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## Innovation is redefining the humble dumpster

by Mike Breslin

The word "dumpster" has evolved to mean different things to different people. For our purposes let us understand it as a broad, generic term for an ever expanding universe of large trash receptacles lifted by mechanical means and dumped into vehicles. The word dumpster originated from the Dempster-Dumpster system of mechanically loading standard containers onto garbage trucks. It was patented by Dempster Brothers in 1937.

Today, a dumpster can refer to capacities of less than a cubic yard up to roll-off containers exceeding 100 cubic yards. They come in shapes and sizes only limited by the imaginations of their designers.

The more trash generated the more dumpsters we need and we apparently always need more. In 1960, the per capita generation of waste was 2.68 pounds per person per day, but by 2009 it grew to 4.34 pounds per person per day. 2010 per capita data waste volume has not yet been posted by EPA, but industry experts believe volume has flattened and somewhat decreased.

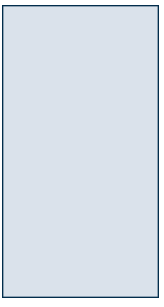
Waste Management, Inc. (WM) the largest solid waste collection company in North America, for example, reported its 2010 internal revenue growth from volume was negative 2.6 percent, although revenues increased by 6.1 percent.

The lingering recession is partially responsible for some volume fall off, but much of the reduction is due to more waste being transformed into useful or money-making commodities. "What we've seen is more of a move towards diversion. The amount of waste volume currently going to landfill has declined simply because there is more diversion going on," said Wes Muir, spokesman for WM. "Whether or not it's because of regulations, or because a company recognizes waste as a resource and wants to divert the material and cut down on disposal costs, it's all coming under the label of eco-efficiency."

Guy Senkowski, the owner of Poynette Iron Works in Poynette, Wisconsin, a manufacturer of a wide variety of dumpsters and related waste containers, and his two brothers started the business in 1996 in a 2,400 sq. ft. building refurbishing old dumpsters to extend their useful life. Today, Poynette has annual sales of \$16 million, 70,000 sq. ft. of manufacturing space on a 13 acre complex, employs 68 and offers a menu of over 40 different product categories with hundreds of individual items. Poynette has built dumpsters as small as quarter-yard hoppers to as large as a 107 yard roll-off trailers. The company serves all types of customers – residential and commercial haulers, municipalities, specialized industrial applications and small and large retailers.



Dumpsters themselves are becoming disposable. Waste Management is now selling flaggers – a disposable dumpster for do-it-yourselfers that the company will pick up and dispose of once full.



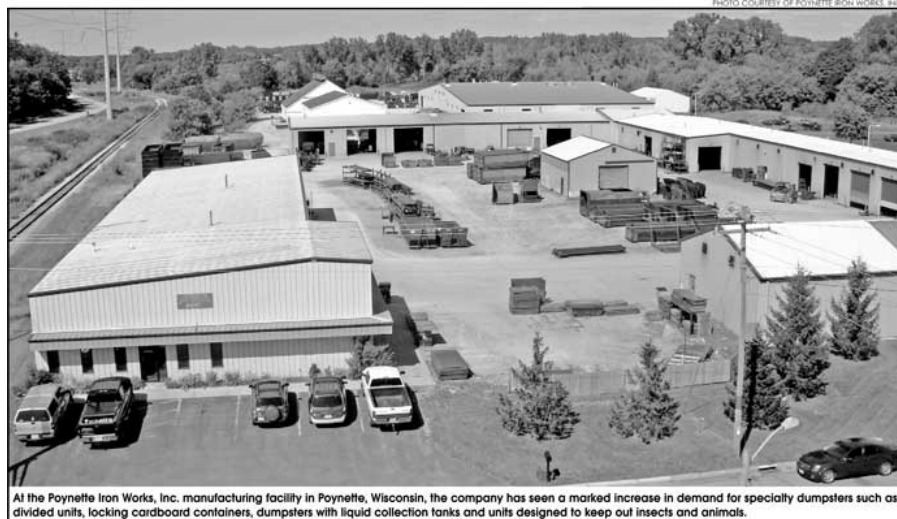
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“The recession really did not affect us. A little bit of a slowdown but nothing of concern. We got darn lucky there. Since 1996 we’ve just seen a ton of growth, about a million dollars a year,” said Senkowski.

Senkowski attributed their continued growth through a tough economy to his company’s products and customer service. But major cultural and environmental developments have undoubtedly helped. Over the past two decades there has been a strong national demand for diversified dumpster types for segregating various recyclables to attain a finer, cleaner granulation at the collection point.

“Everybody always needs to get rid of garbage, but there’s more and more recycling going on everyday. People are always looking for different ways to recycle. That’s where we come in. If you can scribble it on a napkin, we can build it,” Senkowski related.

Apparently there has been a lot of creative scribbling at Poynette. Diversion of waste into marketable commodities has spurred a whole new generation of dumpsters dedicated to source sorting with better security.

“A big part of our growth has been in recycling containers, separating out cardboard, paper, glass, plastics, metals and organics. It seems like you cannot just take your garbage and throw it away anymore, everything needs to be separated nowadays, even behind your local bar,” said Senkowski. “Organic waste is a big thing for us and we do a lot of organic containers. They’re not throwing food waste away and landfilling it, but turning it into energy, feeding livestock or making compost or mulch. You can make money on garbage by recycling with the right dumpsters.”

Poynette has seen a marked increase for dumpsters in several areas – divided units to accommodate multiple recyclables; locked containers for cardboard with slots that force the user to collapse boxes to increase container capacity; dumpsters with false bottoms containing liquid collection tanks to prevent ground contamination; more integral units to keep out insects and animals; and better security to prevent unauthorized dumping, pilfering and reduce liability for the owner.

Nearly every dumpster Poynette makes these days has plastic tops that decrease overall weight and reduce the danger of lids coming down and hurting people. Poynette still builds a few dumpsters with steel lids for applications such as containing fires near buildings.

“We are doing more and more tightly sealed containers that help contain liquids and prevent infestations of rodents, bees and bears. The scrap industry uses dumpsters that hold metals for weeks or months at a time and we build containers that prevent rusty water leaching into the ground water. People are stealing more scrap metals and other recyclables, so we are using more locks and sealed lids.”

A design collaboration with a customer led to Poynette developing a new line of wheeled front and rear load plastic dumpsters with up to 4 cubic yard capacity. “More people are bumping containers up and down curbs and want more lightweight containers. That’s how we came up with our new, stronger, lighter weight plastic container line, of which we’ve been selling quite a few.” Poynette buys tubs from a plastics manufacturer and fabricates steel frames with casters that hold the tubs. “A crucial element in the success of our plastic dumpsters was developing a rugged lid. We worked very closely with the Scott Lemajeur, owner of Impact Plastics to develop a thick, durable hinge line. Scott was a great help getting our plastic dumpsters on the street. Without a great lid you do not have a great box.”

Plastic has further invaded the traditional world of the steel dumpster with the Bagster bag, the first disposable dumpster in a bag now being sold all over North America by Waste Management. Scott Rhodes, co-founder of the WM Bagster and managing director of organic growth at WM, an internal venture capital development group said

"WM acquired our business in June of 2009. When they bought us we were in 10 states. Now we are in over 40 states and most parts of Canada," said Rhodes.

The Bagster bag is WM's first retail product and designed to serve do-it-yourselfers and small contractors, but is also quickly finding other niche markets. "Where we see a really big pick up in the use of Bagster bags, unfortunately, which we never considered, is in disaster relief, flooding, hurricanes and tornados where people are cleaning up and need to source separate," Muir commented.

Bagsters can be purchased at home improvement and hardware stores, including Home Depot, Lowe's, Ace Hardware, True Value and Do-It-Best.

They are flexible, reinforced polyethylene dumpsters that are porous to allow rainwater to drain. In the store, it comes folded in 1.5' x 2.5' package weighing approximately 5 pounds. When unfolded, it can hold up to 3 cubic yards or 3,300 pounds. WM claims that the woven material will not tear if punctured. It can hold sheets of 4 x 8 foot plywood and items as large as a bathtub. When full, WM boom trucks pick up the bags using straps.

"The suggested retail price is \$29.95 and our retailers do a nice job of adhering to that," said Rhodes. "The collection fee varies by market ranging from \$79 to \$159 depending on the area. It's a fixed collection fee within a metropolitan area. If you are in Boston, it's the same fee in that New England area. And it's a fixed collection charge no matter if you are putting in leaves or steel rebar. The collection rate varies across metropolitan markets. Boston is at the high end of our range at \$139. In the majority of our markets it's \$99 per bag. Generally, that cost is 50 to 70 percent less than the smallest dumpster you can rent. When we came up with the idea we were definitely trying to fill a void for projects that were too big for the garbage can but not big enough to justify a dumpster. If you live in an area where the smallest dumpster you can rent is 10 yards and you don't need that size, this is a perfect solution."

Unlike a traditional dumpster, there is no delivery cost involved with a Bagster bag and no rental time limit. A do-it-yourselfer can do a project over several weekends and call for a pickup when done.

Wes Muir, a spokesman for WM explained collections, "People can call or go on-line for a pickup and we collect within three business days. We have a computer program that shows where the pickups are, the addresses and how many pickups are being made. Every month we are increasing the amount of pickups, seeing a lot of multiple bag pickups and just saw one household that had four at the curb. It's taken off and become very popular. It's a cost effective means to collect this material. Each boom truck holds 12 to 14 fully loaded bags. The benefit to us is being able to pick up 12 to 14 bags on one run and avoid the delivery and pickup of traditional dumpsters. The savings in operating costs are just tremendous and obviously from an environmental point of view our carbon footprint is significantly reduced because of the efficiencies as opposed to one bag per load."

Muir added, "At this point Bagster bags are single-use. They are recyclable and we are looking at recycling them. A lot of the materials we collect are deposited at transfer stations so we are looking at ways to tip the bag and have it recycled. We have a number of pilot projects where we are separating some of those materials."

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