

THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION

By Al Krier and Dave Kugler

This article is co-authored by two WCO's. I'm Al Krier of A & D Animal Control and I will cover the past where many of us started in communications to some of the present. Dave Kugler of Critter Catchers will cover most of the present and what he sees in future WCO communications. So this gives you as a reader a choice. If you don't like the writing of an ancient WCO you can just fast forward to a young intelligent vibrant young WCO.

When I started in the animal control business, the main communication was a black desk type dial phone. This was it and I would stay home as long as I could to get phone calls before hitting the road each day. I carried several rolls of dimes with me to call customers from frigid phone booths which most the time were missing the receivers. Then came the tape recorder to take messages. I still had to carry the dimes to call in and many times, there were yards of tape from the recorder on the desk on my return home. Yet, this was better than nothing and I thought it would never get any better. Also, there were phone booths appearing in warmer places like grocery stores, restaurants, and police stations. In addition to the rolls of dimes, many days I carried three meals (breakfast, noon lunch, and evening meal) with me. I was very lucky in the first year of business. One of my competitors had a misunderstanding with the Yellow Page rep and pulled his ads. All I could afford was a few lines, but I saw that it helped greatly. Also in our first year of business, I received a nice thank you note

from a mechanic who patched up my old service vehicle. It impressed me so much we started to send out thank you notes to each customer of ours when the work was completed. This has been done since day one of business. Comments are good.

Shortly after the tape machine, I made a giant communication step when my mother-in-law came to live with us. This put a live person on the phone answering. After a year or so, my mother-in-law fell on bad health and phone numbers were taken sometimes with four digits and at other times with as high as twelve digits. Her response was that was exactly the phone numbers the customers had given her. In a tough management move, poor mother-in-law had to be fired, but we still put a roof over her head till the end. This period with a human being answering the phone displayed to us how important it is

to have a live voice on the line for incoming calls. So we took the following communication step and had calls forwarded to a lady working out of her home. She was called Girl Friday. Calls were forwarded when we were out in the field working. My son and his wife own a sizeable finance company and every call is answered by a human being.

Around the call forwarding time, pagers came into being and we were convinced it would never get any better than this. Dimes and pay phones in warmer places were still very much in daily use. Again, I was sure it would never get any better than this when voice mail came along for after hour calls and/or when the incoming lines are busy. Shortly after this Nextel came along with cell phones and two way radios. The only trouble was the Nextel towers were not up yet and we had the

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Nextel bricks without any communications. Nextel was excellent and credited us with months and months at no charge and generous adjustments. In time they got better and we still have four Nextel phones today with voice mail and a lady (sales coordinator) taking incoming calls. I feel we have come a long way but feel we are in the eighteen century when I look at my friend Dave Kugler at Critter Catchers. I'll let him take it from here.

Over the years, I have been in several world-headquarters buildings from Magna International, PPG Industries, Lear Corporation and LDM Technologies. These were all show-places in their own right filled with palm trees, marble, and glass. Not much set these palaces apart, other than the coffee.

However, the A&D Animal Control World Headquarters really stands out in my mind. It was probably Al's corner office that got me hooked in the WCO industry 15 years ago. You see, this office stood in stark contrast to the rest of his palace, which was adorned with different types of artistic knick-knacks, and hand crafted pottery custom made by his artist-bride, Bel. While her top floor office welcomed gentle summer breezes and overlooked the bikini clad boat hang-out of Dollar Bay; Al's corner office was located far away from these distractions and was nestled in the darkest depths of the lower level (aka basement). Somehow, I saw through the coonskin cap, antiquated filing system, and beat up office furniture and admired his office best. This was the finest man-cave office that I have ever

observed. The one thing that this office managed to maintain was FREEDOM.

During the time that I worked at A&D, the company was using pagers and pay phones for communications. I recall toting around rolls of quarters, which was advancement from the rolls of dimes Al described in those early days. Although it was a fantastic job, I was bound and determined to finish college, start a professional career as an environmental engineer, and work my way up the corporate ladder. I was officially out of the wildlife business for about 15 years, figuring out life and this so called professional career. However, memories of my early adventures with Al's team and the faint whisper of mother freedom brought me back to the WCO business.

During my sabbatical, many



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things changed in the area of communication technology. The internet became mainstream; emails, texting and cell phones made instant communication not only possible but also expected. Technology was changing at a rate described by Moore's law and the constant ring tone from my blue tooth enabled phone was proof. Life was moving at a rapid pace. Despite the annoyance of a totally connected world, the innovation in communications made balancing a day job, managing a wildlife control business, and starting a family possible.

Al's old-fashioned approach to having a live person answering the phone was a characteristic that I knew made his business great. Al is a people person, and no matter how you slice it, business is all about people. However, I was not about to risk making the same mistake by hiring/firing my mother-in-law. Besides, she lived in North Carolina, and I was not about to confess my desire to quit my established engineering career to start an animal control business. That said I knew that I needed a dynamic phone system that was flexible enough to adapt to my changing business needs, so I settled with a VoIP. This system is completely flexible and can be operated anywhere in the world that has an internet connection. This made my business line completely portable.

When I started the business, we used cell phones heavily to communicate with employees. The phones were great for dispatching information from the headquarters to the service vehicles in the form of text messaging. Surprisingly, we found that as the business grew, text messaging was not a very effective communication tool. We found that during the busy season, our schedule could change dramatically and our text messages

became outdated quickly. Additionally, the short non-sentences (called texts) can be interpreted incorrectly due to the lack of adjectives. I knew that a change had to be made.

Early on, we used hand written logs to track and communicate service events from the day's activities. In the evening, my technician would fax the logs to my home and I would enter transactions into QuickBooks. Eventually, we developed an excel spreadsheet that made sorting by customer possible. However, both of these methods were very time consuming and I knew that a change was required.

We took a giant leap forward when we developed our own web-based customer database. Initially, this was developed to improve the organization of our service events and decrease the tedious labor of entering data into the excel spreadsheets. Additionally, we had a function that would allow us to map our routes to save fuel and time. Although the database was fantastic, we still did not have access to the data, in real time, on the trucks. This was a challenge because we had to have the routes all planned out before the truck left for the day. This meant that we still relied on text messaging.

When the IPAD was released, our world was forever changed. I still remember the first time that my hands held one of these magnificent machines in the Apple store. I purchased one on the spot. Shortly, afterwards we modified our database and created an app that would run smoothly on the IPAD. The purchase of this device was a defining moment that seamlessly connected our team no matter the time of day or physical location. Instantly, we stopped texting and minimized our phone calls to technicians.

By using the IPAD's on the service vehicles, we are able to change the route on the fly. If our priorities change due to an emergency, new customer, or animal pickup, we can instantly redirect our vehicles. One of the benefits of using the database is that we can route vehicles efficiently. We save fuel, but more importantly, we save time. Since much of the wildlife control business is seasonal, we must make the best use of our time during the busy season. The IPAD and our custom software meet the challenge.

With all the modern communication tools at my disposal, I want to make sure that we do not lose sight of the person-to-person communications that are so essential for success in business. Al and I each use different tools for communications in our WCO businesses. But we both still understand that business is about people. Without a single telephone device, we both have nearly solved some of the world's toughest mysteries in a sail boat ride around Dollar Bay; and built one of the strongest teams during heavy wind in a split second in Stumpy Bay.

Some might say that the new-fangled approach to modern communications is too complicated to implement in a wildlife control business. But, I think we can all agree that it took much more skill to start a business with a rotary phone, roll of dimes, and a mother-in-law.

Al Krier
Dave Kugler

Did You Know? - Northern flying squirrels tend to have only one litter per year of 2 - 5 pups most often in May-June.