



Golden Rule Plumbing, Grimes, Iowa

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Hearing Sound Advice

by Katie Rotella

Mark Paup bought City Rule Plumbing nine years ago. It had about five employees and a few Chevy Express service vans painted white with red block lettering. A bit “vanilla,” but a good, solid starter business.

Soon, though, the Grimes, Iowa, company “outgrew” its name. “We felt it was time to rename the company to better reflect who we are,” says Paup.

He discussed this major change with industry consultants Al Levi and Ellen Rohr (pictured alongside Mark), who were helping him focus his business goals at the time. They wholeheartedly agreed: Changing the name was a must.

For one, customers were butchering the old name. “They kept asking, ‘What does it mean?’” Paup says. There also was confusion with a competitor in town — City-Wide HVAC.

With the new name of Golden Rule — and a splashy fleet makeover — the company could finally get its service message across.

“In all the years we were City Rule, nobody instantly knew what we stood for as a company. Nobody stopped the employees or myself in the grocery stores and gas stations because of the trucks,” says Paup.

The trucks now have been upgraded to Sprinter models, which better suit the jobs the company completes. They also have been wrapped completely in a golden-yellow color with a stand-out red ribbon. The trucks’ lettering is simple, highlighting the company’s services, and clearly showcasing its phone number and Web site.

The way Golden Rule employees dress repeats this highly visual message: red shirts with gold accents for service techs, gold shirts with red for sales staff.

“Ever since the trucks have been rolling down the road, people have been stopping and staring at them,” Paup says.

Interior-wise, Paup and his warehouse managers follow Levi’s “Truck Design Tips” for efficient use of space and tools on the job. The 30 trucks are stocked the same, and can handle any ticket. A parts list is compiled at the end of each day, and replacement items are scanned by



the warehouse manager and binned for technicians to load onto their vehicles every morning.

Taking a leap and changing an established company name isn’t easy, Paup admits. It was actually “a very scary decision” for him to make at the time. But now that it’s in progress and being noticed in the area, Paup believes it was “110 percent the right decision.”

He only wished he had done it sooner.

“For us, we decided that before we took the plunge of changing our name, we wanted to make sure our customers saw not only a new name, but also had a new experience with every install or repair we provided,” Paup says.

That became possible after the company installed a state-of-the-art training center and classroom in its shop. This allowed Paup and his managers to in-depth train the techs on customer service and sales, and also to cross-train them in other skills.

As for his own sound advice to contractors wondering if it’s time for a change: If you can’t answer a customer who says, “I like your company, but what does the name mean?” you may need to change your name.

“And if you love it too much at first, you probably went too safe on the truck design.”

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