

HAWTHORNE

BY AMY WOOD

steel buildings from the ground up

Two months after selling a successful energy business and retiring at 48 years young, Bob Hawthorne was ready to go back to work. "My children are all in school and my wife volunteers at the school. So it was pretty much me and daytime TV and I can only play so much golf."

One day while working his horses Bob began studying his metal barn building and remembering the experiences he'd had with several steel buildings he had built over the years. It became clear from his perspective – a customer's perspective – that there were key business components as well as structural and aesthetic values missing in his past experiences.

So, as an entrepreneur for most of his adult life, he recognized the market need immediately. Bob went about interviewing many people who had already built or were considering building a steel building and his hunch was right on the mark. "The consumer wants a company that will do the whole job turn-key, and do it right. A company that provides the sometimes forgotten arts of customer service, craftsmanship, and accountability. People are tired of dawdling service, no matter what industry it is in, as they spend their hard earned money." Within a short time period he not only knew he could provide superior service but had some ideas that would also provide a superior structure without increasing the cost to the customer. So Hawthorne began planning – not just for the buildings, but for building a new venture. He studied the structural design of hundreds of buildings, some small, some large. As he surveyed the larger buildings, such as supermarkets, superstores, and large office complexes, he noticed that the V-truss system was prominently preferred and utilized for its proven history of structural integrity. After consulting with engineers and others in the industry, the design was completed and procured. The end result was trademarked by Hawthorne as the SMARTFRAME Building System and the V-truss was an integral component.

While working on the structural design, he was also researching and consolidating his ideas concerning how the business should be operated. Everything from procuring materials to the on-site systematic construction routine, and from marketing to service was translated from brainstorming to an executable plan.

True to the motivation of his initial notions, every part of his plan is "bottom-up planning" based on the needs and desires of the customer. Thus began the process of building Hawthorne Steel Buildings from the ground up.

The Customer is the Philosophy

For any company to be able to retain customers and benefit from referrals, they have to put the wants and needs of the customer front and center. It is a whole-view philosophy that is as much a part of a person's character as it is learned business knowledge.

Because Bob derived the plan by first looking at what consumers wanted, he knew there would be several characteristics of this new venture that would set it apart from the rest. "There was a definite need for an improved frame structure that not only provides strength and durability but also is aesthetically pleasing," he said. It takes some out-of-the-box thinking to reject the idea that "a metal building is a metal building, that's just the way it is" and to identify it as a market niche waiting to be addressed. Hawthorne Steel Buildings is not the only metal building company that offers turnkey service...just the only one that does it the way Bob Hawthorne would do it.

Almost everyone has heard horror stories about fly-by-night contractors who "took the money and ran" or, more often, didn't do the job correct the first time and are hard to get to come back for follow-up. These anecdotes shape consumer attitudes and the criteria they look at when making purchasing decisions, despite the fact that most contractors operate ethically.

"Most folks don't have the time and/or knowledge to hire the contractors that pour their foundation or source the doors, windows, and accessories, and erect the building. And if there is a problem, who do they call? The metal supplier? The erection crew? The concrete worker? And God forbid if they all start the finger pointing routine. Its not how people want to spend what little time they have at home these days. At Hawthorne Steel Buildings we do it all and we are responsible for it all. We call it Single Source Accountability. Our customers have only one call to make and we stand ready to assist them."

Customer Service Starts with the Price Quote

In terms of meeting customer expectations, one area in which the building business often fails is in preparing and issuing price quotes. To Bob Hawthorne, this represented an opportunity to once again excel. "The quote we give is for the complete building package, including computer generated drawings of each building," he said.

Many of Hawthorne's newly-set standards for service also laid the groundwork for an efficient operation that would decrease costs. The same procedures would greatly increase the likelihood that the company would receive a future referral by the customer to a friend or co-worker. For instance, in the midst of their work, Hawthorne puts a priority on keeping the customers' property neat and orderly. "Every day at 4:30 p.m. our crews go into a clean up mode so that when you arrive home there's not a mess," Bob said. "We make sure that when we leave our customer's property at the end of each day it is organized and free of as much construction debris and trash as possible."

Consumers who purchase a metal building are sophisticated enough to evaluate the deal based on value as opposed to seeking the cheapest building at the cheapest price. As he planned, Bob Hawthorne looked at metal buildings the same way. "We don't cut any corners, we pay attention to the details," he asserts. "We're building a company for the long term, based on integrity and service." If his customers are still happy with their building after many years of use, then he will still be getting referrals many years later.

Obviously price is a consideration, but Hawthorne determined the best plan was to provide quality of product, then devise methods to obtain mate-



Hawthorne's SMARTFRAME Building System utilizes the V-truss design used on large buildings.

*Perceiving
precious
moments...
Preserving
priceless
memories.*

*Photography by
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