

From Yacht Care to Carpet Care at Lake Shore, Inc.



The Racine, Wisconsin, marina is where Lake Shore finds many of its customers.

In 1990 when Mike Johnson started his yacht care business, Lake Shore, Inc., he envisioned working outside in the sunshine and getting a great tan. Carpet cleaning was the farthest thing from his mind. Today, more than 15 years later, Johnson is still working in the sun caring for boats, but his company is also known for carpet care.

Lake Shore's entry into the carpet cleaning business presented itself as an opportunity for Johnson to diversify his business. His clients would often ask him to clean the carpets on their boats. The solution seemed simple: rent a steam cleaner. Although he was never really happy with the quality it provided, it seemed to be good enough. It wasn't until one of his clients planned a boat party when the problems with the steam cleaner became apparent.

"We had a job to clean a client's carpet because he had some guests coming for a boat party," said Johnson. He cleaned the boat's carpets with a steam cleaner and used three fans for two days to dry the carpet. "It wasn't enough. His guests took off their shoes and got soaking wet socks." Johnson recalled the client calling

him very angry, refusing to pay for the carpet cleaning.

Just as Johnson was going to give up on the carpet cleaning business, he was introduced to the HOST[®] Dry Extraction Carpet Cleaning System. "We tried out a machine on a boat and the minute we tried it, we knew it



Mike and Jamie Johnson, owners of Lake Shore, Inc.



Technician Don Dowe of Lake Shore uses the HOST Freestyle to clean the carpet aboard a boat.

was better than steam cleaning,” he said. “We have been using it to clean carpets on boats ever since.”

Boat Business is Seasonal

In Wisconsin, the boating season is short. The carpet cleaning business helps Johnson support his business during the winter months, and HOST is a crucial part of it. Today Lake Shore has six company vehicles, four for boat cleaning and two for carpet cleaning. The company has 18 employees, four of who work on the carpet cleaning side.



Since cleaning around the nooks and crannies in a boat is so time consuming, Johnson charges an hourly rate for carpet cleaning, instead of by square footage.

Lake Shore has five HOST Freestyle[®] machines and one Liberator[®]. Their carpet business is about 65 percent residential, 25 percent commercial and 10 percent boats.

Most of the boats are 40 to 45 feet, but the larger boats have as many as four bedrooms and three bathrooms. Johnson says the trick with boat carpet cleaning is to charge by the hour, not the square foot. “There’s not a lot of carpet in there, but it is time consuming,” he said. “You are working around nooks and crannies and doing areas by hand with a spotZAPPER[®] brush. The main rooms can be cleaned with the machine, but boats have more detail work than houses.”

Marketing Tactics

To market his business, Johnson employs two main tactics: advertising and referrals.

Lake Shore advertises in Action Magazine, a local free monthly publication. Available in area gas stations, drug stores and supermarkets, the magazine contains articles of local interest, coupons and ads. Lake Shore buys the cover of the magazine once a year, which gives them an added benefit of running an informative article in the issue.

“We have run the cover each of the last three or four years. That brings in a lot of callers,” Johnson said, adding that they also run a monthly column written by his wife, Jamie. “People say they have seen us on the cover and in the magazine, so they know where to find us. It has helped to build recognition for Lake Shore Dry Carpet Cleaning.”

Lake Shore also has an ad in the

local Yellow Pages. They have tried cable TV and radio advertising with some success. They also exhibit at the Kenosha Expo, which is a local home show exhibition. “We draw a lot of attention to our booth and we normally get from 50 to 60 potential customers. From that we land a lot of jobs. We also have a raffle for \$100 worth of carpet cleaning,” Johnson said.

“Our Best Salesman is a Clean Carpet”

Ask Mike about building his carpet business and he will tell you that it is all relationships and referrals. “Our best salesman is a clean carpet,” he said. “After the job is done is the best time to ask for a referral.”



Advertising on the cover of this local publication each year has helped build recognition for Lake Shore’s carpet cleaning business.

Lake Shore has developed a program called the 10/10 Friends & Family Program. After each cleaning the customer is given a sheet explaining the referral program. Customers get four 10/10 coupons which they can give to a friend or relative. That friend receives 10 percent off the carpet cleaning when they hire Lake Shore. When the coupon is turned in, Lake Shore places it in a “referring customers” file. The next time that referring

customer has their carpet cleaned, they also get 10 percent off.

There is no limit to the number of referrals that the customer can turn in. "If someone gives me 11, I will actually pay them 10 percent of the price of the job," explains Mike. This program has helped Lake Shore build and expand their customer base.

Hiring is about Presentation and Communication

Mike's advice for hiring employees is that it's easier to train someone than to untrain. "We found we are better off hiring people who have not had carpet cleaning experience than those who have," he said. "Then we are training them right from the start."

Here's what Lake Shore looks for in a new employee:

- a positive first impression
- good communication skills
- friendly attitude and personality
- good selling skills
- willingness to work

"They should demonstrate the skills they will need when they are in front of the customer," according to Johnson. "I also value ethics and I

give them a test on simple math skills so they can be counted on to give the customer a quote on additional work."

At Lake Shore, a newly hired carpet cleaning technician must complete their specially designed training program. The first step includes several hours of in-house training. Then a new hire is paired up with an existing cleaning technician for 2 weeks of hands-on training in the field. As a bonus during this period, Lake Shore offers the technician doing the training a higher pay rate. Lake Shore's training also includes sending all carpet cleaning technicians to the HOST School training and certification program. The HOST School, offered by Racine Industries, is one of the leading courses on carpet care in the industry and has had over 22,500 industry professionals from all over the world attend.

Profitability Comes With Tracking

In order to be profitable, Mike found that it was very important to understand how much HOST and other cleaning products were being used on each job. They developed a tracking system that is updated each day. "We're tracking exactly what the material cost is and we're able to clearly show our employees how well they are performing," he explained. "This has helped in the training and efficiency of our technicians. They can see how efficient they are in the use of their time and materials." On average Lake Shore has been able to keep their material cost at about 10 percent of the job.

Stick To It

"I believe wholeheartedly that HOST is the best carpet cleaning



Mike Johnson is happy with how the HOST Dry Extraction Carpet Cleaning System has helped his business grow.

system out there," Mike said. "To be successful you have to stick to it. I've been in this business for 15 years. It takes time to grow and develop a reputation. Overall, I am very happy with the HOST System."



Lake Shore has had great success with its "10/10" referral incentive program.



HOST® Offers the Training You Need to Succeed

The HOST School training and certification program provides you with all the knowledge you'll need to get the most from your HOST Dry Extraction Carpet Cleaning System.



The HOST School, founded in 1978, is a 5,800 square foot state of the art training facility that now offers one of the leading courses on carpet care in the industry. Over 22,500 industry professionals from all over the world have attended.

HOST School curriculum has been designed and developed by Geoffrey R. Greeley, Director of Training, who joined Racine Industries, Inc., in 1975. Greeley is also the author of the comprehensive *Complete Guide to Carpet Cleaning and Maintenance for the Professional*. In addition, he is on the Certification Board of the International Institute for Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC), a WoolSafe Certified Trainer and is also a HOST representative in key industry associations, including the Carpet & Rug Institute (CRI), the Building Services Contractors Association (BSCAI), the International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA) and the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET).

The HOST School course is offered at HOST Headquarters in Racine, Wisconsin, nationally in metro sites around the country and internationally, where HOST is represented in 60 countries.

Call 1-800-558-9438 or visit www.hostcarpetcleaning.com for upcoming HOST School dates and locations.

Here's What Our Graduates Say

"I'm a believer! Your school gave me the kind of information needed...it sets me apart from my competition."

"Knowledgeable and articulate instructors were able to answer all of my questions."

"...by far the best overall school I have ever attended."

"The people, the school and the products are great."

"I would recommend it highly to anyone involved with carpeting."



Start Your Own Carpet Cleaning Business Today!

For over 70 years, Racine Industries has helped thousands of people — just like you — to take control of their futures and start successful businesses. See for yourself why so many people continue to start businesses with the HOST® Dry Extraction Carpet and Grout Cleaning System.



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