

CONTRACTOR

THE NEWSMAGAZINE OF MECHANICAL CONTRACTING

Reprint from July 1997

Bilo Plumbing & Heating - a radiant success story

BY JOE FIEDRICH
Hydronic heating authority

RICHARD BILO, a seasoned plumbing and heating contractor is a believer in European hydronic heating technology. He had been long before it became fashionable.

Bilo became involved with radiant heating and European control strategies about 10 years ago.

He was willing to research new technologies, to look to new strategies to grow his business, to invest a lot of time in learning not only the basics but all of the intricacies of a well-planned floor heating system, and he was willing to listen to new ideas.

Richard's business is now mostly radiant floor heating. That's where he sees the future and he is capitalizing on it. He has become an expert in the field and he is in big-time demand.

His focus is on light commercial and high-end residential projects, and he chooses his clients carefully. He sells boilers that range in price from \$5,000 to \$20,000 and his average floor heating system runs from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

Richard does 20 to 25 floor heating systems a year, which constitute 70% of his volume.

Bilo Plumbing & Heating does a variety of commercial floor heating installations, including car-dealerships, food markets and retail-oriented businesses. He has built up an excellent reference list in the market area he is interested in pursuing.

He is extremely conservative in his thinking and he doesn't take any chances when it comes to product selection. Richard is a professional in every respect, exacting and non-compromising.

What are his secrets to success?

He and his crew have an excellent reputation, he makes sure that his systems run well, and how to sell. His four mechanics are competent, well-trained, reliable and they enjoy what they are doing. Richard has built his company on his reputation. All his work now comes from references passed on by satisfied customers. He is hard working and honest.

When dealing with a new customer, he knows the option he has available to custom-tailor the system to his clients' pocketbook without compromising his belief as to how a heating system should be built and how it should perform. Richard knows how far he can upsell any particular client. He is believable without being overpowering, and

humble all the knowledge he has in his field. He approaches each job with confidence and lets his customer know that in order to have a properly running system some compromises just can not be made.

He asks his customers to rely on his professional judgment in designing the system they need and, because of his depth of knowledge, he can be confident in doing this.

With everybody flying high at the peak of this seven-year marketing cycle, the dip will eventually come again. The way to combat a downturn is to think out a business plan, as Richard has, with a particular target market in mind, whether it be retrofit, new construction, residential or commercial. Those contractors working now to become experts in these areas will have fewer problems when a downturn occurs or when competition increases in the marketplace.

The more diversified and knowledgeable you and your employees are, the better off you will be in the future.

Floor heating is here to stay. Take charge and love it because the next thing to come is radiant cooling. That will open much wider markets for those of us in hydronics.

The author is president of Stadler Corp. (tel. 781/275-3122), a Bedford, Mass.-based supplier of hydronic heating equipment