (Segovia’s) uncle is a welder and builds tanks for another industry.”

The company, which operates within a 45-mile radius of Los Angeles, employs only family members. Segovia’s sister works in the office, and his son helps out in the yard and with deliveries, as does his nephew. Dorico and Segovia do a little of everything, though Dorico primarily handles sales and works in the office, while Segovia does pickups and deliveries.

Banking on the ability to offer the personal touch possible with a small, owner-operated company, the pair picked up the phones and started building a customer base any way they could get their foot in the door. Word-of-mouth and referrals helped after that.

“People were skeptical at first – they didn’t know us. It was a little difficult, but by 2008 we

*(continued)*



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had grown quite a bit," Dorico explains. The company's inventory of PolyJohn Enterprises restrooms quickly grew from 15 to 150.

## Explore FIVE ISSUES that affect A+ Portable Services Inc.:

### PEOPLE DON'T PARTY LIKE THEY USED TO

During recessionary times over the past few years, people have curbed their spending. One of the first things to go? Pricey parties for

birthdays and anniversaries. A+ has felt the sting.

"I noticed a drop in incoming calls," she says. "Between 2009 and last year, probably a 20 percent drop." For a company that draws 70 percent of its business from special events, compensating for that loss has continued to be a challenge. "We keep on calling and going to locations where we think they have a need. Sometimes it has worked out," Dorico explains. "We just have it in our head that we're here to stay." The fact the company has no debt is a definite benefit, she says.

To make up for lost ground, A+ has stepped up its sales game, investing more time researching new business online and getting out to meet people. The two also have emphasized serving "permanent" portable restroom placements, including warehouses, truck yards or nurseries.

**"I DON'T SELL PRODUCT. I SELL SERVICE. THAT'S A BIG REASON WE'VE GROWN ... THIS IS WHAT I DO FOR A LIVING; THIS IS MY PASSION."**

**Cathy Dorico**

### BEEFING UP THE ONLINE PRESENCE

Seldom do potential customers wade two or three pages into an Internet search when researching a portable restroom provider. So a search-optimized website has become an essential tool for capturing new business. An updated website helped A+ come out on top in that area. "I got someone to fix it and freshen it up and once we launched it you could find us through Google," Dorico explains. "We ask customers how they heard about us and 98 percent of the time it's through the Internet."

For about \$300, Dorico hired a freelance Web designer to add images and update the design of the existing site. Dorico wrote the copy. For another \$70 a month, Dorico secures keywords that make her company name pop up before competitors. She also gets monthly reports that document traffic and search results.

### CALIFORNIA IS CASH-STRAPPED

With California's continued budget woes, the special events market has taken another hit. Events that A+ serviced in the past, including a Cinco de Mayo party and a Halloween celebration, have simply been canceled. "If an event costs \$100,000, then it's not going to happen," Dorico explains. Adding insult to injury, Dorico often doesn't hear about an event's cancellation until it's close to its regularly scheduled date. Six events - three of them significant - were canceled in the past year or so, cutting into A+ business.

For events they have served, A+ has reduced prices to compete ... to a certain extent. But Dorico's not afraid to stick to her guns when a low-ball competitor comes along. "I don't operate that way. I tell (customers) just jump on



Paul Segovia (left) and Cathy Dorico are shown with an Isuzu flatbed truck that carries 10 restrooms and the 2000 Ford F-450 vacuum truck they built the business with.



Paul Segovia prepares to pump a holding tank at a special event.





A+ set up this row of PolyJohn Enterprises restrooms and a Bravo hand-wash station to serve the public at a car show.

that price then. You're ruining the industry by going so low."

**COMPETING WITH LARGER COMPANIES**

The competitive landscape is challenging, especially when larger companies with lower prices are prevalent. But the big companies can fall short when it comes to customer service, Dorico says. "This is what I do for a living; this is my passion," Dorico states. The company's goal for quality service is that restrooms must be in a condition discerning females find acceptable.

A+ has made it a priority to ensure its restroom inventory is clean and sanitized, including unit ceilings. This commitment to service has aided word-of-mouth business and kept customers coming back for more. "I don't sell product," Dorico says. "I sell service. That's a big reason we've grown."

**BEATING OFF THE PARTY SUPPLIERS**

Party suppliers have increasingly joined the portable sanitation game, and according to Dorico, they often don't play fair. In becoming a "one-stop-shop" supplier for parties and special

events, these competitors can offer restrooms as an easy, affordable add-on. Or can they?

Dorico explains that the party supply businesses keep overhead low by merely offering the restrooms - they don't have a pump truck or people to service the units. Instead, they'll hire pumping contractors to do the work, while they pull in the lion's share of the profit.

Dorico also has been approached by party supply businesses to provide restrooms. "Something's wrong here, and I'm not doing that," she says. "It's not right, and they're just going to keep getting bigger and bigger." ■

**"WE ASK CUSTOMERS HOW THEY HEARD ABOUT US AND 98 PERCENT OF THE TIME IT'S THROUGH THE INTERNET."**

**Cathy Dorico**



A true California cruiser, a blue two-door Chevy Impala convertible is on display, with restrooms in the background, at a local car show.

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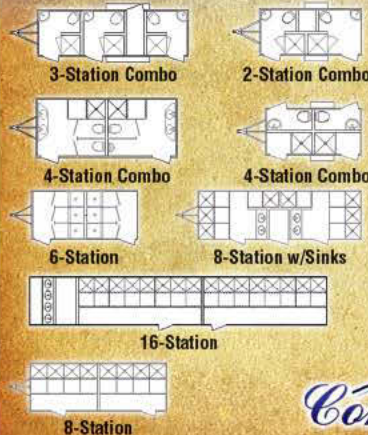
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# Time for an Upgrade

**WHETHER YOUR FAVORITE TRUCK NEEDS A MAKEOVER OR A NEW SERVICE RIG IS IN YOUR PLANS FOR 2012, CHECK OUT THESE OPTIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR FLEET**

By Ed Wodalski



Abernethy Welding & Repair Inc.

## **Abernethy Welding & Repair Inc.**

The International 4300 series truck with 1,100-gallon waste/400-gallon freshwater steel tank from **Abernethy Welding & Repair Inc.** has a gearbox-driven, Masport HXL75V 230-cfm vacuum pump. Features include dual pumping and water service on both sides of the tank, air-charged 40-psi freshwater system with garden hose connections and hose hooks on both sides of the tank. Other features include 2-inch suction hoses (33 feet long) and hooks on both sides of the tank, Rhino-lined catwalks and tank sides, two

aluminum toolboxes (18 by 18 by 36 inches), restroom carrier (holds two regular or one ADA unit), and heavy-duty receiver hitch with 7-wire RV trailer plug. **800/545-0324; www.abernethywelding.com.**

**T**he busy season is just around the corner. Now's the time to add that new service vehicle you've been thinking about. Or perhaps you're looking to expand your fleet, increase load capacity or diversify your business offerings. Here are the products that can help you succeed.



Best Enterprises Inc.

## **Best Enterprises Inc. ♦♦♦** The 1,100-gallon waste/400-gallon freshwater service vehicle from **Best Enterprises Inc.** features a 304 stainless steel tank with PTO warning light in the dash, alerting the driver that the PTO is still on, while sensors shut down the PTO when the secondary begins to fill up. Other features include heated toolboxes and stainless coils that heat water and grease, clutch systems that eliminate the need for hydraulics, inside washdown system and spring-assisted restroom carrier. **800/288-2378; www.bestenterprises.net.**

Other features include heated toolboxes and stainless coils that heat water and grease, clutch systems that eliminate the need for hydraulics, inside washdown system and spring-assisted restroom carrier. **800/288-2378; www.bestenterprises.net.**

**Cougar Vibration ♦♦♦** The DC3200 mobile/truck vibrator from **Cougar Vibration**, a division of Martin Engineering, eliminates carry back for more payload by cycle and fewer cycles per job. The vibrator helps evenly distribute material when spreading and reduces manual tank cleanout. Features in the sealed unit include high-speed, low-amp electric motors and shielded, oversized, permanently lubricated ball bearings. It is available in 12- (85 amps) and 24-volt (62 amps) models and exerts 3,200 force pounds. Weighing 36 pounds, the unit produces 4,000 vibrations per minute. It is 10 3/8 inches deep, 9 3/4 inches wide and 6 7/8 inches high. **800/262-2106; www.cougarindustries.com.**



Cougar Vibration



Imperial Industries Inc.

## **Imperial Industries Inc. ♦♦♦** The 1,600-gallon waste/550-gallon freshwater service vehicle from **Imperial Industries Inc.** has a 5454 marine-grade aluminum tank with primary shutoff and 20-inch top manway. Features include round waste hose hook, low-profile driver's side work station (passenger side optional) and corrosion-prevention anodes in the waste and water compartments. Other features include 3- to 2-inch waste intake and 3-inch discharge, 2-inch driver's side water discharge (passenger side optional), Cox retractable hose reel, 50-feet of hose, upper and lower restroom tie downs, spring-assist restroom carrier with dock edging, two 18- by 30- by 30-inch aluminum toolboxes, Masport HXL4V vacuum pump (160 cfm), and right-angle

drive PTO. The three-switch LED control box operates the water pump, work lights and PTO from outside the cab. Water pump options include 12-volt Whale, DC-10 or Cat High Pressure (1,000 psi). Chassis options include International 4300, Ford F-650/F-750 or Hino. **800/558-2945; www.imperialind.com.**

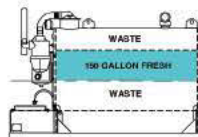
drive PTO. The three-switch LED control box operates the water pump, work lights and PTO from outside the cab. Water pump options include 12-volt Whale, DC-10 or Cat High Pressure (1,000 psi). Chassis options include International 4300, Ford F-650/F-750 or Hino. **800/558-2945; www.imperialind.com.**

(continued)

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## Isuzu Commercial Truck of America Inc.

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## Ledwell ♦ ♦ ♦ The model LSC1500 service vehicle from Ledwell with variable freshwater

system has a PTO-driven, remote 4-way valve, carbon steel or stainless tank, rear work lights, dual restroom carrier, LED side and rear marker lights, hitch receiver, 2-inch hose with ball valve, spring-loaded hose reel with auto rewind and choice of compartments. **888/533-9355; www.ledwell.com.**



Ledwell

(continued)

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**Mid-State Tank Co. Inc. ♦♦♦** The 1,300-gallon waste/450-gallon freshwater, stainless steel tank from **Mid-State Tank Co. Inc.** has a 20-inch top manway with primary, hose support, storage cabinets and work station on both sides. Other features include restroom carrier, work lights and sight glasses for both compartments. 217/728-8383; [www.midstatetank.com](http://www.midstatetank.com)

**Satellite Industries ♦♦♦** Available on Peterbilt, Ford, Hino or Freightliner chassis, the MD1600 service vehicle from **Satellite Industries** has a

1,100-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater tank. Features include reinforced stainless steel skirting, two powder-coated storage cabinets with shelves and keyed locks. The tank has a coated freshwater compartment with manway, sight glasses and internal safety baffle. The DOT safety equipment package includes flag and reflector, first-aid kit and fire extinguisher. 800/328-3332; [www.satelliteindustries.com](http://www.satelliteindustries.com). ■



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## Auto or Manual Transmission?

**THE DEBATE CONTINUES OVER THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE OR CONVENIENT WAY TO SHIFT YOUR NEXT SERVICE TRUCK ... AND OTHER QUESTIONS GET QUICK ANSWERS**

By Bob Carlson

**QUESTION:** What do you think is the best type of transmission for a service truck, automatic or standard shift?

Ray O'Riley  
Helena, Mont.

**ANSWER:** There are a couple ways to look at this question. If you are the owner/operator, then buy the truck you like to drive. If you're going to be living in this truck, it should suit you and your needs.

If you are buying a truck to have other drivers at the wheel, it's time to consider the automatic. Many younger drivers today know nothing about shifting gears. They understand gas and brake. Obviously, the purpose of the job is to drive, pump, collect the fees and go home. Take a look at your situation and make the move that's going to maximize your profits.

Do you want to train someone to drive a standard transmission truck? Will the cost of training that driver be offset by the cost of ordering an automatic? Most larger companies these days are taking the path of least resistance: automatics.

### Brake it to him gently

**QUESTION:** I bought a used truck and everything was going pretty well until the brakes went out. Did I make a mistake buying a truck with hydraulic brakes? The guy who sold the truck said hydraulic brakes were the best way to go.

Lonnie Glenn  
Savannah, Ga.

**ANSWER:** When it comes to brakes you have two choices: air or hydraulic. Hydraulic brakes are initially cheaper on a new truck, but the downside is they require more maintenance. As you know, hydraulic brakes come with a hand brake. But, when it wears down and regular adjustments aren't made, when you park on a hill you'll find the truck at the bottom of the hill in a short time. And if the hand brake is in the locked position and the driver forgets it's engaged, around the town he goes and it's time for a new set of brakes.

Most truck owners prefer air brakes over hydraulic. They cost more when the truck drives off the lot, but fewer things can go wrong and there is definitely less required maintenance. You might ask the guy you bought the truck from what he likes about hydraulic brakes the next time you see him.

### Sizing the primary and secondary

**QUESTION:** I should have noticed this before I bought my truck, but for some reason, somebody installed a 3-inch primary, while the secondary is 1 1/2 inches. Does this matter? I've read your articles on the importance of airflow, but to me, airflow is airflow and this doesn't matter. What do you think?

Rex Baird  
St. Paul, Minn.

**ANSWER:** I think it's time to replace your primary. A steady, even airflow is the key to a properly operating vacuum system. Pulling air through a 3-inch opening and funneling it down through a 1 1/2-inch opening creates a dramatic change in the speed of flow. Vacuum systems are designed to move the same amount of air from the tank, through the primary, through the secondary, and then through the pump.

When the previous owner replaced the primary, for whatever reason, he probably pulled one off his shelf and installed it, regardless of the right fit. The larger primary will work, but your system will not be as efficient as it should be. The basic rule is simple: The primary and secondary should be the same size.

### Checking the vacuum and pressure relief valves

**QUESTION:** It's been about six weeks since I checked my vacuum relief and pressure relief valves. Is there a rule of thumb as to how often they should be checked? So far, everything is running great.

Javier Domingus  
Albuquerque, N.M.

**ANSWER:** They must call you Mr. Lucky. Your vacuum relief valve prevents your tank from collapsing and your pressure relief valve is designed to keep your tank from exploding. With consequences like those, you need to check these vital parts once a week. If they become stuck or freeze up for any reason, you could be shopping for a new service truck, or at least a new vacuum tank. Get them checked. ■

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**April 16-17, Tucson, AZ**  
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 Contact: Kitt Farrell-Poe at (502)821-7221

**April 27-28, 2012 - Helena, MT**  
 Montana DEQ & NAWT  
 Contact: Solid Waste Section at (406) 444-5300

**Installer Workshops**  
 June 26, 2012 - San Diego, CA  
 Re-Certification  
 Installation of QWTS - NEHA 2012 A&E  
 Instructors: Jim Anderson and Dave Gustafson

**Operation & Maintenance Training Certification:**  
 February 28-29, 2012 - Southern CA  
 COWA/NAWT Inspection Certification  
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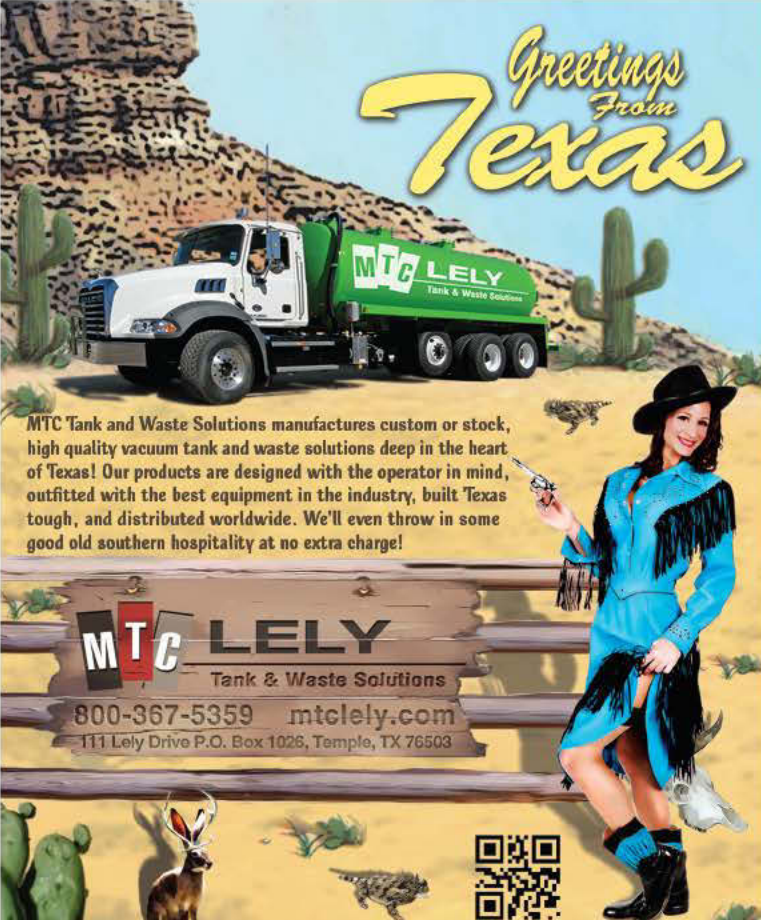
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### Manitou Forklifts, Americas join forces

Manitou Americas Inc. has joined with Manitou Forklifts Canada, combining sales, service and marketing support teams.

### Werts Welding opens Montana branch

Werts Welding & Tank Service Inc., supplier of tank trailer parts, opened a branch in Billings, Mont. The facility will supply parts for the dry bulk, petroleum and liquid hauling industry.

### D & W Diesel opens New Jersey facility

D & W Diesel Inc., headquartered in Auburn, N.Y., opened a location in Cinnaminson, N.J. Jerry Cignarella is the branch manager. Jake Humphrey and Craig Marturano joined the company as sales representatives for the Philadelphia area. D & W distributes and remanufactures engine components and tank truck equipment.

### PolyJohn Manager named to music hall of fame

David Wall, western area business manager for PolyJohn Enterprises, was inducted into the Oregon Music Hall of Fame. Wall was a vocalist and guitarist for Sequel in the 1970s and 1980s and was an opening act for such groups as KISS, Journey, Sammy Hagar, Bryan Adams, Kenny Loggins, Night Ranger and Loverboy.



### Fruitland's Peter Cioruch passes away

Peter "Pete" Cioruch, a long-time employee of Fruitland Tool & Mfg., passed away Feb. 14. He was 59. Cioruch started working for the Stoney Creek, Ontario, Canada, vacuum pump and accessories manufacturer in 1996. Cioruch developed his industry knowledge on the manufacturing floor, and became a respected sales leader, the company said in a statement. In addition to his career, Cioruch was an athlete and craftsman. He enjoyed snowboarding, windsurfing, motorcycle racing, mountain biking, and building custom motorcycles and go-carts. ■

Peter Cioruch was an athlete and craftsman. He enjoyed snowboarding, windsurfing, motorcycle racing, mountain biking, and building custom motorcycles and go-carts. ■

### Tommy Gate medium-duty railgate



The 3,000-pound-capacity, high-cycle railgate for stake and van bodies from **Tommy Gate** is designed for numerous daily lifting cycles. Features include machined steel rollers, dual-sealed ball bearings, hardened-steel pulleys and composite bushings. Other features include safety trip bar, self-close and auto-open cam arm, 12-inch platform taper and

three-light, incandescent light kit. **800/543-8428; www.tommygate.com.**

### Presto Lifts hand pallet trucks

Rol-Lift hand pallet trucks from **Presto Lifts Inc.** have a lift capacity of 4,500 to 6,500 pounds and fork lengths from 48 to 72 inches. Standard and heavy-duty models are available in 20.5- and 27-inch widths. **800/343-9322; www.prestolifts.com.**



### Worksaver pallet fork



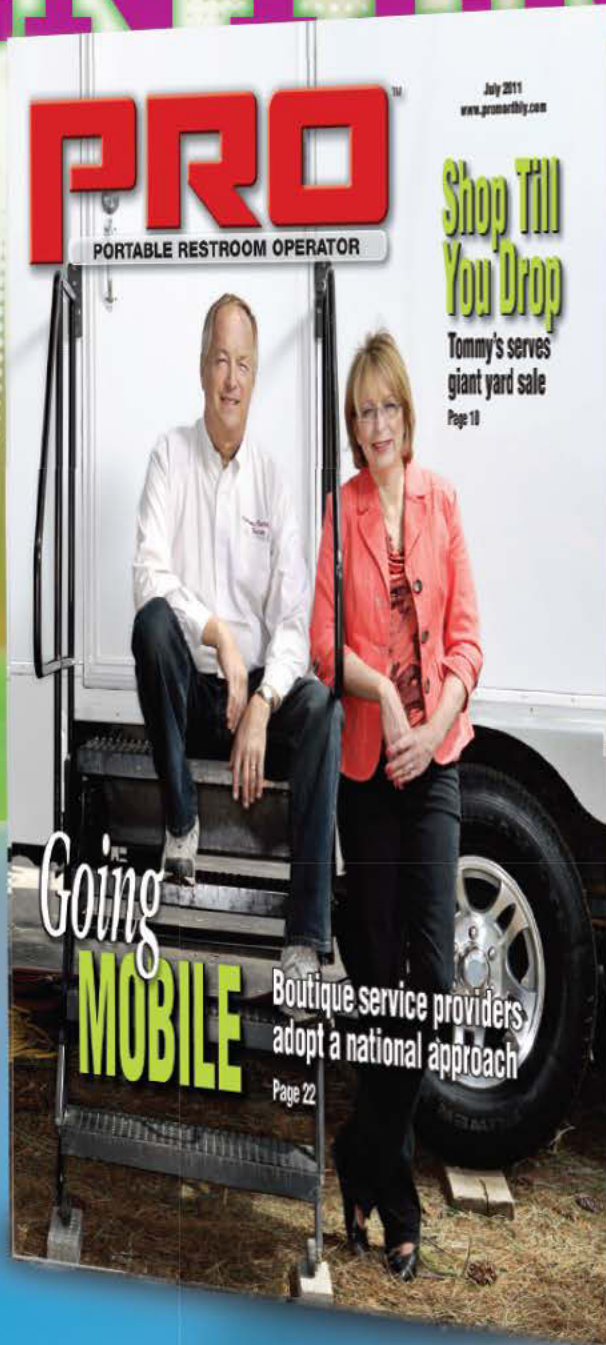
The SSPF-3748 skid-steer pallet fork from **Worksaver Inc.** has a one-piece backstop with class II forks rated at 4,000 pounds for the pair. The fork has an all-welded design and fits tractor loaders that use skid-steer attaching systems. **217/324-5973; www.worksaver.com.**

### FLEXHAUST Tiger Tail hose

The **Tiger Tail liquid suction and pumping hose** from **FLEXHAUST** combines durability and flexibility for waste evacuation and septic pumping. The polyethylene copolymer hose is reinforced with integral polyethylene helix, has a smooth interior, is kink resistant and 10 percent heavier than previous versions. The abrasion-resistant hose features factory-installed leak-proof polyweld cuffs and rounded external cap that slides over asphalt and concrete surfaces. The hose has an operating range of -40 degrees to 140 degrees F and is available in 1.5-, 2-, 3- and 4-inch I.D. sizes in 3- to 50-foot lengths. **800/343-0428; www.flexhaust.com.** ■



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## PORTABLE RESTROOM TRAILERS

3 Decons, McKee portable toilet transport trailers, 3-12 pack; 2-6 pack. American Engineering 828 Tonto and 814 Royale. 2001 ASCI 16' Presidential. 315-437-1291, NY. (P03)

Maryland Restroom Trailers is up grading inventory for the new year and has several restroom trailers for sale. All are Olympia brand. (5) 26' trailers, (6) 19' trailers and (3) 14' trailers. These are housed indoors year round. Please contact rick@mdpt.com for pricing or 410-365-0098, MD. (P03)

## PORTABLE RESTROOM TRUCKS

2005 Ford 550, diesel 4x4, auto, air, 97,000 miles, one owner, never driven in the winter, 950-gallon Transway tank. Call will give more info. Call for pricing, 802-895-4445, VT. (PBM)

2004 Freightliner M2, MBE 900, 210 hp, manual 6-speed, non-CDL, air brakes, 151,578 miles, PresVac system, 400 fresh/1,000 waste, dual side service, 2-unit carrier. \$22,000. 2003 International 4300, non-CDL, DT466 6-speed manual, 127,021 miles, 300 fresh/1,250 waste, dual side service, 2-unit carrier. \$24,000. 1999 International 4700, DT466, non-CDL, 223,055 miles, Lely body, 300 fresh/1,250 waste, MEC 6500 pump, dual side service, 2-unit carrier. \$16,000. OHIO, 614-497-1776, www.billjr@potty4u.com. (PBM)

For Sale: (2) 1993 International 4700, 1,000 waste/250 fresh, still in service. \$9,000 each. Call 800-843-9286, IN. (P03)

2002 International model 4300 flat bed, 140,650 miles, gvw 25,500 lbs, DT-466, International engine, 215 hp, Allison automatic transmission, muncie power takeoff, 500-gallon fresh water tank, GREAT for EVENTS, 10' flat bed, 2,000 lbs lift tuck away lift gate, rotary snow chain system and exhaust brake. \$18,900. 845-499-0570, NY. (P03)

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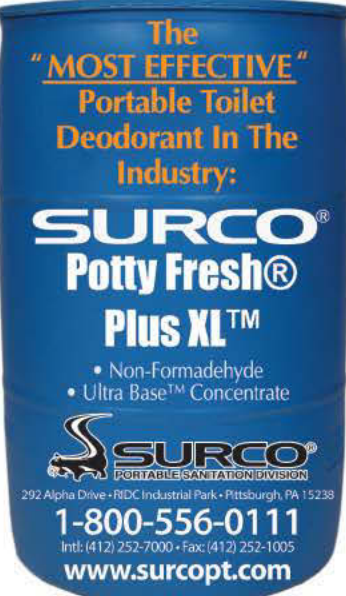
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## PORTABLE RESTROOM TRUCKS

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## PORTABLE SHOWER TRAILERS

Available for immediate sell: A 2006 Pace 24' trailer, custom out for us. Interior and exterior pictures are available. Used infrequently by non-profit organization. Asking \$35,000 but will consider price to sell. Please contact dave@mlf.org, 512-328-7299, extension 108. (P03)

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