



**Brent Sebright explains how
this company outdoes the competition
in quality and service.**

Sebright Products



Talking Trash

In 1976, Brent Sebright and his colleague, Lee Murray, formed a small operation in Hopkins, Michigan installing trash compacting equipment manufactured by another company. By 1980, the manufacturer was experiencing financial troubles, and its largest customer, Brask Enterprises, a trash compactor rental company, had become dissatisfied.

“We got a phone call from the president of Brask Enterprises asking us to build compactors because he knew our background. We said no because that would put us in direct conflict with

the manufacturer, which still fed us a lot of business—it didn’t seem like the right thing to do,” said Sebright, who is an experienced welder. About a month later, Sebright got another phone call from Dave Brask. “To make a long story short, in 1980, we started manufacturing one compactor model, and in 1983, we began selling on the open market. Brask is still a highly valued customer of ours.” Today, Sebright Products designs, manufactures, and installs a number of waste compactor models for high-profile customers, including Honda, Coachmen Industries, Mall of America, and Kohl’s.





Bright idea

In 1999, the company formed a specialty equipment division, Bright Technologies, which focuses on recycling and wet-waste processing equipment. According to Sebright, trash compactors haven't changed much in the last 30 years. "It's a cylinder, a ram, and a power unit. The recycling equipment is light years ahead of compactors in terms of technology. We hold several patents on recycling equipment, and that is where we see the growth for our company."

The company decided to form Bright Technologies not only because it made more sense from a product standpoint, but also because the distribution models for the two types of products differ greatly. For starters, Bright Technologies generally works with large corporations, engineering firms, and municipalities, and deals often get caught up in red tape. Sebright Products works with many smaller businesses where decisions can be made more quickly.

"Sebright Products' top salesman sells two to four compactors a week. The top salesman at Bright Technologies sells about 30 units a year. They have different sales cycles and our people are tuned to different ways of thinking," said Sebright. He added that a trash compactor can cost up to \$45,000, while specialty units can be as high as \$350,000.

Bright Technologies, among other equipment, manufactures belt filter presses, which separate

liquid from solid at sewer and waste water treatment plants. Sebright explained that some presses are stand-alone units, others are skid-mounted units, and some are mounted on large trailers that travel to industrial and municipal sites treating the sludge in evaporation ponds. "They operate on Siemens PLC technology, and the control room on the trailer units are like the cockpit of a 747," said Sebright.

Bright Technologies also manufactures extruders, which are mainly used in the paper industry to separate water from paper pulp during the recycling process. Sebright explained that many paper mills pay \$25 to \$50 per ton to dispose of waste water created during the paper-making process, but with Bright Technologies' extruders, they are able to recover and reuse most of it. The extruders also use the Siemens PLC technology and can be programmed for any change in a customer's waste stream remotely with a modem and a phone line.

Outlasting the competition

According to Sebright, the competition stamps out the frame sides of their trash compactors and other waste treatment equipment, meaning one large sheet of metal is formed into the appropriate shape. Sebright Products welds structural channels and other shapes onto sheets of formed flat steel, resulting in greater structural integrity. The welding process can take up to 38 hours on a standard two-cubic-yard compactor, while the competition can build the same piece of equipment in 14. We only use the best, brand name



component parts, such as Allen Bradley when building our power units to further reduce service issues and aid in parts availability when service is required. The pay-off? More than 60% of the equipment Sebright Products installed during its first few years in business is still running today.

Its extractors and belt presses are made from stainless steel, while trash compactors are made from mild steel. "We stick to high quality materials and never cut corners," said Sebright. "As a result, our equipment often lasts two to three times longer than that of our competition."

If higher quality equipment doesn't win customer loyalty, the company's after-sale service will. Sebright Products has partnered with a network of service companies nationwide capable of installing and servicing its equipment. For instance, Jim's Welding and Repair based in Johnson Creek, Wisconsin services Kohl's stores across the country.

Certain members of the service network are also dealers, for example our largest dealer, Stepp Equipment, with offices in Chicago and Milwaukee. Some sell Sebright Products' equipment but leave the installation up to the company. Others stock equipment and do their own installation work. "It's a mixed bag. We've spent a lot of time over the years with our network, sharing information about what makes an effective sales, service, and installation team."

Five tenets

Technology and processes aside, Sebright Products' and Bright Technologies' most valuable assets are employees. As a small company with 90 people between the two divisions, a family culture prevails, especially given that Brent's brother, Stuart, heads up Bright



Technologies, while his other brother, Dave, is general manager for both companies. "We do the typical annual picnic, golf outing, and birthday parties, but our employees appreciate our common sense and laid-back management style the most," said Sebright.

Sebright remembers once reading an article in which the president of the Stryker Corporation, a manufacturer of medical products, shared business dos and don'ts: smart leaders stay out of employees' way; think before you act; don't lie, steal, or cheat; teamwork matters; and if you are going to make a big decision, you better be right. "Those tenets have formed my business philosophy. I stole it from someone else, but I've never stolen an idea that I didn't like," he chuckled.

One business "do" Sebright didn't steal was listen to employees. Sebright Products and Bright Technologies have implemented an employee suggestion program in which employees are rewarded monetarily for their contributions. "We also give them recognition for their ideas, and some of the patents the company holds have their names on them. It's common sense to me to give credit where it is due." ■

—Liz French

