

Tenacity, talent and the right tools

The recipe for cockroach management success varies in commercial accounts, although the basic ingredients remain the same

By Heather Gooch | PMP Editor-in-Chief

When you were first learning the ropes of the pest management industry, you (hopefully) were taught that no two accounts are alike, and that a cookie-cutter approach will likely end in failure. This is particularly true for German cockroaches in commercial accounts. That's not to say there aren't similarities you can pick out before you begin an inspection, or that best practices and protocols are not needed. There are — hello, sanitation issues — and they are.

Running with that theme, since we are, after all, talking primarily about commercial kitchens, treating for cockroaches is not unlike baking a batch of cookies. You need flour, butter and eggs, but the different amounts used and what else you add can make them a different kind each time. And most times, as long as the basics are in place, you'll get success.

THE "BASICS" INCLUDE:

- **Tenacity:** Inspect everywhere. Move objects. Ask for access to closets and cabinets, and don't give up until you get it. Follow up, monitor, report and repeat.



- **Talent:** Cockroach technicians should be able to both follow the product label to a T and think outside the box when it comes to placing monitoring devices, for example. They should be able to identify species, even those that can be hard to distinguish, and know how to put together the best strategy for each situation. And while residential technicians need the “gift of gab” when explaining recommendations and expectations to homeowners, it's a great quality for commercial techs to have, too. They need to be able to talk with more than just the main contact at an account, as the line cooks, the cafeteria volunteers, the second-shift crew all may have input as to where the cockroach issues are originating and spreading.

- **Tools:** You need more than the sole of your shoe for cockroach control, although it's a good start. Baits, aerosols, liquids, dusts — each has their benefits, from quick

To reach deep into cracks and crevices where roaches — regardless of species — like to hide, Vaughn Thomas uses Control Solution Inc.'s Precision Delivery System tool with Dorex Precise dry flowable bait. Its measurement accuracy, ease of use and ability to go even a few feet into hard-to-reach spaces makes it an integral part of Thomas' integrated pest management program, he says.

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GERMAN COCKROACH SUPPLEMENT

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knockdown to long residual to being labeled for use in food accounts. Vacuums, monitoring devices and formal reports are necessary for maintaining accounts and identifying hot spots before they become an issue.

● **Time:** Consider this the fourth “ingredient” — perhaps the sugar in your cookie. “A cockroach infestation in a residential home tends to be centralized in the kitchen, whereas in a commercial account, the source may not be coming from the area you were called out to service,” points out Vaughn Thomas, founder and president of Cleveland Heights, Ohio-based Cleveland Best Pest Control (CBPC). “You may need to search adjacent rooms and lower levels to find the epicenter of the problem.”

Gabby Cash, co-owner of Double C Pest Control in Weimar, Texas, agrees. “We place more emphasis on spending more time inspecting than treating,” Cash adds. “When a tech goes into a restaurant to perform a treatment, for example, whether it’s a maintenance or an initial service, they should go in with just a flashlight and inspect *everything*. Look behind everything, pull things away from the walls when possible, and get on your hands and knees to look thoroughly.”

Scott Wrozier, ACE, a service supervisor for St. Louis, Mo.-based Rottler Pest Solutions, trains his commercial technicians to take the time to “think about why the pests are there before figuring out how to get rid of them.”

“Is there a seal where the floor meets the wall, or is there a gap? Is the drain below the equipment filled with food debris and trash? Did you crawl under the dish sink and check under the backsplash or around the motor?” he adds. “Our techs enter a new account with only their inspection tools; the products can wait until you know exactly what you’re going to do with them.”



SCOTT WROZIER

COMMERCIAL VS. RESIDENTIAL

Educated as an engineer and marketer, CBPC’s Thomas started his business in 2019 after providing pest control for family-owned rental properties and falling in love with the work. He is primarily residential (a 70/30 split with commercial accounts), but last year won the bid for a local school system that has kept him very busy. Besides allotting more time at commercial accounts, he notes two other big differences from residential cockroach control:

1 More cooperation. Overall, he says, schools, restaurants, stores and other commercial clients tend to be more receptive to integrated pest management (IPM) recommendations. Naturally, they have more at stake (losing customers to cockroach sightings) than a person who has learned to live with the pests at home. But structural repairs and other advice go a long way to “getting

Key cockroach control factors

“The Pest Coach,” Bradenton, Fla.-based industry consultant Jeff McGovern, trains all new technicians — and reminds not-so-new ones — that there are 12 key words and phrases to keep in mind when controlling cockroaches and other pests:

- Access, food, water, harborage;
- Underneath, around, behind, on top of;
- Cleaning (visible dirt), sanitation (dirt you can’t see), maintenance (leaks and holes), and product rotation (first in, first out).

If you can, McGovern advises, for commercial accounts try to get in an audit visit before performing a cleanout. That way, you can find the hot spots before they’re all disturbed by your cleanout work. In addition to your report paperwork, the clipboard you walk around with as you inspect and discuss

with your client should have the following (and for the more technology-savvy, perhaps these are files on your digital device you can share):

- A satellite photo printout of the facility, so you can see trees, neighboring businesses and any other potential cockroach contributing factors. Google Earth is a good resource.
- A map of the facility, which shows all fire exits, storage areas, etc. This should be provided to you by the client upon request.

During this visit, ask your client and as many team members as he or she will allow you, “Where was the *last* place you saw a cockroach?”

“If you ask it that way, instead of just ‘where have you seen cockroaches,’ they need to stop and think,” McGovern points out, noting that he learned this trick from *Pest Management Professional* Hall of Famer



JEFF MCGOVERN

and keeping control more quickly and for longer periods,” Thomas says.

2 More species variety. When we say cockroach, you say *German* — but Thomas warns against technicians becoming complacent with identification. “In commercial accounts around here, we have what I call the Big Three: American, Oriental and German cockroaches,” he says, referring to *Periplaneta americana*, *Blatta orientalis* and *Blattella germanica*. “Each requires a different treatment approach, as their habits differ slightly.”

Thomas says that at his accounts, German cockroaches are the most common overall, but that he finds American cockroaches near pipes in kitchens and restrooms that need attention. The problem usually is quickly brought under control once a leak is fixed or plumbing is replaced. Oriental cockroaches, meanwhile, are found near coolers and the back walls of kitchens. “Think of where, especially in older schools or other facilities, the kitchen is located,” Thomas points out. “They’re in the back of the building. And what’s right outside the kitchen door? The dumpsters.” While handy for keeping the kitchen area clean, he says, if dumpster and garbage can maintenance isn’t on a regular schedule, cockroach — and ant and rodent — populations can blossom.

With schools closed for much of 2020, Thomas says, he was able to get the majority of his school accounts onto either a two- or four-week rotating

maintenance schedule, with callbacks as needed. “I charge a flat rate, and in return they are assured their school is as pest-free as possible,” he says, noting that ants, spiders and sowbugs also appear from time to time in certain schools. Smoky brown cockroaches (*Periplaneta fuliginosa*) were a problem with a specific school’s old-fashioned coolers in the cafeteria, but were taken care of last year with Control Solutions Inc.’s Precision Delivery System, using Doxem Precise dry flowable bait.

Newer schools, with fewer cracks and crevices, are easier to service than older structures, Thomas says. He admits the worst — regardless of district — tend to be the cafeterias that are training kitchens for culinary students. “You have one half that is the main cafeteria kitchen, and it’s clean as can be,” he says. “And then the other half, that the students use for cooking classes — well, that can be another story.”

Double C’s Cash, who has been in the industry since 2013, points out that it’s easy to become complacent when the customer is cooperative and the cockroach level stays below the threshold. Approach every visit with both time and energy. “Don’t feel rushed,” she adds. “Doing a good job is more important than doing it quickly.”



GABBY CASH

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Dr. Austin Frishman, BCE-Emeritus (Class of 2002).
(Editor’s Note: Doc Frishman wrote a special column for this issue, which starts on p. 149.)

“If they tell you where,” McGovern continues, “you say, ‘show me.’ And now you’ve formed a partnership: They’re pointing to things. They’re engaging with you.”

The more people you engage at the facility, the better able you are to detect a pattern of pest distribution, he says.

During the audit, learn as much as you can about their food deliveries: the frequency, the schedule. Where are the pallets stacked before and after product is put away? Learn about the employees’ habits on-site. Where do they keep their coats, purses and backpacks? Where do they tend to congregate on breaks?

After what is presumably a daytime audit visit, McGovern suggests conducting a nighttime “forced monitoring” process. After the restaurant is closed for the night, take your favorite cardboard monitoring traps, mark them with numbers, and place them throughout the

facility. About 130 traps will do for a typical 8,000-square-foot, sit-down restaurant. Return the next morning before the restaurant opens and collect them. Then “read them” to find your distribution hot spots. Keep in mind, he says:

- An adult male cockroach has a range of 12 feet in every direction from point of capture.
- An adult female has a range of 6 feet in every direction from point of capture.
- Nymphs and gravid females each have about 1 foot in every direction from point of capture.

Once you get your account under control, McGovern says, consider a twice-a-month frequency. “One night service for any heavy lifting; one day service for communication and observation,” he says. “Having both a month helps secure the account. Plus, on the day visit, you’re seeing the ‘boss’ — it helps remind folks that you’re the reason they’re cockroach-free.”

Learn more about McGovern’s 12 Key Factors program at JeffMcGovern.com. — H.G.

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Documentation with reports and photos also are essential at commercial accounts, Cash says. “We share our findings with clients, and inform them that if any areas we told them about that need sanitation are not remedied, there will be an additional charge for the follow-up visit. But if they do their part, the follow-up is free.”

Rottler’s Wrozier says after gaining control at a commercial account, it’s worthwhile to set up another appointment with your main contact. “Do a walkthrough of the account, and go over the progress that has been made,” he advises. “Identify the corrections made to conducive conditions, and point out how it has improved the pest activity. Then point out any conditions that have yet to be addressed, and come up with an action plan to correct them.”

While it’s not always possible, he says, “try to engage with staff as this process is happening, to get everyone on the same page. This also may be a time to add services, such as additional insect light monitors, drain treatments or exterior services.”

IDENTIFYING TRENDS

Wrozier admits that cockroach management in commercial kitchen environments has become more “interesting” in recent months, due in no small part to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. He says he believes there are several factors that contribute to the surge.

“We have accounts that did not allow vendors inside for long periods of time, including pest management services; we have our customers’ employees working from home part of the week, taking things like infested laptops to and from these environments,” he explains. “And in my experience, staffing issues have been exceptionally bad for the food and beverage industry. This means things like cleaning and organizing the kitchen get put on the back burner, if they are done at all.”

When facing these challenges, Thomas says, pest management professionals simply need to continue to do all they can to get cooperation from customers. “We must continue to work hard to educate our customers on the habits of these pests, and what best practices they can implement to reduce the risk of future problems,” he concludes. **PMP**

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Scenes from a restaurant

By Paul Bello, ACE, BCE | *PMP* Contributor

When it comes to pest management professionals (PMPs), I think of what Bill Murray so astutely noted in “Stripes”: “There’s something wrong with us, something very, very wrong with us.”

We’re ever vigilant and we see stuff others simply don’t. Once you’re a pro, you’re always on duty.

Picture this: It’s 1981 (“Stripes” is in movie theaters, no less) and I’m on my second date with my future wife, Mary Ann, at a local pizzeria and restaurant. They have great pizza and excellent food here. My family had been going to this place since it opened in the 1960s.

We’re seated at a typical booth, with a napkin dispenser, salt and pepper shakers, sugar packets and a round, black, plastic ashtray. The ashtray was shaped like a small cup, with notches cut out to rest a cigarette. It sat on three bump-style feet.

So, there we were reviewing the menu, making small talk and being nervous. “What’s good here?” she asked. “Everything,” I replied.

Of course, that’s about when “it” happens: I’m a pest guy and I see movement, kind of like how a hawk sees a furry critter scamper across open ground. But it’s not a rabbit, it’s an adult female German cockroach strolling across our table.

Fearing a freaked date, my mind raced for a quick solution to this predicament.

Good thing she was reading the menu, which is huge and obscuring her view. I grabbed the ashtray and placed it over the cockroach.

Ah, crisis averted, well done, I congratulated



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This cup of salad dressing seems to have some added protein.

in this economic climate, Joe was swamped and shorthanded.

He was bussing a table when I approached him with my cell phone photo of the nymph doing the backstroke in the dressing. “Do you know what this is?” I asked.

“Oh man, that’s a roach,” Joe said with a groan. “I think they’re coming from next door.”

(They’re always coming from next door, aren’t they?)

“Do you have pest control service?” I asked. “How often do

they come out?”

Joe responded with the name of a company I’ve never heard of, and said they come monthly.

I gave him my card, and told him to speak with his service provider so we could arrange for a free training class for their team at this restaurant. I assured Joe he did not lose a customer, and that we’d be back next week — but we need to have one of our favorite places cockroach-free!

myself silently. But the success was short-lived. Remember those three bump-style feet?

A few seconds later, more movement was detected — which activated PMP-on-a-second-date panic mode. The huge menu was still serving as a diversion, but what to do, part two?

I remained calm and created another diversion: “Look on the next page, they have really good veal parmigiana and shrimp scampi here!”

As she turned the page and looked more deeply at the menu, in nearly one fluid motion, I helped the cockroach crawl into the ashtray, flicked the now-occupied ashtray under the table and dispatched it with a swift kick across the room. Crisis permanently prevented.

FAST-FORWARD 40 YEARS

Mary Ann and I are at another favorite restaurant, one we have enjoyed and trusted for years. Now that I’m a consultant, though, I am, before this evening, unaware of who actually performs their pest control.

After so many years being with me, that PMP’s ability to spot any pest movement has long since been imparted to Mary Ann. She spots a newly emerged cockroach nymph on the table and says “Hey, look at this!”

This was way better than the anticipated freak-out, screaming event I had imagined decades earlier. I get it to crawl onto a piece of paper, and I flick it into the stainless-steel cup of creamy Italian dressing, as pictured above.

We finish the remainder of our meal without incident. Mary Ann heads to the car so I can chat with the owner, “Joe,” privately. Not surprisingly,

LESSONS LEARNED

I recently posted this story to the Pest Cemetery Facebook Group, and received some great responses and extra insights, including:

- “My old boss did this, and ended up selling the owner of the restaurant a service on trade: He and his employees eat there free, and in return, the restaurant gets monthly service.” — *Hayley Ash*
- “It’s very possible they received the roach in a recent delivery, in which case the PMP and owner very well could be unaware of an issue... I personally have witnessed infestations being brought into my customers’ establishments from deliveries or even them picking up supplies, on multiple occasions. I’ve opened up beer boxes with hundreds of German cockroaches that literally just got delivered. Same with strawberries (twice) that a customer was picking up from a supplier.” — *James Pickett*

Whatever the reasons this occurred, we need to handle such situations carefully. Being generous with our experience and knowledge serves us, and the community, well for the long-term. Providing assistance is a win-win and, as they say, life is a circle. PMP