

Sweating the Small Stuff



“We have never lost sight of our proud tradition of personal relationships and high-touch client contact.”

Timothy P. Hughes, Founder, President/CEO
Movers Specialty Service, Inc.

Q. Please describe your company and its operations.

A. I founded Movers Specialty Service, Inc. (MSS) in 1978. From the beginning our mission has been “dedicated to restoring order and comfort to the lives of corporate transferees and their families.” We accomplish this daily through our nationwide network of trained technicians capable of providing over 350 technical services at the residence at the time of relocation. These services include disconnect, disassembly and custom crating of customers’ most valued household items at origin and uncrating, assembly, and re-connect at the destination home.

Q. How did you get into this business?

A. I was introduced to the moving industry through six summers of employment working for my Uncle Joe’s moving company (Bekins and Atlas agencies) in Camden, N.J. and my first job out of college was as a dispatcher for Bekins Van Lines. Dispatching moving crews can be challenging enough without the extra hassle of scheduling the many different trades like plumbing, electric and handyman services that are frequently required to be on site and on time to assist the movers. I decided to

start a business that provided a one-stop resource for those services, and MSS was born. I was fortunate that I had the knowledge and skills to perform the work myself without the need to subcontract during those early, lean years.

Q. How has your company grown or changed over the years?

A. The early years were a real challenge when our geographic coverage was limited to Pa, N.J., and Del. That’s when I learned the incalculable value of service customization to meet the individual and diverse needs of each client, one handshake at a time. In 1984 I made the decision to create and formalize a nationwide network of service providers. MSS gained renewed traction and we locked in to a new phase of substantial annual growth. We have never lost sight of our proud tradition of personal relationships and high-touch client contact.

Q. How has your company integrated technology and innovation?

A. First, MSS has built custom enterprise resource planning and customer Relationship Management systems from the ground up designed solely and especially to meet our niche industry’s



unique customer service, order management and dispatch and billing requirements. Second, MSS has adopted technologies which enable seamless integration with our clients' systems wherever possible. MSS offers multiple options to accommodate the differing systems and user preferences.



The Hughes family has a tradition of working in the moving industry.

SNAPSHOT: Movers Specialty Service, Inc.

Exposure/Awards:
AMSA's 2009 Summit
Award winner.

Headquarters:
Montgomeryville, Pa.

Founded 1978

President: Timothy
Hughes

Q. How do you ensure that your company provides quality customer service?

A. MSS has never lost sight of the individual account needs, strong client relationships and one-on-one daily service excellence at residence. We assign each account a select customer service team most familiar with the special needs of each client. To ensure continuous quality in field service, MSS developed our Supplier Evaluation Metrics Information program that measures daily technician performance, applies strict accountability and levies real consequences for non-compliance. We have dedicated Service Recovery and Quality Assurance departments to immediately address any service escalations at residence and to measure success of all our continuous improvement initiatives. Our employee curriculums through MSS University are very customer-focused and require stringent training and demonstration of competency for all staff. Finally, our entire executive team — sales team, customer service and dispatch management personnel — are literally available anytime a customer needs assistance, day or night, weekends or holidays.

Q. What's your biggest concern about your business?

A. My biggest concern now is maintaining the financial stability of our critically important network of service providers while providing the fairest pricing strategies to our clients.

Q. What's the greatest business risk you've taken?

A. The technology innovations mentioned earlier required a very significant investment in IT infrastructure and software a number of years ago and a considerable commitment in internal resources to continuously improve and maintain it. Beyond that I try not to take 'great' risks. There was that time I left my service van in a no parking zone in NYC. It was towed, fully loaded with crates for a job, and not returned to me until the next day. Was that a 'risk' or just dumb?

Q. What's the biggest lesson you have learned in business?

A. Recognizing that a company is made up of many moving parts and every effort you make needs to be focused towards synchronizing those parts. Hiring people that like people, giving them a vision of service, acknowledging what the customer needs and supporting employees as they do their jobs. Additionally I cannot conceive of running a business without 'listening' to your customers and ensuring that you are delivering on every promise.

Q. How do you see this industry changing in the next decade?

A. The downturns in job opportunities and the near frozen housing market have severely impacted the relocation industry. I believe strongly that both will

rebound; however, I have to leave that to the economists to predict.

Geographic mobility has declined over the past 20 years and has really taken a nosedive in the current recession. I am confident it will return as business leaders' confidence in the direction of the economy improves.

Q. What message do you have for your colleagues in business right now?

A. I have a message about perseverance and gratitude, with heavy emphasis on the latter. First, perseverance—I most recently addressed all employees at our annual meeting committed to recognizing great performances. I implored that 2010's theme will not be about 'weathering the storm' or 'industry recession' or any other phrase that defined 2009. Instead, MSS is already ignited to move forward with a team of professionals and a network of suppliers that has never been stronger and more eager to serve.

My message to our clients, customers, and the industry at-large is that the hard knocks behind us have made us stronger than ever now! My gratitude is for the strength of our resolve, our long-held foundation of stability and integrity and for performance excellence every day that brings us to this moment. I am also most grateful for every client and customer not just those who chose MSS in the past, but who will choose us in the future because of who we are today. ♦