



Photograph by Richard Sennott, Star Tribune
Building demolition, for expansion at West Lutheran High School

CONSTRUCTION RESULTS CORP.

Business: Commercial and industrial general contracting company. Specializes in challenging renovation and remodeling projects; also experienced in new construction and additions.

Founded: 2000

Headquarters: Plymouth

Website: www.ConstructionResults.com

Employees: 20

Executives: Mark Snyder, president, founder; John Snyder, vice president

2008 revenue: \$11 million

Strategy: Follow through on marketing efforts, take care of current clients while carefully identifying new ones, build up work in manufacturing.

Mark Snyder said the recession has brought cutbacks at his Construction Results Corp. But Snyder saw the rough economic stretch as a time for more aggressive marketing. And he said that's paid off.

He keeps on building, even in down times

By taking on jobs big and small, and marketing aggressively, a construction firm grew in a tough 2008 and hopes to do the same this year.

By **TODD NELSON**, Special to the Star Tribune

A detail-oriented civil engineer, Mark Snyder thrives on building things.

That goes both for the often-challenging construction and remodeling projects he seeks out as president and founder of Plymouth-based general contracting firm Construction Results Corp. and for the company itself.

"I enjoy the immediate gratification of seeing things completed every day," Snyder said. The economic downturn has brought more changes and challenges to contractors in the Twin Cities, including Snyder, the rare engineer who runs or owns a contracting firm instead of designing projects for others to build. Many contractors, Construction Results included, are feeling the pinch as existing and potential clients shrink or eliminate construction budgets. Some have seen big cuts to office and field jobs. Some contractors appear to be bidding below-cost on some projects, Snyder said.

With fewer big projects to keep them busy, some larger contracting firms are moving down to compete with small- and medium-sized contracting companies for work, said Snyder, who added that the slowdown hit last fall at Construction Results. He scaled back hours for some of his 20 employees in response.

Instead of pulling back, though, Snyder has chosen to invest significant time and expense in stepping up the company's marketing efforts. The goal is to strengthen relationships with current clients while reaching out selectively to new clients likely to be a good fit with the company.

One new element is the "MyEstimate" link, added to the company's website in April, that generates preliminary cost estimates for proposed projects. The website, updated regularly with project photos, also has a new "Completed Project Survey" to get client feedback on recent work.

Snyder hopes the ramped-up marketing -- along with a new strategic partnership under which Construction Results assumed the clients and projects-in-process of century-old Olson General Contractors -- will help his company post a countercyclical increase of 4 to 5 percent in revenue this year.

Construction Results finished 2008 with \$11 million in revenue, up slightly from the year before, Snyder said. He founded the company in 2000, completing \$2.4 million in work that first year.

No job too small

A commercial and industrial general contracting firm, Construction Results does new construction, building additions and renovations. Clients include Macy's, CenterPoint Energy, Anchor Bank, Dunn Bros. Coffee and General Mills and others ranging from health care and manufacturing companies to public and private schools and religious organizations.

The company also specializes in unusual, challenging renovation and remodeling jobs.

"As an engineer, I tend to not only see the forest and the trees but also the branches and the leaves and the bark," said Snyder, who worked at Lunda Construction and Maertens-Brenny Construction before starting his own firm. "I like being in control of my own destiny."

A recent example of such challenging work is the repair job Construction Results is completing at the Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Center in Minneapolis. Cracks had appeared in existing walls near one corner of the rectangular building, administrator Bill Price said. While most buildings settle over time, Snyder said, the corner of the Salvation Army's building had risen more than 7 inches, probably because of unusual soil and groundwater conditions beneath it. Snyder's solution was to stabilize the area under that corner, then replace that corner with a diagonal wall, Price said. The building is easier for trucks to get in and out of with its new triangular-shaped corner.

"We thought it was ingenious," Price said. "It wasn't complicated, but it solved a couple problems for us. I was happy to find someone who was knowledgeable and also able to speak in laymen's terms."

A repeat customer is Donaldson Co., the filtration products maker in Bloomington.

The most complicated of several projects there, Snyder said, was the demolition and renovation of 21,000 square feet of office space at Donaldson's headquarters.

Strategic acquisition helps

"Probably the thing that they stand out most with is they're large enough to tackle the work our headquarters campus requires but small enough to be moldable to the different types of projects we require, said Steve Zeller, director of real estate and facilities at Donaldson. "They're very scalable and flexible. Sometimes, you don't get that with larger contractors, or you get a smaller contractor that can't ramp up to do design-build work."

Today's slowdown is familiar territory to Snyder, who saw a dropoff in business after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, fewer than two years after he had founded the company. Then, Snyder said, business picked up after several slow months thanks to repeat business from existing clients and word-of-mouth referrals.

This time around, besides the marketing push, Construction Results also is looking for a boost from the strategic alliance, struck in November, with former competitor Olson General Contractors. Bob Olson, president and owner of the New Hope firm, was looking to retire but wanted to find a way to take care of his many repeat customers.

Snyder was ready to step in, taking on Olson's client records, pending construction projects and continuing service requirements.

The expert says: John Sailors, assistant professor of marketing at the University of St. Thomas Opus College of Business, praised Snyder's willingness to step up his marketing in the face of the downturn.

"I wish I had some kind of award that I could give to Mr. Snyder," Sailors said. "I wish I could shake his hand."

The key is Snyder's mind-set: "He's looking at marketing as an investment and not as an expense," Sailors said. The former outlook sees marketing spending as based on the goals the company is trying to reach; the latter views it only as a percentage of sales that naturally shrinks as the economy sours.

One caution, however, Sailors said, is that Construction Results' marketing boost might not generate the 4 to 5 percent sales increase Snyder is projecting in the short term because the downturn is so widespread.

"He may be flat," Sailors said. "But I would not view that as a failure of the strategy because without the strategy he may have declined 4 to 5 percent."

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