

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

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Focus on customer service fuels TestOil's growth

RACHEL ABBEY MCCAFFERTY [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Email](#)



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TestOil employees helped design their own workspaces in an effort to make the company's recently expanded lab more efficient. A number of the suggestions were implemented in the renovation.

The customer-facing name for holding company Insight Services Inc. recently expanded, adding about 5,400 square feet of space to its 10,000-square-foot building in Strongsville.

TestOil is aptly named: That's exactly what it does.

Specifically, the company analyzes oil samples from heavy industrial equipment for wear particles, which is important for preventive maintenance. Taking care of problems before they happen means there's less chance of machine failure or downtime.

The company was founded in 1988 and has grown steadily over the years, said chief operating officer Mary Messuti. That's in part because it's a somewhat "recession-proof" business, she said, as customers want to protect their machinery both when times are tough and when they're not.

But growth really picked up in the last nine years, Messuti noted. She thinks that's due in part to the company's approach to customer service, which includes same-day oil-testing results and a commitment to resolving issues in one phone call.

TestOil, the customer-facing name for holding company Insight Services Inc., recently expanded, adding about 5,400 square feet of space to its 10,000-square-foot building in Strongsville.

TestOil's offices and lab are flexible and customizable. Its bright, open offices have sit-stand desks and movable meeting pods scattered throughout. To help with the flow and efficiency of the new lab, employees were invited to take part in meetings to design their own workspaces, Messuti said.

In addition, a number of changes have been made in the lab to eliminate wasted time, said lab manager Devin Evancho, from adding more automated equipment to a screen that shows where work is getting backed up, so techs can help relieve the bottleneck.

The expansion was completed in January. Messuti declined to share the amount the company invested in the expansion or annual revenue.



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TestOil's Strongsville office was recently expanded by 5,400 square feet.

Today, TestOil has about 100 employees, said Chad Bittner, vice president of marketing and customer experience. And it's constantly growing to meet business demands. In the past nine years, the company added about 75 new jobs.

For the most part, TestOil doesn't ask its employees to bring particular degrees or certificates to the table. Instead, it trains them through its TestOil University once they're hired. There are some jobs that might require a degree, but most do not.

"They just need to be good, deductive thinkers," Messuti said.

In the past year, TestOil has expanded its training program to include such skills as personal finances, in addition to professional skills. Messuti said it's a way to show employees that the company cares about them.

TestOil tries to create a positive culture for its employees. Because the company is committed to same-day service, employees don't always know when their days will end, Messuti noted. So TestOil tries to provide fun breaks from work, such as picnics, art projects and live music.

Messuti said the company's approach of training new hires and promoting from within has meant that it hasn't had difficulty finding employees. And the company culture is important, too. After all, today's applicants can easily find comments from current employees. Messuti said applicants to TestOil will see positive ones.

"You know, you can't really manufacture that," Messuti said. "You're either doing it or you're not."

The company has seen increased demand from its existing customers, as well as growth in new customers. As the industry becomes more sophisticated, people better understand the value of predictive analysis, she said. Messuti started to see that increase as the use of lean grew, since the lean approach puts a strong emphasis on maintenance.

"We want to predict it, we want to prevent any kind of catastrophic failures and we want to get ahead of that eight-ball," Messuti said.



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A mobile collaboration space and a private phone booth help make TestOil's offices and lab flexible and customizable.

One of TestOil's customers is the Kingsport, Tenn., plant of plastics and chemical company Eastman Chemical Co. The plant has used TestOil for its oil analysis for more than a decade, said technologist Earl Edens. Eastman Chemical has a substantial predictive analysis program to try to prevent machine failures, and oil analysis is one of the approaches it uses.

"The cost to repair a machine if it's gone to failure is a whole lot more than it is if you can predict before a machine actually fails. If you can use technology to predict a machine is headed toward failure and you stop it before then, it's a huge cost difference in repairing a piece of equipment. It's a lot of cost savings," Edens said.

He added that the plant has stuck with TestOil over the years for its customer service. Eastman Chemical can connect with TestOil within one phone call or email, he said, and the company visits regularly to discuss updates.

Customers typically mail oil samples to TestOil, but the company recently launched a new industrial services business segment. Messuti said customers don't always have enough time or employees to take those samples, so the new segment will send TestOil analysts to the customers. A beta test is underway and the segment will continue to grow.

Inline Play

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