

# Get set for the digital age!

Digital technology is poised to disrupt the way rodent pest management is conducted in future. In this article, which is summarised from an interview in the Futura *Talking Pest Management* series, Peter Trotman, until relatively recently managing director at Mitie Pest Control and now MD for the digital technology-based business, Pest Pulse, explains why digital is the way forward for professional pest managers.



## A bit more about Peter Trotman

Peter Trotman was born into the pest control industry.

From the age of just 13 it was just him and his father catching rats on farms in the Cotswold Hills as Gloucester Pest Control and he is now in his 37th year as a pest control person.

The business developed into a regional company then Peter put a plan together to go national, got some finance in place and rolled out Eagle Pest Control, which became the third largest pest control servicing company in the UK with a turnover in the low millions.

But the market was changing with big corporate clients opting for bundled services so it was a choice of either retract into a regional pest control company or get into bed with one of the big boys which in 2003 was where Mitie Pest Control came in.

In 2018 he left Mitie and today is managing director of Pest Pulse.

The costs associated with the traditional eight or 12 visits a year pest control contract are rising but the price clients are prepared to pay has pretty much hit a glass ceiling. This is not a recipe for sustained growth in a pest control business so what can be done?

Speaking in an online interview with Daniel Schroeer from Futura, Peter Trotman explained why he believes that digital remote sensing technology offers a credible solution allowing the pest control business to reduce its costs through fewer and more targeted visits, whilst providing a value for money service that actually reduces the risk for clients.

Peter said: "There's a glass ceiling on the price that corporate customers want to pay and that's not budging. The big pest control players are competing and there are always new boys coming in to bid at a price the client wants. The cost of transport is rising, not just fuel costs, but congestion costs. The time it takes to get from A to B is only going to get worse. Labour costs are also increasing. Generally pest controllers are underpaid compared to those with a similar skill set in other industries and we are competing for their labour. That means we will have to increase what we pay. That's a good thing; most technicians deserve a higher wage, but, for the business it means less profit or even no profit at all and that's not sustainable.

### Digital is the way forward

"The way forward is to use digital technology which reduces the visits required by around 30% saving on labour and transport costs. Yes there's a capital cost and at first this was prohibitively expensive but the technology has been around for a while and the costs are now much more in line with the labour savings available."

There's also a saving to be made on rodenticides. When Peter was at Mitie he was one of the first to introduce an integrated approach to pest management. "I'm not anti-rodenticide, he explained: "It has its place but it is a tool with diminishing effectiveness because of increasing

resistance and label restrictions on its use. Blanket baiting and heavy rodenticide use doesn't equal a sustainable business for the future. Rodenticides should be one of the last tools in your service bag."

What Peter did at Mitie was to start to speak to clients about how to make their buildings less attractive to pests. But he wasn't just talking about the odd bit of bristle strip being added to a door. Proofing was an upsell package with a proper survey and report with plenty of photographic evidence of the problems. Then the right proofing materials were applied so the finished result looked good. "Sold as a rounded package, clients got it," he said.

Peter quoted the results of a case study from that time. This involved a client with over 1,600 outlets. The customer was very engaged with pest management but he was frustrated that whilst the rodent problem could be solved for a while at one site inevitably another would be infested. Across all 1600 sites the level of rodent activity never got below a certain level. "We brought in our proofing survey team and whenever there was a refurbishment of an outlet we worked with the building contractors to make sure the building was in a pest proof state," explained Peter.

"Proofing alone brought rodent activity down by 86%. We measured this over six months on 300 sites so I know proofing works. Add this to the fact that trapping was

our first method of control and we reduced our use of rodenticides by 90%."

Peter was also an early adopter of remote sensing technology: "But," he warns, "It's not simply a matter of swapping one black plastic box for another digitally enabled black box. Because they are more expensive it makes you think about box placement. At one site we reduced the number of boxes from 600 to around 80 digital traps. This cut the servicing time from 1.5 days to 0.5 days and, more importantly, the level of sightings was down by about 80% because the boxes were in the right place."

"The technology removes the need for technicians to needlessly visit, open and date, box after box where nothing has happened. That's a mindless task and one of the worst parts of a technician's job. Sensors allow technicians to spend more time thinking about the problems and engaging with clients."

### Change is coming

Many businesses are still very reliant on the old ways and there is still a place for them but change is coming. More agile disrupter companies are entering the marketplace and arguably Pest Pulse is one of those.

Peter explained: "Digital technology allows us to have real time data and that, combined with historical knowledge of a site, allows management to happen which, in turn, allows a risk-based deployment of resources. The industry has been selling eight to 12 visits a year for 50 years but if we can reduce routine visits for the low and medium risk sites and supplement them with technology we get fewer visits but more meaningful recommendations. We are also using staff better, technicians are more engaged and clients get better service."

This management is essentially what Pest Pulse supplies with local partners delivering the onsite servicing, as required. Pest Pulse acts as account manager and technical adviser and specifies the pest management a client needs. The company has developed algorithms for dynamic risk assessments which allow it to apply the right resources to

the right sites at the right time meaning the technician is there when he or she needs to be there and not just for 12 contracted visits a year.

### Problem sites are the exciting sites

"I remember back when I was a technician and it was the sites with problems that were the most exciting. Those sites are where you can do something and solve a problem so this approach is much better for everybody," adds Peter.

In addition, many corporate customers would like to have the benefits of working with local servicing companies but they also need the big picture across all their sites. The Pest Pulse model allows them to have both.

"Information about a trap going off doesn't go to the client who will then only be anxious about it, it comes to us at Pest Pulse as a sort of triage service. We can look at the history, what proofing and hygiene recommendations are outstanding and can to engage with the client. So, for example, we can say to the client not only are we sending in your technician at 2pm to solve that one problem but are you aware of x, y and z."

Digital technology is here and it's not a case of if, it's when, it will take off.

In the meantime Peter's advice is to get an understanding of the product: "Put your hands on it, put it into a site to make sure it works and get the comfort of being familiar with it and having faith in it. Then you can see how the technology fits into your portfolio of clients. Take it to clients and talk to them about it, put it on their desks. Some will not be ready and will fight against it. Don't go there. Apply it into a select number of your client portfolio. Then, whether your five year plan is written down, or in your head, try to understand what part digital pest management has to play in it. Digital pest management needs to be in the forefront of your mind because unless you start to engage with it you will lose market share. Not immediately but over the next five years," concluded Peter.



## What is Pest Pulse?

Pest Pulse is a technology-led pest control startup headquartered in Dublin, Ireland. Founded in 2017 by Brian Monaghan, Tim O'Toole, John O'Gara and Wassim Magnin, Pest Pulse has developed internet-connected smart pest traps aiming to revolutionise the pest control industry. Pest Pulse provides smart pest control services directly to commercial customers in the UK and Ireland. Clients include international brands such as Five Guys, Brewdog, CRH and Cafe Leon. The company was recently (May 2019) acquired by the American giant, ServiceMaster. Find out more at [www.pestpulse.com](http://www.pestpulse.com)



## More about Talking Pest Management from Futura

Futura is a family-owned business based in Germany with a long history of innovative pest management. It all started in 1993 when Biotec Klute was founded as a professional servicing company with a focus on the food and pharmaceutical sectors. When the need for alternatives in routine servicing was recognised, Futura was founded. The company is now an independent and internationally recognised player in the field of

pest management innovation including remote sensing technology, the non-toxic NARA range and Green Hero. Visit their B2B Webshop at [www.futura-germany.com](http://www.futura-germany.com). CEO Daniel Schroeer has so far recorded eight fascinating interviews with a range of pest management professionals from across the globe. To see the full interview with Peter Trotman, or to watch the other interviews, search for 'Futura Talking Pest Management'.