

AHIT success stories: Dan Kutchin



After decades working in corporate America, Dan and Colleen Kutchin started their second career, opening what has become a successful home inspection business. Five years into their new lives, they're not looking back.

AHIT alumnus Dan Kutchin started Northern Wisconsin-based HomeEx in 2012. Five years into the business, the couple's home inspection service has hit its stride.

"It has just been fantastic," Kutchin said. "Colleen and I have been working really hard, and we've hit our targets pretty much every year. Our annual growth has been about 30%. This past year, I'm about as saturated as I can be in terms of the number of inspections. We are just exactly where we wanted to be."

HomeEx is a small business model. Colleen manages the office and does

the majority of the company's marketing and networking. She's involved with the Women's Council of Realtors and goes to a number of other events and Chamber meetings. The couple also is involved in a local business networking referral group.

"All of that has helped so much to grow the business," Dan said.

Kutchin has no plans to grow the business by adding people. After spending three decades as a telecommunications field engineer and consultant, Kutchin said working with his wife and keeping the business small is the goal. They remain focused on quality, communication and putting out the best product possible. Their commitment to quality allows them to stay busy, despite charging slightly more than the competition.

Kutchin's advice to home inspectors who are new to the career and want to **start their own businesses** is to embrace learning. Get a good foundation for an education and keep learning by asking questions and adding **certifications**.

The successful home inspector also thinks future inspectors need to prepare for what can be a slow and expensive first year.

"You have to have the financial wherewithal to withstand the ramp-up period the first year," he said.

“ You have to be able to invest in the business — in the marketing, training and tools — to get going and be able to weather the storm until you build up enough inspections to keep the lights on and keep things rolling. ”

Marketing and networking are the lifeblood of the business. Inspectors need "face-to-face time" with the Realtors, mortgage lenders and title companies that are going to make up a lot of the company's referrals, according to Dan.

It's all part of what can be a very successful business package.

"I think one of the things that has been very helpful was the ability to communicate back to some of the **AHIT instructors**," he said. "As recently as a couple of years ago, I was relying on them quite a bit. It's kind of nice to have that lifeline. In that first year or two when you run into some unusual situations — things you just haven't seen before — it was very helpful to get on the phone and hook up with an instructor real time. Not a day goes by that I don't learn something new."