



Security & Shredding & Storage News

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 4** 'Free Choice' Or 'No Choice' Battle Pits Labor Vs. Business
- 8** Seeking To Acquire Equipment For Your Company?
- 15** Organizations Explore New Data Security Measures in Tough Economy
- 19** Foreign Crime Syndicates Set Their Sights on U.S. Victims

DEPARTMENTS

- In the News
- Product/Equipment Profiles
- Products/Equipment & Services



Cartoon by Frederic Serre

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Rapid Shred Headquarters and Off-Site Secure Destruction Facility in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

“Responsiveness and Service”

RAPID SHRED Retools for Niche Market Success

— BY MEG THORNTON —

In today’s business environment, *Predictable Outcomes Rule!* And when the task is the secure destruction of their sensitive documents, off-specification product, obsolete computer media, and a myriad of other proprietary materials, companies and institutions demand that every step be under control, transparent and verifiable. Customers for destruction services are challenged both with a rigorous regulatory environment, and heightened consumer expectations. They can accept nothing less than full compliance from their contractors.

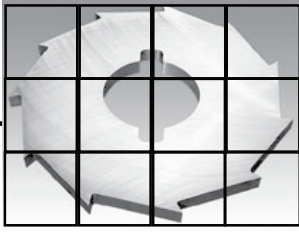
Scott Dennis, owner and president of RAPID SHRED Confidential Destruction and Recycling, Grand Rapids, MI, walked into this industry with his eyes wide open. A native of West Michigan with a master’s degree in environmental engineering, Scott maintained a successful consulting practice in the area which included litigation support. Scott describes West Michigan as “a very tight community, with primarily locally-owned businesses”. Developing strong working relationships with both legal and regulatory authorities during his consulting career, Scott was well networked for secure destruction markets.

While engaged in a project to recover nylon from recycled carpet during the late 1990’s, Scott “found the genesis of my business model”. He zeroed in on shredding opportunities in West Michigan, and discovered “that there was no established regional document destruction company in the market.”

Armed with the results of his market research, Scott, and his wife and business partner, Jodye founded Rapid Shred in December of 1999, and the company was fully operational by mid-Spring of 2000. Although he was embarking on a dynamic new career path, Scott brought his skill-set and thirst for knowledge along for the ride.

Recalling the early days, Scott readily admits to utilizing “a shotgun approach to targeting markets” during the formative years of the company. Growth was “primarily by referral, the word-of-mouth plan”, he notes with a smile. Healthcare services, law firms, banks, state and city offices, home businesses and doctor’s practices were among the initial customers for Rapid Shred. Despite focusing more attention on specific market sectors as the business matured, Scott has maintained in his words “a strategy of robust client diversity.”

Continued on page 3



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“Responsiveness and Service”: RAPID SHRED Retools for Niche Market Success

Continued from page 1

Scott’s vision for Rapid Shred has remained consistent: focus with laser-like intensity on customer needs, and develop high-value niche market objectives. Fundamentally, this sharpens the call to “responsiveness and service – our goal is ‘just make the client happy’”. Rapid Shred must deploy the proper procedures and equipment to meet that goal,” Scott asserts.

Investing in professional accreditation was another early move to reach a higher level of customer service. Rapid Shred was the first company in Michigan to be NAID certified, and has successfully passed each annual inspection to retain AAA certification for off-site (plant-based), on-site (mobile), micro media pulverization, and hard drive destruction. Scott also developed a unique Service Audit in 2002 to solidify his high-end range of quality assurance and service offerings.

However, the most radical commitment to the ‘total service’ focus at Rapid Shred was what Scott calls “building my Tool Kit”. For Scott, this concept encompasses: key business relationships; choice of operational model (plant-based vs. mobile); criteria for selection of equipment; and creating a custom facility that embodies both his business values, and knowledge of the market. The trick is to “capture the elements of success”, he suggests, “and to do that, you have to align yourself with smart, credible partners.”

When it comes to emphasizing off-site or on-site shredding services, Scott has found that ultimately “it’s a customer decision” what balance to strike. Rapid Shred has ultra-high security clients who demand on-site shredding of material such as uniforms and arm bands to a small particle size.

Hospitals are a distinct category of client requiring what Scott characterizes as “a perceived extra level of security and confidence” with on-site shredding of patient records, and other paper documents. As a result of these market growth opportunities, Rapid Shred recently upgraded its mobile shredding capabilities with the purchase of two new state-of-the-art shred trucks.

But by far the major investment in Scott’s ‘Tool Kit’ lies in the company’s new multi-million dollar, 32,000 square foot facility, designed and custom-built for the specific security and operational requirements of Rapid Shred’s destruction business. The building includes access control, 24-hour video surveillance and alarm systems. It also houses the innovative and high-capacity system that Scott describes as “the very best machinery for the job, which is serving the needs of our customers.”

According to Scott, the majority of Rapid Shred clients choose the total service option of shredding their confidential material at this ‘showplace’ facility. “Tours of the operation are our biggest selling point. If we can get a client to take a tour, the facility sells itself.” This is certainly

a bold sales strategy, considering the notoriously dusty atmosphere of many shredding operations. But Scott has addressed environmental air quality issues by implementing bag-style dust collectors at each machine. Exhaust fans act as air rotation units during the summer months.

Coordinated by professional staff, the Rapid Shred facility functions as the central hub for the companies’ secure loop of off-site destruction services, and baling terminal for material shredded by on-site trucks. These shred trucks return to Rapid Shred’s facility where they are emptied onto a Halco 7.5 ton capacity moveable floor system inside a custom-fabricated dust enclosure. The moveable floor system feeds the shredded paper to an American Baler auto-tie baler.

Rapid Shred’s fleet of 12 collection trucks, each staffed with a bonded operator, are dispatched for scheduled pick ups (and exchange) of the company-owned Rapid Distributing Secure Containers, or client-packaged materials to be destroyed. On the return trip, all confidential documents and secure material is off-loaded and inducted into the Rapid Shred system at the dock door point of entry.

Once sorted by class of material, high-volume, moderate-security paper shredding is performed by an Allegheny strip shredder, equipped with an auto-feed conveyor. Shredded material is discharged onto the moveable floor system, which feeds the baler. All baled material is staged for loading onto semi-trailers at one of six dock doors, and is then transported to a paper mill for pulping and recycling into new paper products.

The latest addition to Rapid Shred’s technology is a Cresswood single-shaft, low-speed shredder. “I had clients with specialized needs for ultra-high security shredding that I couldn’t handle”, Scott explains. “The Cresswood provides the ability to consistently control particle size and create uniform output with screen selection for those niche applications.”

“Since we installed the machine, we’ve destroyed a range of materials – from sticky off-specification dental floss in 500 lb. spools to uniforms with arm patches”, Scott continues. “We purchased two different screen sizes from Cresswood, a ½” screen for the lower volume but high-security contracts like purged court records, and a 2” screen for the challenging, but less security-intensive jobs.”

Set up for ‘dump & go’ operation at Rapid Shred, the Cresswood shredder is paired with a Vestil tipper, which features a 52” width and 4,000 lb. capacity, to accommodate 96 gallon secure collection containers or gaylord boxes. “Mechanizing the dumping function limits labor requirements and improves system ergonomics,” Scott reports. When shredding paper, the shredder discharges output directly onto the moveable floor system. This finished material is then merged with

Continued on page 6



Scott Dennis, owner and president of Rapid Shred, inspects shredded paper bound for the baler at the companies' off-site facility.

RAPID SHRED Retools for Niche Market Success

Continued from page 3

the standard shred stream of paper before entering the baler.


Currently, shredding of film products, plastic and metal-containing computer media is confined to a Shred-Tech grinder. Low-quality paper such as label stock that would devalue the baled material destined for paper mills is also shredded in this system. The secure loop is closed for all products processed by the company when Rapid Shred generates a Certificate of Destruction, along with an invoice, upon completion of the shredding protocols.

Strong relationships and a dedication to the community of West Michigan are recurring themes in the development of Rapid Shred, and plans for future growth into under-served markets. Scott has a "healthy reciprocal relationship" with a number of friends and business colleagues, including a local secure storage firm. "We work collaboratively, don't step on each other's toes, and are able to offer our clients a more powerful portfolio of services," Scott claims.

Through his work with Rapid Distributing and the secure collection cart business, Scott contributes business consulting, primarily to companies just entering the secure destruction arena. He is very

aware that with the current economic challenges, helping another business navigate a start-up is "a huge responsibility that I take very seriously". Moreover, as a result of this outreach, Rapid Shred has developed a flourishing referral network throughout the country.

Contemplating future plans for the company, Scott shares his enthusiasm for expanding Rapid Shred's recycling services to meet the demands of an exploding 'green economy'. "This move began with the formation of Rapid Recycling in 2008 and will require additional dedicated space, and careful management. It's a fine line to navigate for a secure destruction company because you can't afford to compromise any security procedures or contractual obligations with clients."

Exploring new ways for Rapid Shred to innovate in the recycling business would certainly bring Scott Dennis back to his roots in environmental engineering. He will do his homework, and you can be sure that his 'Tool Kit' of responsive service assets will be working overtime. It's just Scott's way of making success a more predictable outcome for all of the business ventures - Rapid Shred, Rapid Distributing, and Rapid Recycling. 

Photographs courtesy of Rapid Shred and Cresswood Shredding Machinery.