

Home repair company adds business clients

Michigan's economic downturn led HandyPro services owner to create commercial division.

Maureen McDonald / Special to The Detroit News

PLYMOUTH -- The 13-person staff of HandyPro Handyman Service Inc. is pounding on new doors as the Plymouth-based firm increases its commercial outreach to paint a steady profit picture, according to co-owner, Keith Paul.

"We've moved our firm in the direction of demand. Retailers and business owners have a difficult time finding reliable, licensed, insured handymen for their small projects," Paul said as he ramps up HandyPro Facility Services. "We respond. We show up when we say we will or we give a \$30 discount on repairs."

The pace of layoffs, corporate mergers, firings and retirements put HandyPros customers throughout the region in a tailspin. Paul saw a drop in elective repairs, particularly the big ticket remodeling projects that helped the firm reach revenues of \$771,422 in 2004 and \$819,000 in 2005. In 2006, revenue fell to \$800,109. The fall might have been more precipitous without a new plan.

- **Contact:** www.handypro.com or call (800) 942

Keith and Debra Paul put their dream of a 100-franchise HandyPro network on hold. They maintain franchises in Dallas and Minneapolis, delayed launch of Honolulu and bought back St. Clair Shores and Ann Arbor stores, running the operation out of the Plymouth headquarters. The couple hired Mark Liedtke as its new sales manager for commercial work while they focused on its core residential business. Commercial accounts include Fujitsu, Red Frog Realty, Shrey Systems, Starbucks and others.

"HandyPro is our handyman service," says Heather Oechsner, facilities service manager for 50 Starbucks Coffee sites in southeast Michigan. "They do paint touch ups. Sometimes they need to repaint the whole store. They are very good about getting back to us quickly. That sense of urgency is what we look for in vendors."

They maintain a team of specialists for plumbing, drywalling, painting and electrical work on the payroll. To keep them busy when business bogs, the Pauls' purchase and renovate one apartment building a year. The finished units are rented out, providing another cash stream.

"Converting from residential to commercial work isn't as simple as it appears," warns Allen Cook assistant district director of the U.S. Small Business Association in Detroit. "If you take on too much new business before cash flow catches up you could have trouble meeting payroll. If you start a new line of business you can't ignore the old. Your reputation is at stake either way."

Paul and his team endeavor to do the best job for business and residential customers by maintaining active membership in the Better Business Bureau. He created a strict list of rules that all employees and contractors must follow, from showing up on time to professional behavior. The service team appreciates steady paychecks and bookkeeping services.

"Having people work directly for HandyPro is best because they are dedicated to us and our system," he said.

Maureen McDonald is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.



Lessons

- **Problem:** Orders for kitchen and bath remodeling dwindled as the automakers announced round upon round of layoffs. How could HandyPro maintain its staff and its revenue stream?
- **Solution:** Keith and Debra Paul, owners of HandyPro Handyman Service Inc., retooled their business focus and ramped up corporate sales, HandyPro Facility Services. The firm also rehabs small apartment buildings during down months.
- **Contact:** www.handypro.com or call (800) 942-6394