

Late Start, Big Wins: Bill Dunn's Journey in Building a Cleaning Empire

Thu, Nov 07, 2024 9:30AM • 47:57

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Janitorial Manager, Business of Cleaning, Bill Dunn, CNS Cleaning, farm upbringing, hard work, wine industry, entrepreneurial spirit, business acquisition, employee care, superior service, customer retention, marketing strategies, SEO experts, Michael Gerber

SPEAKERS

Bill Dunn, Tim Clagg

Tim Clagg 00:01

Janitorial Manager presents The Business of Cleaning Podcast, the podcast that brings you the information you need to be successful in the cleaning industry. The Business of Cleaning Podcast provides in depth interviews with successful personalities from the commercial cleaning industry, as well as discussing the trending topics that matter to you and your organization. And welcome into The Business of Cleaning Podcast, your number one source for information on the commercial cleaning industry. We release new episodes monthly as we're live from the Janitorial Manager studio located in Toledo, Ohio. I'm Tim Clagg, the Marketing Communications Specialist here at Double A Solutions, and your host of The Business of Cleaning Podcast, we want to welcome in Bill Dunn, owner and president of CNS Cleaning. Welcome to the show, Bill.

Bill Dunn 00:53

Hey Tim. Thank you very much. Appreciate you having me on.

Tim Clagg 00:57

And Bill, you have one of the most, I think, unique and interesting stories in the entire commercial cleaning industry, and I can't wait to dive into it.

Bill Dunn 01:07

It's definitely a unique one, that's for sure.

Tim Clagg 01:09

First, I kind of want to go back, back in time. It is Throwback Thursday, so it makes sense that we are indeed hopping back in time. Before you were in the industry, I want to go back, you were growing up in Pennsylvania on a farm. You learn from a young age the value of hard work. What are some of the best

memories that you had working on a farm with your family, and how did it prepare you for the challenges of your future in every interest industry as an entrepreneur?

Bill Dunn 01:40

Yeah, good question. So when we were kids, we were young, we lived in a townhouse in central New Jersey, and my parents always wanted to own a much bigger piece of property and own a farm. They were in real estate and in construction, but they wanted to also have a farm as well. So at a very young age, nine years old, my parents moved us from this nice townhouse that we lived in to this gigantic farm, and it's actually in New Jersey, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, about 150 acres. And yeah, we started, took over a working farm with cattle, and we planted soybeans and also corn and had multiple animals. But what it taught me from having a very pampered young life to learning about real work and real life at a very young age. So we were as kids, I say to my wife all the time, I think my parents had kids because they needed people to work on the farm. We were at 9-10, years old, out there at five o'clock, five thirty in the morning. Every day, going to feed the livestock, take care of all the animals. It didn't matter what the weather was like. It didn't matter if we were tired or sick. We had to do it. And it became a way of life. And I lived there all the way until I went to college, and dealt with that all the way until I went to college, and one of the biggest things it taught me is that I never wanted to do that again.

Tim Clagg 03:09

Sure!

Bill Dunn 03:10

I had many other jobs as well. I always liked to work. I always liked to make money. I never like to rely on other people for my own income. And so I always had some sort of a job outside of the farm, and every job I had dealt with manual labor. So I realized by the time I was in college that I don't want to do this for the rest of my life. It's too hard. There's definitely a better way to make money if you can. So I went into a different industry, and I worked hard in college just so I could. I had graduated with an accounting degree, so I went onto the business side of things. But I learned the value of hard work when I was very young, and the rewards of hard work. To see the things that have, how things have changed, and to see what the farm is now from when I was a kid, it's just amazing. Just amazing.

Tim Clagg 04:01

Does it now, looking back at that, does it make you appreciate those experiences a little bit more from understanding that value the hard work and the success that you've had, basically in everything that you've touched?

Bill Dunn 04:16

Tim, absolutely. I mean, if I didn't have that experience, I would be, the best way to say it's much softer now. I mean, I learned that putting in the work, there's always going to be a good result out of putting in the work, and that you can't rely on other people to get things done for you in many facets, but you also can in other facets as well. I mean, you have to delegate. You have to be able to trust people in your business, but at the same time, you have to set the tone for your organization, and you have to show that you can do every single thing yourself, from the lowest point of the job to the highest point of the job. You really have to understand every part of it. So if you're not willing to get your hands dirty, and

you're also not comfortable talking to the president of a large corporation, you're not going to have the level of success you might want to have.

Tim Clagg 05:07

And you've had a lot of success, you've seen a lot of success.

Bill Dunn 05:10

Yeah, I've learned a lot. Thanks, yeah. We've been lucky!

Tim Clagg 05:13

The hard work paid off, the wine and spirits industry. Along that way, you were able to work for some of the most respected and reputable companies, like Jim Beam. When did it for you start to become apparent that you were ready for a new challenge in something completely different?

Bill Dunn 05:32

Yeah, so I always, always wanted to own my own business. Both my parents own their own businesses. My brother owns his own business. Two of my brothers own their own businesses, and I knew I had an entrepreneurial spirit inside of me. The issue that I had was that in the spirits, wine and spirits industry, that because I had the work ethic and set myself apart from many others, not because I was smarter, but just because I worked harder, I was more diligent. I really had a lot of ambition. I was able to move up and up and up in that industry. And so it got to the point where it was like the golden handcuffs. I was making too much money to just quit, but I still always wanted to own my own business, and I knew I would be a good boss with having other people on my team, and would treat people the right way and make them feel the way I wanted to feel. So when I was about 47, and this is after many years of saying this, I said, That's it. I'm done. I'm going to find a business to buy. I did a lot of research into starting your own business versus buying a business. And buying a business was by far the safest option. You have a much better chance of succeeding if you buy a business that's already up and running and profitable than if you start one from scratch. Now that's if you have the capital to do it.

Tim Clagg 05:32

Right.

Bill Dunn 05:46

I was fortunate that I had 40-30-something years of work experience and saving money to be able to have some capital to buy a business. But I took two years from when I turned 47, took two years while working full time, looking for businesses to buy, nights and weekends. Whenever I could even sitting in my car online in traffic, I'd look at biz, buy, sell, and I'd establish relationships with brokers. And I knew I wanted a service business, something that I could understand, something that wasn't going to be too technically challenging for me, like even something like hardscaping, you know, and owning a landscaping company. I didn't even want something that technical, which is not that technical, and I was lucky enough to find the cleaning company that my wife and I ended up purchasing. And when I started reading and doing more research on cleaning and seeing the fact that, first of all, it's never going to go away, you're always going to need cleaning. You're always going to need cleaning companies, the growth of the industry was tremendous. The barriers to entry were not that big. And

there are a lot of people who are really, really good cleaners in the industry, and they run, set up pretty good businesses, but they are more of a technician. And when I when I say that, I mean, they're more involved in doing the day to day kind of stuff in the work, they're not as good at marketing or setting up systems in a business that you need in order to take it to another level. And luckily, because of my years of experience, I had some of that in my back pocket. So we were lucky to find this business, and the owners of it were great. They had run it for 36 years, but were ready to retire. And it was just Kismet. They were a husband and wife team ready to retire. We were a husband and wife team that wanted to make a new start.

Tim Clagg 08:54

And you always hear the phrase, whether it's in sports or any aspect of life, always bet on yourself and you put all the chips, literally. I think it's ironic. ISSA is later this month in November, as we're talking here, I think it's fitting you put all the chips on the table. You mentioned 30 years of retirement into buying this company. What were the emotions for you and your wife? Because this was a team effort here, high risk, high reward, and the reward has been sweet.

Bill Dunn 09:28

Well, yeah, thank you for that. We used every dollar we had in our retirement. We used a vehicle that I'm sure most people are not familiar with, and I'm happy to share this. There's a financing that people can use who want to make a transition, like I did, you can use your retirement funds and roll it into what's called the ROBS plan. It's a rollover for business startups, and there's a couple large corporations in the country that set these up for you. And what it allows you to do is take your funds, roll all your retirement funds into a seat corporation, purchase shares in your own company. So betting on yourself and using those shares to purchase a business or start up a business buy a franchise. So I used every dollar of mine and my wife's retirement funds, plus put a second lien on our home and maxed out credit cards. We did everything to make sure that we could buy this business, and we did the due diligence that you have to do in order to make sure it was the right move, but it was still a risk. I mean, we knew the break even analysis, like, if we didn't do as good enough due diligence as we should have, or we missed something that we knew what our cushion was, you know, and how much business we could lose. But it was still very, very tight. So there were moments where we didn't sleep for weeks because we were so scared about losing business. And we did lose a lot of business in the beginning, because a lot of the business that we purchased were government contracts that were all low bid jobs, and we didn't know anything about that. That was a huge learning curve for us the very first six months of of buying this business, we lost almost a quarter of the business in six months because it was government contracts that expired at the end of the year. We purchased the business and started on July one. A lot of these contracts ended December 31.

Tim Clagg 11:16

Merry Christmas. Happy New Year, man.

Bill Dunn 11:19

Yeah, I still look at that spreadsheet sometimes, and it scares me when I see how much we lost.

Tim Clagg 11:24

You spent two years so at age 49 you purchase CNS. It's never too late for people to pursue a goal or a dream. What advice can you give people that might be hesitant, maybe just plain scared, to take that leap for a new goal or a new opportunity,

Bill Dunn 11:44

I would say, first of all, trust in yourself. That's number one. Number two, listen to podcasts, read books that will inspire you and give you the confidence that you need. Because, quite frankly, that was the biggest thing for me. And why it took me so long to get to this point is because I had so much fear, fear of losing my home, fear of losing everything, basically, if I did this, and also being comfortable in the fact that I had a good salary and a good job and everything else. So getting over the fear, but teaching yourself how to get over the fear betting on yourself, and also not listening to the people who may be in your ear saying, No, stay with what you got. You're making a bad move. It's too risky. And also do your due diligence, like, if you want to get into another business, or you want to, you know, start a business, as long as you make sure you protect yourself and you believe in yourself, nine times out of 10, you're going to be fine. I mean, I really, really, truly believe that, and like you have to also know that you're going to do whatever you can in order to make it work like there was no way I was going to fail because I wasn't losing my home. I wasn't going to lose everything, including all the retirement funds that I'd saved on for 30 something years. So I just knew that I would do whatever I had to make it work.

Tim Clagg 13:10

You mentioned not just new for you, but also your wife. How much did her experience working in hospitals in HR with development practices. How did these key pieces having different strengths right, yours from sales and marketing? How did her having different key strengths help the transition in taking over some of those areas, maybe that you weren't familiar with?

Bill Dunn 13:37

Yeah, so that, she is, I mean, a huge asset to our business, and I'm so lucky that she's my partner in life, and my partner in business, because she, get a little emotional thinking about it, but she's there at the office right now. She's there three days a week, or I'm there three days a week, she's there two days a week. And we figured out how to run different roles, like she does what she's good at. I do what I'm good at. We stay out of each other's lanes. In the beginning, it was a lot of this. It didn't always work so smoothly, but it took us some time, and we worked it all out. But her experience in human resources was key to our success, and also in setting up systems within the business, standard operating procedures for everything. So she had written plenty of manuals for standard operating procedures, ways of working, things like that. And we needed those. We needed structure, and she was able to build that kind of structure for us. So without her and what she brought to the business, it would have been much, much harder. And also she's, I'm more loosey goosey kind of when it comes to a lot of things, I'm willing to spend money and take a lot of chances. And she's my check point.

Tim Clagg 14:48

Yeah, checks and balances. Yes.

Bill Dunn 14:50

Yeah, checks and balances. It puts the brakes on me sometimes, which is good. And at times, you know, I'll say, no, no, no, we got to do this. And then she'll say, No, we can't. And it ends up that she was right. So having that other voice to help give some guidance is very, was very key for us.

Tim Clagg 15:09

Day one, coming in, making a splash immediately. And what I mean by that, not just getting involved, going out, getting down and dirty, right, understanding the job, but coming in, making big changes for the employees within the first two weeks, some employees got a bump as much as 50% of salary you guys taking over the business. What do you think this, looking back at it, showed your employees about you as a leader right away.

Bill Dunn 15:41

Yeah. So one of the things, because I'd worked for so many different people over so many years, I knew what it was like to work for somebody who treated you well, and I knew what it was like to work for somebody who treated you poorly or just didn't care about you or wasn't someone I respected. I knew what that was like. I had so many jobs in my life, and so I always said to myself, I want to buy a company, not just because I want to run the business, and I want to have, you know, the opportunity for unlimited success, because that's the other thing you will have if you own your own company. You set the parameters for yourself. It's up to you, how much you want to grow, how big you want to get, how much success you're going to have. I wanted to go in from the very beginning, and my wife was supportive of this, and show the employees that we cared about them as much as we cared about this business, and a big part of that was taking care of them financially. So we looked at the rate of pay that they were getting from the previous owners, and we knew it wasn't sustainable for the type of people that they were. They're good people. They're all still there with us now, and it's been five years.

Tim Clagg 16:21

Wow.

Bill Dunn 16:22

And now all their salaries have gotten way more than 100% in five years. We, from day one set it up so that way we took care of them, because they take care of us. Without our employees, we're not going to be anywhere so, and we really recognize that, we've set up a bonus structure for them. We set up all kinds of incentives for growth that are tied to our businesses growth, also to their interpersonal growth. And we've also fostered a atmosphere in the office that is fun and inviting, but we all still get our work done. I mean, people listen to music all day, you know? They just have everybody gets along. We all have fun together. There's challenges in this industry, as you know, is extremely difficult. You have people that call and complain all the time. No one's ever calling you and patting you on the back and giving you an Atta boy. Customers rarely do that, so you've got a lot of crap to deal with, and so you have to keep things upbeat and fun.

Tim Clagg 17:52

Building a culture that dynamic, so instrumental, and retaining those pieces, those employees, and also, too, I'm sure you know, having that motivation to see, okay, there's an opportunity for growth that motivates people. They kind of see, okay, we're gonna keep things here for people that have hustled,

that have grinded and put in the work. So that's gonna allow people to be a little bit more hungry, more motivated to try and continue their personal journey as well.

Bill Dunn 18:24

Yes, and that's a really good point you bring up because they were so excited in the fact that when my wife and I took over that we wanted to grow the business, because the previous owners were tired, they didn't want to grow the business. They didn't, honestly, and they would, they would tell you this, if they were on the podcast here, that they didn't know how to grow the business to the next level, and they had gotten it to over 3 million, and then they were just like, we don't know. We we're going to explode if we get any bigger than this.

Tim Clagg 18:53

Yeah,

Bill Dunn 18:53

And so they didn't know how to do it, and they were excited to see that we were going to come in, set up the systems needed for growth, and then push aggressively to grow and then share, let them share in the success of that financially.

Tim Clagg 19:09

You had mentioned, too, in our initial conversation, when we met a few weeks ago, a month ago, how you felt it was important to keep key people in and on the management staff who were in those roles, who knew the company inside and out because of the value the experience and what they had been through and what they had seen already with the company before you guys took over.

Bill Dunn 19:35

Yeah. So we have a lot of key employees. So number one, I would say, is our Vice President of Sales and Marketing, a gentleman named Jeff Upmalis. He's been with the company for almost 15 years now, 10 before us, and 5 with us. And he's, he's my right hand guy, like, I don't know, in a pinky's worth of cleaning that he does. I mean, this guy knows everything about. Floors, everything about, he's even, we're doing hood cleaning now, he's gotten us into hood cleaning for universities, which is unbelievable, which we've never done before. I'm talking like multi campus universities, and cleaning dozens and dozens of hoods every couple of months, which we've never done before. But he takes the time and has the energy, because he's young, he's in his 30s, to learn this stuff and then to find good subcontractors to work with that are able to handle this cleaning for us in many cases. So having a guy like him is instrumental to us, and he cares about the business. That's the other thing for me. If people screw up, that's fine. I don't care as long as they care if they care about us, they care about the business, they care about themselves and their growth. That's huge to me. And then there's Brianna Culligan, who manages our office. She's done an amazing job with managing our office staff, with putting systems in place, with helping integrate things like QuickBooks. Um, Salesforce. We are using Salesforce now as our CRM, integrating that, which was very, very difficult, and taking the lead on that. And then we've got other people, Sharee Taylor, who manages all of our contractors, subcontractors, and those relationships. And then we've got couple of customer service people that deal with our customers all day, every day, on the phone, and then someone who handles our accounts receivable

for us, she does an amazing job as well. And there are operations guys that are in the field every day, if without, and it's all the same guys. We've had them for years. They do an amazing job. They have built great customer relationships, and they're key to us. And I want to never lose these guys, because having to retrain someone, which we do on a regular basis, because we're growing, we have to hire new people, but to see them be able to be trained by our people that have been there for three years and teaching them our ways of working is just great.

Tim Clagg 21:57

And you guys have that system, that foundation already built in play into your business. You mentioned the first six months a year. So margins very tight, very compressed, which made profitability maybe a little bit smaller than what you would have liked. At first, what factors were you guys prioritizing determining a new pricing model, labor costs, materials, time or value added services.

Bill Dunn 22:27

Yeah, so one of the things that I realized after being there for a good six months and analyzing the business and where we were is that the profit margins were terrible when we took over the business. They were very, very low. The business model that the previous owner had was volume, volume, volume. Get as many customers in as you can. Grow, grow, grow, grow, grow, but do it by being the lowest priced operator in the marketplace. That was his MO and so he brought in a lot of business. But when you do that, you also bring in a lot of problems because you can't pay the employees very well. So they're not happy. Customers aren't happy because they're getting crappy service, because you're getting crappy cleaners, you know, not crappy cleaners, but cleaners that aren't being paid right. And so we, it took us six months to learn that, and once we learned that and analyzed it, we raised our prices, and I'm not kidding, by over \$10 an hour in what we went to market with in terms of our estimates. And I did a lot of research on it. I talked to some other people, like yourself, who I just reached out to I didn't know, in other parts of the country where I know I wasn't going to be a competitor. And I asked them, What do you charge when you do an estimate for regular office, clean, janitorial work, floor work, you know, carpets, BCT, stripping, waxing, buffing. I asked them all those questions like, what do you charge? And I gotta, it was an eye opening conversation, because they were telling me things I thought we could never even think of charging. And so the next step was teaching my employees to accept these changes.

Tim Clagg 24:02

Right. Getting everybody on board.

Bill Dunn 24:04

Yeah, getting everybody on board. Because they were like, Bill, you're crazy. We can't charge, you know, start at \$27 an hour for general cleaning. We can't go 32-30 we can't do that. You're we're never going to get any business. We're going to go broke. And I just said, guys, trust me, you got to do it. You got to try it, because we're selling ourselves on our superior service. And that was our, that's our catch. That's our 30 second elevator speech is that we offer the best service in the industry, customer service. Cleaning is cleaning. You're going to get good cleaning, for the most part, from any company that you hire that's reputable. But what you don't always get is somebody answers the phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and that's one thing that we do have. It sets us apart from many of the companies

I've ever met and talked to. Literally, you could call us at three in the morning. You're going to get a live person on the phone, and they can get you emergency service within an hour if you need it. I mean, that's just the way we operate, and that's what we're selling to people. So we don't have to sell that for \$17 an hour. We can sell that for \$35 an hour, because we're offering much more than they're typically going to get from somebody else. Now, is that for everybody? No, it's not for everybody, because some people just want the cheapest price. But we don't want those customers anyway, because we've also found that those people are the ones that give you the most headaches. So they want the Cadillac for the price of a Kia, and they want it to be brand new every single day. What led to you guys implementing a 24/7, essentially 365 call center where somebody can speak to A, a live person and B, have that issue taken care of right away, instead of, well, I can get to it in the morning. What led to that? Yeah, so what led to that was the fact that I didn't feel like we were selling ourselves, we were giving our customers what we were saying we were giving them if we didn't offer that. So we've always prided ourselves since my wife and I took over as having the best customer service in the industry. That's what we pride ourselves as, and not having someone to answer the phone after hours didn't fit that model for me. So we found a company, and we looked at a number of different companies for answering services at night time, and then we always have somebody on call to handle any emergencies as they come up. So it was really because I felt like we weren't fulfilling our promise that we were making to our customers without having that available to them. And again it was another thing to set ourselves apart from everybody else. Always looking for something to set ourselves apart.

Tim Clagg 26:43

Continuous learning, continuous improvement. It's in every aspect of business. It's in our daily lives. We have a thirst and a hunger for it as human beings. We're talking with Bill Dunn, Owner and President of CNS, Cleaning and image and company perception, two very important key components to success. You mentioned it, company under prior ownership, maybe sometimes different leadership didn't always thrive. How did you have to work when you took over to build the company brand, and we've already talked about the culture, how did you reshape, rebuild that brand?

Bill Dunn 27:25

Yeah, so it was a lot of repetition. Quite honestly, it was telling the story, talking about where we were going, showing a vision to the employees was very important too. To show them that, hey guys, we're here right now, but this is where we're going to go, and we want you all on board and constantly repeating that message to them and also showing them what our values were. Coming up with a value statement for us. Also, a list of what our exact values were, and preaching those values to them and showing them that we were going to be here for the long haul and that our vision was not going to change. It was a vision that included the employees, and it also included all the cleaners. It included everybody that was involved in helping our business to grow. And then in terms of branding, it was everybody wears this. Everybody wears a CNS shirt. We've got long sleeve ones for the winter. We've got short sleeve ones for the summer. When an operations manager comes to your facility, they're going to have this on they all have business cards that are really nice business cards. They're high quality business cards. We had billboards on the highway on 95 in Philadelphia area. We changed our logo. We did everything we could to get the message out that we had superior customer service in this industry. And it's taken a long time, but we are now, we now get calls from people who say, I've heard about CNS. I heard that you do a good job. We're starting to develop a reputation in the Philadelphia

area, but it's taken us a good five years of a lot of work. Now Google advertising, we've done a lot of that. We're on our third company, hosting our website now. I look at the analytics all the time, and while I'm not an expert on Google Analytics, I've learned enough to know when we're not doing well and when the company that's supposed to be, we're spending thousands of dollars a month with to manage our website for us and do the SEO is not doing as well as they should, and then taking action on it. Constantly striving to always get better, I think is a big part of it too.

Tim Clagg 29:45

Something that you shared with me in our conversation initially was over the 35 years the prior owners were there, there were only five total reviews, so you essentially came in from scratch, clean in essentially that area and just having to go through building that takes time. Rome wasn't built in a day.

Bill Dunn 30:11

Yes, and that's a big part of it. You bring that up. The reviews I thought, to me, were very important, because whenever I look at anything to buy, especially in a service I look at the reviews, and the previous owner, like I said, had been in business 36 years and had five reviews, I think we're up to about 148 now, 149 which still, to me, isn't very good. We should be doing a lot better. And I've searched and searched and searched for good review companies that will help us automatically give reviews or get reviews. Like sometimes, if you get a service done and they automatically, you get a request for a review on your phone. And I'm still searching for that, we had one. It didn't work out so well. Then I've tried some other things. So that's another thing that's constantly a work of process. I still don't have a good one. If anybody that's watching the podcast has a good one that they know of, please contact me and let me know.

Tim Clagg 31:05

Reach out to Bill.

Bill Dunn 31:07

Yes, please. So, I thought that was very important, and it's still even today, I asked my guys, because we do it manually, every time you leave a customer's office, send them an email requesting a review and six requests came through this morning for my guys, so I was really happy to see that.

Tim Clagg 31:26

I think what you just hit on there having your cleaners as they leave aside, or a manager asking initially for review. I know me as a consumer, I had some keys remade through my membership with, I think, Sam's Club recently. And so they're, hey, well, we've got, if you're looking to have some keys made, we've got this third party here. And I'm like, great. And they got done. And would you mind leaving us a Google review right now as I'm standing there. Oh, here it is, and watch me hit send. I was more inclined as a customer to do that right away. I know if I would have got in my car and headed home Bill, no chance. I wouldn't have done it. I'm going to be honest, right?

Bill Dunn 32:09

Sure. Sure. You know, the other thing I will tell you, Tim, that we do that sets us apart is that besides having solid cleaning crews, we have dedicated operations managers to each account. And I would tell

anybody who's starting a cleaning company or running a cleaning company that if you're not doing this, and most of them, I'm sure are, anybody that's very successful will be doing this, is these operations managers, we set it up so we know what are our top 125-150 accounts. And these guys, our operations managers, are in those accounts on a regular basis, rotating basis. The bigger ones they see once a week, the medium size two times a month. The smaller ones once a month. So we have a cadence for everybody. They all have a plan every single day of who they're going to go see. I mean, that's also been very key to our success, is that there's somebody from CNS, besides the cleaning crew in their building on a regular basis. It's a big investment. Not everybody can make it, but being strategic in how you manage your accounts is very important.

Tim Clagg 33:11

And that communication layer, so important to whether it's with your team, whether it's with your clients, it is so important, so vital. When you guys lined up five years ago, became owners. 300 accounts. Not bad. Now, five years later, here we are over 1000 monthly accounts, and you have tripled your revenue when you started scaling and growing and it started to happen this quickly, were you guys a little surprised at how fast that whirlwind came?

Bill Dunn 33:47

Oh, tremendously surprised. I mean, it blew me away. I'm one of those kinds of persons that, people that, I put little post it notes all over the place, and I've got, like, goals for myself. And I'm not like a big goals guy, like I write down everything, and I check it every day, but I make little post its for myself and I posted it, and it's inside my medicine cabinet in the morning. So when I open it up every single day, I had goal for year one, goal for year two, goal for year three, and then goal for year five, and I had financial numbers written in there, and we hit goal for year five by year three. So it blew me away. And I never thought, because I look at that and I tell my wife, she's in the bathroom, standing there with me getting ready in the morning, and be like, Babe, I can't believe we did this. Like, look at where it is. And, yeah, I mean, it's been a hard journey. I'm not going to say it's all been easy, but I'm very surprised at where we are right now. And the thing that I'm most excited about is that it's not enough, because we owe more to the employees that, when my, you know I'm 55 I'm not going to be doing this forever. We gotta leave this business in a good spot for them. So if we can double, triple this business, it's really not for us. It's going to be for them, but I want to do it. I mean, clearly I want to make money too. And I'm going to benefit from that, but our employees are going to benefit more down the road.

Tim Clagg 35:11

And once now you've had that success, sustaining long term, having that, some years are going to be better than others in business. It's just the way it happens. What challenges have you guys had to face and been presented with in 2024 because I know there's been a lot of curve balls and some different hurdles for people in the industry to try and get over top of this year.

Bill Dunn 35:39

Yeah, this year has been the toughest year we've had, Tim. There's a couple of factors. Number one, I think the economy is starting to soften. There's no doubt about that. The back to work stuff people from COVID, going back to work is still slow. People are tightening their belts. I mean, we've had customers that are still customers, but instead of being cleaned five days a week, cut back to four or cut back to

three. That adds up when you have as many customers as we do. And then we've seen a lot of our larger customers, even though they're extremely happy with their service, will look for a better pricing. And so most of those customers we're able to keep because we will negotiate some pricing with them if we really need to, and work around ways to still make it work. Now, we won't say, Okay, you're paying \$10,000 a month. You want to pay eight and get the same level of service. We don't do that. What we will do is we'll say, Okay, we're gonna give you the same level of service in terms of how we act with you. But we're going to, maybe, instead of vacuuming the floors five days a week, we're going to vacuum four. We work it out so that way it works out for everybody. But the other thing is, too, is Google has changed a lot of their analytics and advertising and things like that. So that's gotten much more difficult to manage. There's a lot of smaller companies now, which is great for the people just starting out, but they're going out. A lot of companies are going out very aggressively on pricing, and again, they don't offer the same level of service, which is fine, that's their MO but it's tougher for us to sell what we have in many cases. So when somebody's dollar conscious, instead of paying 1000 for us, they maybe pay 750 for somebody else, and they're okay with that level of service, which previously wasn't always the case, because with COVID, people were very worried about the state of cleanliness, and not only for themselves, but also for their employees and their image. So they wanted the level of service that we provided. So it's been tough. That being said, we're still up this year, double digits again in terms of growth, but not like 40-50% like we had been every year.

Tim Clagg 37:55

We've talked a little bit about SEO, and you've done a complete deep dive, as you were just discussing. You've worked and are continuing to work with different companies. Some people listening may not necessarily be familiar with SEO. Want to kind of ask you, just kind of some questions on that topic, and how you guys do measuring and specifics. So we'll focus on that here. Have you guys been able to identify, identified and targeted, specific keywords to help increase visibility in the search engines like Google and attract new commercial cleaning clients from those efforts?

Bill Dunn 38:41

Yeah, so in all honesty, I leave it to the experts. So, you know, my expertise is in, I would say, in interviewing these marketing companies and taking the time to interview a lot of marketing companies to find the ones that I know I feel anyway, really know what they're doing and I put it on them to have the right keywords to optimize our search engine optimization. Also, I know some other things, like blogging, that's important that they do blogging for us using the keywords that are needed and putting those things on our website. I just really honestly leave it to the experts, because while I can understand how to read a Google Analytics report now, but when they have many, go through monthly calls for our marketing company to explain it to me. I can tell when they're just trying to get through the call and appease me on it. And so really just managing them and staying on top of the people we're paying to do it, I wish I could say that I had some advice on how to do it yourself. Unfortunately, I don't we've been fortunate enough with the size and scale of our company that we've been able to hire a company to do it for us, but we were able to find ones when we first started out, it was and it's still a lot of money, but \$1,500 a month to be able to manage this for us, and they did a great job. And I know there are other companies you could find out there that'll do it for less than that, but they are the experts. My guidance would be to find somebody who's really good and that's all they do. Don't look for somebody who does 7000 different things. Yeah, we use a company that all they do is search engine

optimization. We use a different company for branding and for advertising. I felt that was very important, because we had used a one size fits all before. They did a lot of different things, like we use a different company for Google ads because they're the best in Google advertising. That's all they do is Google advertising. So SEO is one company. Google advertising is another company. Then we use somebody else for LinkedIn stuff. So they're all the experts in each one of those categories. That's all these companies do in that in that space.

Tim Clagg 41:07

And I think it's important too people listening who are just maybe starting to get into SEO for their companies in Google Analytics. I think the biggest thing to preach would be play the long game. This is something it takes time, some of it is trial and error, so having the patience to put the hands and the trust in the experts to get those results, because they will come. You've seen the success. But just understanding that it's a marathon, not a sprint.

Bill Dunn 41:40

Absolutely it takes time. And that was a hard thing for me to understand in the beginning, is that wait, I want these leads coming in now, why are they not coming in fast enough? And then it snowballed. It took time. We had to completely redo our website. But, yeah, they do come in time, and then they'll still come consistently. Is what I found.

Tim Clagg 42:01

You've had so much success your past adventures and with CNS with marketing, how do you continue? I know we were emailing back and forth a few weeks ago. You're on the west coast at a marketing conference. How do you guys continue to try and stay ahead of the curve? Marketing continues to change. It's an ever changing game. So growing, developing, knowing the latest strategies and what's working really helps businesses continue to thrive.

Bill Dunn 42:30

Yeah, I'm just always tinkering. I'm never satisfied with the status quo. So I'm always looking even at our own website. I'll read it over and over and over, and I'll find little things and say, okay, hey, we need to fix this, or we need to add this, or we need to change that. I think just really being ingrained in the marketing side of your business, and how to tell your story is so important, and to make sure that you figure out ways to get the story out, like I preach to my guys all the time, what are you telling? What are you saying to the customers when you're with them, like, are you telling our story? Are you telling the customer about what sets us apart? Every time you send out a proposal, are you sending our brochure? Make sure you send out the brochure. Are you asking for a review? If you're not, you got to ask for a review. All these things build up and they add up together to help you long term. But I think the most important thing is never be satisfied with what you've got. Always, always look to make things better. Even if I had 50 reviews or 50 leads coming in a month, I'd still look for more.

Tim Clagg 43:36

You are having an exciting time right now in the process of being featured in a book being published, what information, what details, can you share with listeners on that project, and when can they expect to see it in shelves?

Bill Dunn 43:52

Yeah, yeah, no. Thanks for asking Tim. So my favorite business author of all time is a gentleman named Michael Gerber. He wrote this book called The E Myth, and it's all about the entrepreneurial myth of being an entrepreneur, meaning that you can be an entrepreneur but still basically be an employee to yourself, because you're constantly working, working, working, doing, doing, and never really growing. And he has a set of principles that help you build standard operating procedures. Help you build ways of working so that way you can duplicate yourself. Basically, make a lot of mini me's. If you have a great employee, I tell my guys all the time, we need 10 more you. You gotta teach the guys under you how to be like you. So Michael Gerber teaches you how to set up systems within your business to allow yourself to grow. And I've been a student of his for many, many years, and had the opportunity to speak with him on the phone a couple times, and he's writing a new book, and he wanted some business owners to, who had success using his system. He asked us for stories. He asked a bunch of us for stories and how we used his principles and his book and teachings, in order to have success in business. And so I was lucky enough to submit an application for it, and was selected as one of the business authors. So I'll be in a book, his newest book, E Myth Evolution, with, I think, 20 other business owners who are going to tell inspiring stories about themselves and how they used his system to grow their business. So they should be very inspiring, fun and easy to read for people, and it should be coming out, I believe sometime later this year. I think around November, December time.

Tim Clagg 45:39

Right at the holiday season. So, perfect targeting there, right? It'll be on the Amazon. I know that. Bill, I greatly appreciate you taking time to come with us on this month's episode, discussing your journey, because I think it is one that is so unique, so interesting, and I think it inspiring, for sure, for what you've been able to do in just five exciting years in the industry that led you to the commercial cleaning industry. I appreciate you sharing your success. How can people follow you on social media if they want to reach out, if they want to look into getting that book as a stocking stuffer for a loved one. Where can they do that? You've got the knowledge, the drive, the passion and desire, and I can't wait to continue to have our journey together and continue to follow up on your guys' progress. That will complete this month's edition of The Business of Cleaning Podcast. Be sure to subscribe to us on Spotify, Apple Podcast, Amazon or wherever you get your podcasts from. Also be sure to watch the video portion on our YouTube page. Leave us a five star review and your comments from everyone at Janitorial Manager, our guest, Bill Dunn, I'm Tim Clagg, so long! Until next time.

Bill Dunn 46:26

Absolutely, I'm on LinkedIn under Bill William Dunn CNS Cleaning Company. You can always find me on LinkedIn. Email us at CNS. It's cns@cnscleaningcompany.com, or me directly at, bdunn@cnscleaningco.com, so it's B, D, U N, N, @, C, N, S cleaningco.com I'm happy to take any emails, any calls from anybody. Google our website, the phone number is on there. If anybody wants to call me, I'm happy to talk to anybody. But, you know, we're just getting started, Tim, I have a lot to learn. I talked to some business owners at ISSA that have 25-35, \$50 million companies. And I feel like this when I talk to these guys, and I learn so much from them. And it's intimidating, too to talk to these guys, because they've been doing it for so long, and they have so much knowledge and experience. I just hope to get to that level at some point.