

TAKING INSPIRATION FROM OUR US COUNTERPARTS

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*A visit to the US provided CDI Pest Management with a rare opportunity to trade business insights with American pest manager **Garrett Thrasher**, of Thrasher Pest Control.*

Attending conferences can provide opportunities for education, development, networking and a great deal of fun. After travelling to San Diego to attend the recent Pestworld conference, **Marshall Blacklock** of CDI Pest Management in Toowoomba, QLD, realised it could also present an opportunity to learn outside of the confines of the convention centre.

Mr Blacklock realised there would be a lot to be gained from chatting to an American pest manager, particularly a business owner, who could share insights and tips about the industry from an entirely new perspective. "I thought there would be great value in spending some time with a pest management business of a similar size to ours in the US," said Mr Blacklock. The question was, how to go about it?

Initially, Mr Blacklock approached **Eris Hess** of Agserv, who suggested that he speak to **Bell Labs**. Bell's Australian technical representative **Samuel Wood** made contact with his US colleague **Nick Branca** in Southern California and explained the situation. "Nick really went above and beyond. He asked a few questions about what sort of business was of interest to Marshall, and then knew exactly who to speak to," said Mr Wood.

Mr Branca set up a meeting with **Garrett Thrasher** of Thrasher Pest and Termite Control (main picture, left) for the Monday before the conference started. It promised to be a valuable experience for Mr Blacklock and CDI operations manager **Jessica Prentice** (main picture, right). Not only did Bell Labs organise the meet-up, but Mr Branca also chauffeured Mr Blacklock and Ms Prentice to the meeting. “We really weren’t expecting so much. Nick was an amazing host, including a tour through downtown San Diego. I told him that he’s really set a high bar for his colleagues in Australia,” commented Ms Prentice.

Spending time talking openly with a non-competitive business provided great insight for Mr Blacklock. He explained, “It was interesting to see the difference in how work was planned. For example, we book our jobs on a 12 monthly basis, arranging a particular day and time with the client, who is most often at home during the treatment. Whereas Thrasher Pest carry out a lot of routine pest services by just planning a route and then letting the client know they will be there that day. Pest services are often done on a monthly or quarterly service plan.

“Productivity, team performance and sales planning and growth were very closely monitored by Thrasher Pest Control and we will look to adapt some of these practices for our own business. They also have similar issues with getting skilled staff, training and retaining them, as we do.

“The other standout observation was that termites were not a huge part of the business. Being located in California, a state that has strict environmental laws, pursuing other work with fewer restrictions was sometimes more profitable. This has prompted me to take another look at our business service sectors and see what is more or least profitable.

“Obviously, some of the challenges we face in Australia are different to those in the US, but overall it was a very positive experience. It allowed us to see some things that we could improve upon in our business, and also showed us that we’re already doing some things really well. I’m so grateful to Bell Labs for arranging the meeting, and particularly to Garrett Thrasher for making the time and being so open to sharing with us.”

Mr Wood commented, “I’m really happy that Bell Labs was able to facilitate such a valuable interaction for our customer. I can’t thank Nick enough for his help, he really typified Bell Labs’ approach to customer service.”

Mr Branca said simply, “It was awesome. And now I have some new friends in Australia!”