

BUSINESS

ABOUT THE ABODE

Why hiring a plumber can make 'cents'



ANDY RODENHISER

It is truly underestimated how much work it takes to be a homeowner.

Some homeowners are inclined to think that being a handy do-it-yourselfer can save a lot of money in the long run and, as such, will take on any home improvement task that comes their way. Sometimes, though, success comes down to the homeowner's capabilities and realizing that these projects are more complicated than just doing it yourself. Some home issues need more attention and skill than any average homeowner could offer.

Although your wallet and ego might take a hit, there are occasions when it's best to bite the bullet and call an expert. This is especially true for your home plumbing issues, and here's why.

It can be harder than it looks

This is a phrase we've all heard before, but hope never applies to our situation. With plumbing situations, this is unfortunately the norm. Simple logic says that if there's a leak in your piping, you should be able to tighten the loose part with a wrench, however it usually is not that simple. If it were truly this easy, we all could call ourselves plumbers. The 4- to 5-year apprenticeship that hopeful plumbers go through, followed by examinations to obtain a plumber's license, would be obsolete. To execute plumbing techniques, one must also be sound in mathematics and problem solving – some skills that not everyone truly excels in. Like almost any job, there is more to being a plumber than meets the eye of the consumer.

The right tools for the job

Back to tightening things with a wrench – even if you have truly diagnosed the problem that your plumbing system is experiencing, it may take more than a common hand tool to get the job done. Professional plumbers have a plethora of tools stowed away in their van or truck to get the job done correctly. An average homeowner may have the basic wrench, screwdriver and hammer on hand. Even a do-it-yourselfer may have some extra tools lying around for specific tasks, but there's no telling that they have the specific tools for the job. The job that a plumber has prepared for is in part buying specific tools for the job.

Plumbers who purchase these tools for their job will get their money's worth out of them with repeated use for their career. Homeowner, on the other hand, will most likely end up spending a big chunk of change on a tool they won't end up using more than a handful of times. The tools need to be purchased correctly and used effectively in order to get the job done

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SMALL BUSINESS PROFILE

Twin bill for Medfield IT firm



Twin brothers Konrad, left, and Kevin Martin are co-owners, with Jeff Bell, of Tech Advisors in Medfield. DAILY NEWS PHOTOS/DENNIS STEIN

With Tech Advisors, Martin brothers specialize with assisting the CPA market

By Bob Tremblay
Daily News Staff

If you were into statistics, what would you say the odds were of twins not only ending up in the same line of work, but as partners in the same business? Let's just say the odds would be as slim as a wasp's waistline.

But that unlikely two-fer has happened in Medfield where twin brothers Konrad and Kevin Martin serve as co-owners, with Jeff Bell, of Tech Advisors Inc., an IT firm specializing in the CPA market. Both Konrad and Kevin are CPAs and interestingly enough so is their older brother, John Denis Martin.

So, how did Konrad and Kevin end up as partners in the same firm? So glad you asked. Konrad was a CPA at the firm Abrams, Little-Gill and Loberfeld in Chestnut Hill. One of the partners approached Konrad to help fix a computer that wasn't working properly, and this breakdown occurred during the height of the tax season when minutes count. Konrad was able to fix the problem and it led to the partner suggesting that the company open an IT specialty firm to help other CPA firms in need. They saw this as a legitimate second profit center.

Konrad recalls that, although



Tech Advisors' employees Roberto Coehlo, left, who oversees the help desk, and Xabriel Colon, senior field manager, review data in the company's Medfield office.

he in fact knew a fair amount about computers, he wasn't interested in abandoning his CPA role to become the firm's IT person. It was at that point that he told the partner that he wasn't the right choice, but his twin brother Kevin might be interested. Kevin was at the time working for John Denis in Maine. Both Kevin and Konrad at different times worked for John Denis and his firm. Abrams,

Little-Gill and Loberfeld hired Kevin as a CPA with the understanding that he would also take care of the firm's IT needs and the company could begin to promote the service to other CPA firms. In 2002, the "firm within a firm" incorporated as Tech Knowledge Advisors, a division of Abrams, Little-Gill and Loberfeld. Kevin and Konrad were given a minority ownership of

Tech Knowledge Advisors.

Over the next couple of years, Konrad and Kevin made the transition from CPAs to IT professionals, providing services to their company and other CPA firms. In 2005, Konrad and Kevin and the partners decided to part ways. The twins approached the partners about buying out the

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BUSINESS LEADER PROFILE

Rosa Caulfield

Name of business: Rosa's Hair Salon
Address: 108 East Central St., Natick

Phone number: 508-596-4424
Website: rosashairsalon.com

Tell us how you ended up in this line of work.

My cousin and I decided to attend a hairdressing School after high school and loved it. This is a great profession to work in while you're raising a family. My children are grown and now I can enjoy my passion at my own pace.

What memories from your career stick with you the most?

I have one that has followed me throughout the years. I was out of school for about a year when I had a client ask me a question regarding "hair" and I didn't know the answer. His response was "know your craft." From that day on "I knew my craft."

What do you most like about your work?

I love the interaction with my clients and the

friendships that have grown throughout the years. I truly believe that the quote "If you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life" says it all.

What makes your business or profession unusual?

There's nothing unusual about looking good. What I think makes Rosa's different is that it is just me...



More about Rosa Caulfield

Age: 52
Occupation: hairdresser
Years in business: new (30 years as a hairdresser)
Town in which you reside: Natick
Family: married with 3 children
Hobbies: gardening, traveling to Sicily

you might find in a bigger shop.

In a way, my shop is always open.

What advice do you have for someone who wants to open a business?

Make sure you're ready. Plan and make it your own. No regrets.

It's the personal experience you get when you come into a small, family-run shop. I don't have set hours so when people call, I do my best to work within their schedule and I don't have the limitations

BUSINESS

Banking on a new location



Attending the ribbon-cutting ceremony of Needham Bank at 41 Front St. in Ashland are, from left, Denise Conti, the bank's assistant vice president; Effie Marshall, teller; Jorbley DeSouza, head teller; and Holly Veum, assistant branch manager. DAILY NEWS STAFF PHOTO/KEN MCGAGH

ON THE MONEY

High-tech house calls

On-demand doctor apps bring an Uber approach to medicine

By Matthew Perrone
The Associated Press

It was 8 o'clock on a weeknight and Brooklyn resident Sarah Sheehan was reeling from a painful earache.

She wouldn't be able to see her doctor until the next morning, and that would require a 45-minute subway ride uptown. That's when Sheehan, co-founder of an education technology business, remembered receiving a promotional code for a new company called Pager, an Uber-like service that sends doctors to patients' homes.

Pager and similar companies like Heal and Medicast aim to streamline medical care -- cutting out waiting rooms, receptionists and trips to the doctor's office.

"It's a completely different experience when you're sick and able to stay in your pajamas," says Sheehan. "Someone comes to your home, they're kind to you, they answer all your questions and give you all the time you need."

But some doctors warn there could be drawbacks to convenience-driven medical care, especially if it disrupts an already complex, fragmented health care system. As the app makers search for a sustainable business model, however, it appears they are more likely to end up working with traditional medical providers, than against them.

House call comeback?

House calls were once commonplace in the United States. Today, 9 out of 10 general practitioners say they do not typically make house calls, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians.

But new phone apps may signal a comeback for house calls.

Pager is currently only available in New York City but it will expand to San Francisco in coming weeks. A rival company on the West Coast, Heal, already operates in San Francisco, Orange County and L.A.

Gaspard de Dreuz, one of Pager's three co-founders, says the services' typical customers are working mothers ages 30 to 45.

"It's really an urban population that is busy and values its time," he adds.

So much so that they are willing to pay a premium. Like other services, Pager is not currently covered by insurance. Customers pay a \$50 fee for their first visit and \$200 for subsequent visits from one of the company's 40 health practitioners, including doctors, nurses and physician assistants.

That fee is about 10 times more than the typical \$15 to \$25 doctor co-pay for patients with insurance. But there are situations where a Pager visit might be cheaper than conventional care. For instance, \$200 is significantly cheaper than the median cost of an emergency room visit: \$505, according to federal figures. The ER is often the only medical option for people without insurance.

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right. Spending money on tools that a consumer does not fully know how to operate or will only be using once, is a waste of time and money when the consumer can simply call the plumber for the job.

Safety and peace of mind

When you bring a licensed and experienced plumber into your home to work on any issue you may be having, you can rest assured knowing that your plumbing system will be in good hands. We are all human, and if, for some reason, your plumber overlooks a problem during his visit, you can always re-contact them and they can schedule a second trip to your home and they can ensure that the job is done properly. Like most physical labor, plumbing can be a dangerous task if you don't know exactly what you're doing -- another reason to count on the professionals available to help you out. Various parts of plumbing could become dangerous quick, or create a bigger problem if not handled correctly.

For example, trying to quickly fix a malfunctioning water heater on your own could end up posing a fire hazard to your home. Worst-case scenario, this could happen unbeknownst to you. To guarantee the safety of your home and those living in it, along with a job well done, a professional plumber is your best bet.

When you find that your home is experiencing plumbing issues, it is important to keep the number of an experienced plumber on hand. Even though some jobs may be small enough to handle with your home tools and a YouTube video, it can't hurt to get an expert opinion to ensure you don't have any further unseen issues. So, when your plumbing goes south... who are you going to call??

—Andy Rodenhiser of Holliston is the fourth-generation owner of Rodenhiser Plumbing, Heating, A/C and Electric in Holliston. He can be reached at www.rodenhiser.com.

PRODUCT REVIEW

Strong search feature for Google photo service

By Anick Jesdanun
The Associated Press

Google's new service for organizing and backing up images blends some of the best of what Apple and Yahoo have rolled out in recent months.

These services come as smartphone cameras get better, and people take more photos and video with them. The problem is many of the images simply sit on the phones, taking up valuable space. Worse, digital memories can disappear when phones are lost or stolen.

Photo services from Google, Yahoo and Apple all store copies of those photos and video online. Images taken with tablets and stand-alone cameras can be added, too, giving you one home for your entire image library.

These services also offer editing tools and help organize your images. After all, why bother taking photos if you can't find them later?

The latest offering, Google Photos, isn't perfect. Recently, Google apologized when the service mistakenly labeled two black people as gorillas. And there's a catch with free storage of photos and video. On the other hand, Google has the best tools for searching photos. That's no surprise, coming from the world's most popular search engine.

Here's a look at Google Photos and how it compares with Apple's and Yahoo's offerings.

Storage and backup

Just download the Google Photos app on your iPhone, iPad or Android device and

connect over Wi-Fi. Photos and video on your device will automatically upload to Google's servers.

Google offers unlimited storage of photos of up to 16 megapixels. That covers iPhones and Samsung Galaxy phones. For the few phones that exceed that, Google will either reduce the file size or let you store the original as part of a free allotment shared with Gmail messages and other Google services. You get 15 gigabytes, enough for a few thousand photos at 16 megapixels, after which you pay \$2 or more a month. If you choose to store the originals, all photos will count toward the quota, including those under 16 megapixels. Unless you're looking for poster-size prints, 16 megapixels is fine for printing, but the extra pixels help when cropping.

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"practice within a practice" and they left the CPA firm and launched their IT venture, now under the new name Tech Advisors.

Konrad recalls, "It was a nerve-racking time. We had 5 or 6 clients and my role was to go out and find additional CPA firms to add to our client roster."

In 2006 their firm grossed about \$600,000 and today that figure is at approximately \$1.6 million. They have expanded their model, and offer IT outside the scope of the CPA industry, although this is still their primary area of practice. They are seen as go-to sources within the CPA industry and have helped write the WISP (written information security program) for the Massachusetts Society of CPAs.

So, what's it like to work with your twin brother? "It's like being with my best friend," says Konrad. "Kevin and I are very different in our personalities. We like many of the same things -- the same type of music and sports, for example. Kevin is more reserved and quiet. I am more outgoing. But what we have worked well together."

A Medway resident, Konrad recently discussed Tech Advisors with Daily News staff writer Bob



Connor MacLean, left, Tech Advisors' Apple specialist, shows Konrad Martin how he has set up the Medfield company's Facebook page. DAILY NEWS PHOTO/DENNIS STEIN

Tremblay.

QUESTION: Why was the business started?

ANSWER: We knew firsthand how troubling it is to a CPA firm to have its network down, particularly during critical times such as tax season. We saw the need to provide this quality IT support to CPA firms and other businesses, and we knew that we had the "inside" or firsthand knowledge of what CPA firms needed.

Q: Why did you choose your current locales?

A: Kevin lives in Medfield and we have worked in the Boston area for a long time. Medfield provided

us with quality office space at a reasonable price. We have grown from 2 people (Kevin and myself) to 12 people today and we now have more than 100 clients.

Q: Do you have other businesses or work in other businesses?

A: We have had several service businesses in the past. One of our other companies was called KRK Productions and created travel CD-ROMS for the state of Maine. We did a CD-ROM of Acadia National Park.

Q: What does Tech Advisors do?

A: We provide outsourced IT management and

consulting. We take care of computer networks and all the items that touch that network.

Q: What makes you different from the competition?

A: Our company was founded by CPAs and is owned by CPAs. We understand business and how to create an IT solution that works for your business. We are also very involved in compliance with Mass. Data Breach Laws, HIPAA and PCI. We did 22 seminars for the Mass. Society of Certified Public Accountants.

Q: What is the price of your product or service?

A: We have monthly IT service plans, which have

all-inclusive pricing and we do project work such as virtualization, compliance reports, etc. Pricing depends on the number of users and the services desired.

Q: Any financial news?
A: Our growth percentage has been over 20 percent since we started the company in 2005.

Q: Any future plans?
A: Continued growth by adding a 24-hour, 365-day help desk and we are working on providing cyber insurance for our monthly IT service plans. We have also added technicians to our service team as the company has grown, and we have some other expansion plans in mind for the future.

Q: Any news to report, such as upcoming anniversaries or new products?
A: July 1, 2015, was our 10th year in business as Tech Advisors Inc. We are also named to the Boston Business Journal's "Pacesetters" list for 2015. The list designates the region's 70 fastest-growing privately held businesses based on research conducted by the Boston Business Journal. The companies included were selected based on their strong growth over the last four years.

—Tech Advisors has offices at 266 Main St., Medfield, and 20 Park Plaza, Boston. Its website is www.tech-adv.com.

DILBERT —Scott Adams



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