

Can Rodents Attract Millennials to Pest Management?

Smart devices, like digital rodent monitoring systems, could be the answer to the industry's labor challenges, helping PMPs fuel profitable growth and stay one step ahead of rapidly changing food safety regulations.



Have you **Future-Proofed** Your Business?



For decades, I've traveled across geographies, meeting with pest management professionals who manage dynamic teams of all sizes, servicing numerous markets and clients. Despite differences among this global cast of pest professional peers, there are more commonalities than you'd think.

All these inspiring conversations seem to invariably focus on the future – the future of the pest business, the future of regulation, the future of technology and the future generation of service providers. If you worry most about the latter, you're not alone. And for good reason.

According to a 2017 Pew Research Center report, more than a third of the U.S. labor force is composed of millennials, and an estimated 61 million Gen Z-ers will join the workforce in coming years. As an industry, are we ready for the next generation?

Part of our collective charge is allowing our actions to redefine antiquated notions of the pest industry and to advance a reality where PMPs are data analysts and strategic consultants, integrated plan managers and entomologists, solutions specialists and artificial intelligence enthusiasts. This aligns with a need to manage shifts in customer experience expectations, harness the speed of technological development and, most important, attract top talent now and in the future.

While there are numerous variables to consider when it comes to recruiting and retaining Millennial and Gen Z-ers, technology is mandatory. Don't believe me? In a joint research project, SurveyMonkey and Microsoft reported that *93 percent* of millennial workers say that a business having up-to-date technology is an important factor when choosing a workplace. That percentage will be even higher for Gen Z-ers. The good news is that we're getting there.

In this special section, you'll hear tips from forward-thinking PMPs like Jason Everitt, technical director at Rottler Pest & Lawn Solutions, who are adapting their service offerings and resulting hiring practices: "We are finding that we are looking for more 'tech-y people.'"

You'll also get fresh perspectives on changing roles, the idea that "the technician's job is not trap-checking – it's to protect our customers' brands," as shared by John Moore, corporate IPM director, Fumigation Service & Supply. And Food Safety President Steven Sklare weighs in on how tech empowers your current – and next generation of – employees to "show your clients that your employees are trained to be problem solvers and observers rather than people assigned to walk into a facility and perform a couple of non-thinking mechanical tasks and leave."

I believe that sense of future ownership appeals to any age. ☺



Ildem Bozkurt
Head of Pest Management & Public Health for the U.S.
Bayer



CHANGE IS NOW

Is technology the answer for dealing with your customers' 24/7 expectations and the industry's ongoing labor challenges? For those cutting-edge companies that have embraced digital rodent monitoring systems, the answer is yes.

Business owners across industries are facing a new reality in hiring the next generation of employees who expect career development and technological conveniences to be part of any job package. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that investing in innovative technology is critical to attracting and retaining millennials.

In fact, 93 percent of millennial workers say that a business having up-to-date technology is an important factor when choosing a workplace, according to a report by SurveyMonkey and Microsoft. And, if technology is substandard, 42 percent of millennials stated in a Penn Schoen Berland report that they'd leave the company.

Those are eye-opening numbers, particularly when labor pains are the primary reason pest control firms are not growing as fast as they could. For the fourth year in a row, about one-quarter (24.3%) of respondents to an annual survey conducted by Specialty Consultants reported "finding or keeping good employees" as the greatest challenge to their pest control business. It's the number one barrier to growth.

Technology could be the answer.

Innovative technology that elevates the employee experience—commonly referred to as EX—includes day-to-day technologies employees use to accomplish their work, according to the 2019 Forrester Guide to Employee Experience Technology. "The biggest EX gains come from technology that reduces day-to-day strain," Forrester notes. "These are technologies that uncover barriers to daily productivity, whether they're cultural, organizational or technological."

In the pest control industry, a significant EX gain can be realized by implementing advancing technology, such as digital rodent monitoring systems. And, these types of solutions are equally appealing to customers who have 24/7 expectations and little room for error when it comes to protecting their brand. Specifically, regulatory pressures on clients in the commercial food industry are changing expectations for the pest management companies they hire to safeguard their facilities.

"The risks facing food-handling companies today have never been greater," says Steven Sklare, who owned and operated a commercial/industrial pest elimination

business for more than 25 years and is engaged in the pest control industry as a consultant to food industry clients.

If you ask PMPs who are adopting new technologies, including digital rodent monitoring systems, they'll tell you that connected devices are changing the job description of a pest control technician—and this could open up avenues for recruiting and retaining talent from a modern workforce that is attracted to technology.

"If a pest management company embraces this technology and recognizes the importance of framing the role of their employees as more of a collaborator than a service person, they will have the opportunity to enhance their image and that of their employees, as well as deepen their relationships with clients," says Sklare, president of the Food Safety Academy.

GROWING EXPECTATIONS. The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) represents the most sweeping change in U.S. food safety laws in 70 years, Sklare says. "Appropriate 'preventive controls' must be in place throughout a food company's production flow, from receiving to delivering their product," he says. "What screams 'preventive control' more loudly than a pest management program?"

There are higher expectations for how a pest management company should protect clients facing regulatory and consumer pres-

tures. Facilities like food processing plants need much more than a trap-checking service to guard their operations and brands.

“In the food safety industry, there is an expression that if a company’s food safety program is designed to meet regulatory requirements, they may pass their inspection, but they are not doing what is necessary to effectively protect their brand and customers,” Sklare says.

Meeting minimal requirements isn’t enough, particularly when one considers “more closures, more product seizures, more non-compliant citations and 483s have occurred as a result of pest activity than any other issue,” he says.

This explains why food processing facilities must go above and beyond regulatory requirements—or risk going out of business. “A pest problem—especially a rodent-related pest program—is a tangible, concrete and visible problem,” Sklare says. “It gets noticed, and the consequences can be devastating to a food business.

“Food companies that take a more enlightened approach to their pest management programs have higher expectations and are looking for a more collaborative relationship,” he continues. “They expect the pest control operator (PCO) to provide the essential service, but they also expect to hear from the PCO if there are problems in the facility that need to be addressed, whether it is a structural problem or a procedural issue.”

The modern PCO must be more of a detective—more of a consultant, not a trap-checker. “We need higher-level technicians with more skills who can do more than properly check a trap,” says John Moore, corporate IPM director, Fumigation Service & Supply, Westfield, Ind. “What we are selling is our knowledge and expertise in reducing pest-related risks to food safety. They need the expertise we have.”

Fumigation Service & Supply uses digital rodent monitoring systems in some large food processing facilities it services. “The technician’s job is not trap-checking—it’s to protect our customers’ brands,” Moore says. “The whole reason for a pest control company to be in a big food plant is to support food safety, mitigate risk and

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION



In a March 2019 Forbes article, “Disruption on Display,” the publication notes that experimental technology is moving to the mainstream, with key drivers being the ability to innovate (36%), revenue growth (34%) and profitability (32%), based on a Forbes Insights and PMI survey of 537 executives.

Bayer’s Rodent Monitoring System (RMS) gained the attention of Forbes and was featured in the issue, as it called out other digital transformation cases like Shopify, 3-D printers, the cloud and sensors that help government agencies prevent vehicle accidents in high-traffic areas.

“The digital transformation is being talked about everywhere, including in mainstream media that is addressing our industry specifically,” says Jennifer Poore, senior marketing communications manager, Bayer. “It’s not going away. Pest control operators’ customers may start to ask for and expect these types of technologies, if they aren’t already inquiring about it.”

The Forbes piece echoes this reality, reporting: “Pest management systems, cloud resources, 3-D homes, robotic baristas—they’re at the core of innovative business models, new revenue streams and happier customers.”

protect the customer’s brand.”

Elevating pest control service to meet customers’ demands includes adopting technologies that allow PCOs to dedicate more time to investigating potential pest risks and educating customers. “Rodent monitoring systems allow the PCO to become another pair of skilled, educated eyes walking through the facility and looking at the overall big picture,” Sklare says.

And, that’s exactly what food processing plants need because the risk of not having a pest control “consultant” who can provide proactive service could be devastating.

“In today’s consumer-sensitive market, the risks of being involved in a problem such as a recall, a foodborne illness outbreak, a video of a rodent or insect in a food handling company’s facility, or even the perception that a company has a pest problem, can be magnified tenfold if social media is involved,” Sklare says. “This can all lead to catastrophic brand damage and economic loss.”

THE TECH OPPORTUNITY. The labor shortage, technician retention challenges and heightened regulations are forcing a paradigm shift in the pest control

industry. And, there is a great opportunity for pest control companies that embrace technologies and reinvent the technician role to attract talent, provide a better service to customers and, ultimately, change the public’s perception of the industry.

“It is important for the pest management industry to recognize that [digital rodent monitoring systems] are here, and they will only become more common as time progresses,” Sklare says.

Across the board, industries are recognizing the power of connected devices and artificial intelligence (AI). And, the millennial generation has grown to expect these advances in the modern work environment. According to a 2016 Dell & Intel Future Workforce Study Global Report, 56 percent of millennials believe that AI leads to more productivity in the workplace.

“Companies, large and small, that take a proactive approach in figuring out how this technology can benefit them and their clients will see their businesses continue to grow and change,” Sklare adds.

Let’s explore how digital rodent monitoring systems might address labor, technician retention and consumer demand. 🌱

WANTED—

Tech-Savvy Pest Detective

How pest control companies can attract quality talent in a competitive labor market.

The job description of a pest control operator (PCO) is evolving as innovative technology enters the scene. Service visits that once revolved around checking traps are becoming more sophisticated, more investigative and less repetitive.

Namely, pest management companies that integrate digital rodent monitoring systems are freeing up technicians' time to focus on proactive service—consulting with customers about potential pest problems, analyzing data collected from IoT-enabled devices, and designing IPM strategies that align with clients' business goals.

Jason Everitt, technical director at Rottler Pest & Lawn Solutions in St. Louis, Mo., shares how technicians' roles have changed at one account since implementing digital rodent monitoring

systems. The client is a family-owned dog treat warehouse, and checking rodent traps there used to take 45 minutes. "We had very little activity," Everitt reports, adding that the state requires traps to be checked in that facility every 24 hours.

Now, Rottler Pest receives alerts if a trap is tripped by a rodent. Technicians save hours of time every week that are now dedicated to other pest-prevention activities instead. "The technology is making us a more efficient company, and we are doing more inspecting of product, looking for spillage and checking for other types of pests," Everitt says.

Heath Kern, Rottler's director of sales, notes how implementing technology like digital rodent monitoring systems is attractive to potential customers and employees. "We really promote what we are doing and it's part of our culture," he says.

To engage young, fresh talent and introduce them to the industry, pest control companies need to do more than offer jobs that require repetitive manual labor like trap checking, Everitt says. "The key to finding and engaging millennials is to keep technology at the forefront, and we are finding that we are looking for more 'techy people,'" he says.

For millennial job seekers, technology isn't a given for any job—it's a must.

According to a Forbes report, "The Millennial Expectation of Technology in the Workplace," millennials no longer ask for sufficient technology at their jobs, they expect it. "What millennial workers really want are the tools they need to do their jobs efficiently," the article reported.

Everitt says, "Technology is a necessity (for millennials), not a luxury. And I think Rottler Pest has figured that out, and we



Digital rodent monitoring systems are freeing up technicians' time so they can perform more thorough inspections, analyze data from IoT-enabled devices, and design IPM strategies that align with their clients' business goals.

have become a very 'techy' business. We have iPhones and iPads and scanners. We have the high-end electronics like infrared cameras to help our technicians become better at their jobs."

When prospective employees notice the technology in place, they like it. "They see we are a progressive, innovative company and there are a lot of people who are interested in working for us because of it," Everitt says.

Here are three ways that digital rodent monitoring technology is changing the job description of "pest control applicator" or "technician" to "consultant" and "pest detective."

REDEFINE THE ROLE. Perceptions of pest control generally involve spray tanks and traps—but the reality is far from this scenario, and that's what companies need to promote. "Showing that your company

is attuned to technological change is going to be important for attracting a different type of technician," says Steve Sklare, president, Food Safety Academy.

John Moore, corporate IPM director, Fumigation Service & Supply, Westfield, Ind., emphasizes the technician's role in delivering knowledge and managing risk. "Food accounts need us—they need our expertise," he says.

Rather than recruiting a technician, what companies might really want to focus on is attracting workers who want to be "pest control/food protection consultants," Sklare points out.

TEACH THE TECH. The skills of a modern technician working in a tech-enabled pest control firm go beyond pest identification and include problem solving, Moore says. "Knowledge of pests does not go far without an understanding of how

to apply that knowledge," he relates. "So, technicians need training at a higher level."

At Fumigation Service & Supply, technician training includes A.C.E. programs and courses at Purdue University. "We tie training to compensation, so if you want to make a higher rate of pay, you have to demonstrate that you have mastered skills," Moore says, adding that the company subsidizes all training. "Training just to pass a state certification test is no longer sufficient."

SHARE THE VALUE. Emphasizing the value and necessity of the technician's role to potential employees can help them understand their job is vital. Their work on a property can keep businesses up and running, in compliance and preserve brands. It's not just about spotting or eradicating pests—it's about protecting public health. This message can be attractive to job seekers who want to make a difference.

So, the same message of delivering value through technology and knowledge that pest control companies share with clients also must be communicated to job candidates. And, companies that adopt a culture that celebrates technology will attract talent.

"This is the future," Moore says. 🌱



"THE KEY TO FINDING AND ENGAGING MILLENNIALS IS TO KEEP TECHNOLOGY AT THE FOREFRONT. TECHNOLOGY IS A NECESSITY, NOT A LUXURY. AND I THINK ROTTLER PEST CONTROL HAS FIGURED THAT OUT AND WE HAVE BECOME A VERY 'TECHY' BUSINESS." – **Jason Everitt, Technical Director, Rottler Pest & Lawn Solutions**

The Bayer Rodent Monitoring System helps improve food safety, transparency and audit readiness in facilities where rodent control is mission critical.

Monitoring Performance, Capturing Opportunity

Digital rodent monitoring systems can secure client relationships and create enticing career paths.

In a tight labor market with pest control companies struggling to recruit and retain talent, an opportunity to improve efficiency and automate rote operations like trap checking can improve profitability and make room for business growth.

John Moore learned this firsthand after Fumigation Service & Supply in Westfield, Ind., implemented a digital rodent monitoring system at a key account (a large food processing facility). “Technicians were spending 40 to 50 hours a month checking rodent devices on that one account,” says Moore, corporate IPM director.

“If an account doesn’t have a rodent issue and they are at low risk, why should the customer spend so much money to have trap checking done when those dollars could be spent instead on real issues that present a risk to food safety, like stored product pests,” Moore relates.

After installing the digital rodent monitoring system at this site, that’s exactly what Fumigation Service & Supply did: They reallocated labor toward investigating potential pest threats. “This way, you actually achieve a higher level of food safety, mean-

ing you lower your risk and the customer ends up spending less money per year for a higher-value program,” Moore explains.

LABOR-SAVING TECHNOLOGY.

Technicians are much happier using digital rodent monitoring systems because time and resources are not wasted by checking traps. “It’s saving wear-and-tear on their bodies and they no longer have to do a meaningless task,” Moore says. “You know, after you bend over to check your 300th empty trap, you start rethinking your career choice.”

Digital rodent monitoring technology saves labor, saves dollars and frees up technicians to provide more value-added services for customers whose brand reputation and business livelihood depend on running a safe, clean, compliant operation.

“Rodent monitoring devices are turning our technicians into consultants,” says Jason Everitt, technical director at Rottler Pest & Lawn Solutions, St. Louis, Mo.

✔ **Take-Away Tip:** Share what you know. “Show clients you are committed to being aware of changes in your industry and their industry,” Sklare says. “Show your clients that your employees are trained to be problem-solvers and observers rather than people assigned to

walk into a facility and perform a couple of non-thinking mechanical tasks and leave.”

DELIVERING TRUE IPM. Pest control operators (PCOs) who are equipped with digital, automated technology like rodent monitoring systems can be an asset for a food handling company—“an appropriate fit for the technology,” says Steven Sklare, president, Food Safety Academy.

Technologies, like the Bayer Rodent Monitoring System (RMS), allow PCOs to analyze trends and adjust their IPM program. “IPM is a dynamic process that must be constantly evaluated and adjusted,” Sklare says. “The RMS gives PCOs an opportunity to offer their clients real-time monitoring of their rodent devices 24/7 with an instantaneous alert system if there is a capture. And it also allows their employees to devote more time to thinking about what can be done to improve the service they are providing the food handling client.”

✔ **Take-Away Tip:** Moore notes that customers, particularly those in the food handling business, are willing to pay for a pest control service that provides added value. “It’s not just about price and hiring the cheapest company,” he says, emphasizing that PCOs must sell their knowledge and experience. “That is what they want.” 🌟

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