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Nonconformity Helps 30-Year HVAC/R Veteran Solve Everyday Service Challenges

"Nonconformist" is a word that perfectly describes Steve Berger, a 30-year-veteran HVAC/R service technician. AC/R products and equipment that other technicians might consider as nonconforming become part of Berger's service arsenal as long as they perform up to manufacturer claims, save time/money and exhibit efficiency gains.

For example, his truck, a 2005 Mitsibuishi 14 x 8-foot box truck that's uncommon in the HVAC industry, is large enough to store the average service tech's van inside. The size enables a huge inventory that eliminates time-consuming trips to the wholesaler. Plus, truck outfitter, RBG, Raymond, N.H., installed a roof-mounted hydraulic aerial lift bucket—unheard of in HVAC work--that permanently eliminates carrying heavy equipment and tools up and down ladders and saves job time.

Steve Berger shows off the lift bucket on his truck, effectively eliminating the need to carry equipment and tools up and down ladders.

With complex refrigeration leaks, the president of Berger HVAC LLC, Northwood, N.H., uses a refrigeration system sealant for indiscoverable or inaccessible leaks because of time restrictions. Not only does this practice save customers thousands of dollars, in most cases, repairing presumably unfixable equipment and making it efficient again saves the environment from many pounds of leaked refrigerant. Using Super Seal leak sealants by Cliplight Mfg., Toronto, has added such a marketable dimension to his commercial services, that he even promotes the product on his new website homepage at www.bergerhvac.com

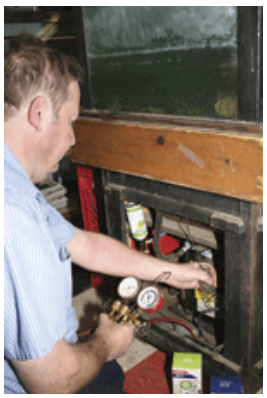
Nonconformity isn't a goal, but merely Berger's strategy when more conventional practices sometimes cost the customer more money. For example Berger went unconventional when a machine shop customer's Rheem Mfg. Co., Fort Smith, Ark., and Bryant, Indianapolis, Ind., light commercial rooftop units spewed smoke every fall heating season start-up because the plant's computer numerical control (CNC) machinery processes had oil-coated the heat exchangers throughout the year. Instead of replacing the units with costly industrial-grade heating equipment, Berger, who is a veteran welder and graduated at the top of his class at the Associated Technical Institute (ATI), designed his own sheet metal filter holders, outfitted them with washable PreVent Equipment Protection Filters by Permatron, Elk Grove Village, Ill., and installed them on the units.

Steve Berger standing in front of the live bait tank refrigerated system that he saved.

Berger learned long ago that saving older equipment or at least prolonging its services, during recessionary times, creates a loyal lifelong customer. It also generates many

referrals that have helped him build his four-year-old business, which he operates with his wife, Margaret, after being laid off as a long-term service tech for Acme Mechanical & Sheet Metal Co., Somersworth, N.H. Vacuum-packed sealants and true moisture removal agents are two proven methods of increasing new and old refrigeration system operating life cycles by several years so owners can budget and plan for equipment replacement at a later time.

For example, Northwood Country Market became a loyal customer since Berger successfully fixed the convenience store's 40-gallon refrigerated seafood/live bait tank, which is responsible for drawing many customers as well as selling 300 to 400 lbs. of lobster weekly in the summer and 25 to 30 lbs. of live bait in the winter. Previous service techs couldn't find the R-12 leak that periodically brought water temperatures up to 56°F from the recommended 36°F on the half-ton, 7,000-Btu system. The last service company suggested new components at a cost of over $1,000 or replacing the entire unit at more than $4,000, according to Eric Enos, the convenience store's owner.



Steve applies Dry-R to the lobster tank.

After charging the system with R-12 alternative, R-409a by the Genetron div.—Honeywell, Morristown, N.J., Berger couldn't find the intermittent leak either because it was most likely hidden in the evaporator coil. The low pressure side was still in a vacuum, which indicated internal moisture was causing sludge and soft particulate formation that blocked the capillary tubes. Berger applied one can of Dry-R™, a drying agent capable of removing up to 60 drops of moisture, thereby freeing up the partially blocked capillary tubes and returning the system to normal operating pressures and conditions. Instead of the conventional method of replacing the capillary tube(s), applying the drying agent eliminated the existing blockage and future particulate formations caused by moisture.

The leak was still indeterminable however, even after inspection with his Inficon, East Syracuse, N.Y., and Amprobe, Everett, Wash., leak detectors. Berger applied one can of Super Seal ACR designed for smaller refrigeration systems under 1.5 tons. Since moisture elimination is critical to sealing process success, the prior Dry-R application guarantees a moisture free system. The absence of moisture allows the sealant to do more work while ensuring the optimal life cycle and performance of the system. Both products use a patented vacuum-packed can instead of hydrocarbon refrigerant propellants that are known to reduce the system's refrigerant purity and operating efficiencies. "Berger HVAC saved us a lot of replacement costs, not to mention lost sales from downtime," Enos said. "We call them for all of our repairs (HVAC/R) now."

Countermen, Kevin Blanchette and Derek Reposa of the Manchester, N.H., branch of wholesale distributor, Bell/Simons, introduced Berger to Super Seal as well as a myriad of other product trial samples it provides to all customers, according to branch manager, Stephen Ribecca. Along with samples, Bell/Simons "counter day" seminars are critical to the success techs have with new products. For example, manufacturer's representative, Edison, N.J.-based MarketAir Inc. and its New Hampshire territory sales rep, Jim DeSantis routinely hold seminars on sealants and drying agents at wholesalers. Bell/Simons, which operates 32 HVAC/R distributorships in New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York and Massachusetts, has carried the sealant for almost five years with no complaints, according to Ribecca. "Now it looks like the techs are beginning to buy a lot of

drying agent because it eliminates the moisture factor," said Rebecca.

Since the Bell/Simons introduction, Berger has successfully applied the drying agent and sealant combination to more than 12 systems ranging from small restaurant refrigerated reach-in appliances to salad bars, walk-in freezers, ice machines and rooftop air conditioners.

While some might consider Berger a non-conformist, non-conformity is not a negative when considering he's moving with the pace of scientific advancements in AC/R repair to save customers time and money. Berger promises he'll continue this listening and learning process in an attempt to grow his new business in a rapidly changing world.

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