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Fastest-Growing Private Companies

One man's trash has become Alpine Waste's treasure

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For [wAlpine Waste](#) and Recycling, success is about staying on the cutting edge of an evolving industry.

The Commerce City-based company, which has grown from a one-truck startup into one of the largest Denver-area waste-management companies in 10 years, has kept pace in a fast-changing business by anticipating the next customer demand and being ready to meet it.

“Our focus is growth in our industry,” said John Griffith, founder and president. “Where that’s going to come from, we’re going to let our customers tell us.”

These days, Griffith said, his customers are looking for a more sustainable and affordable system of waste disposal — and Alpine provides one.

In 2007, Alpine’s management responded to the growing industry trend toward recycling and opened Altogether Recycling, which became the second recycling plant in the Denver area.

“We took a big risk,” Griffith said.

It paid off. Alpine realized huge financial gains with revenue increasing \$5.9 million from 2007 to 2008 following the plant’s launch.

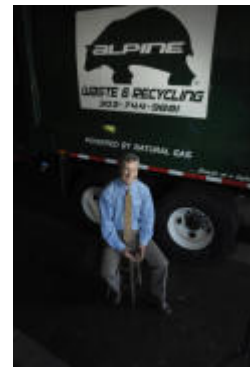
Alpine’s management opened up the plant to competitors, making recycling more accessible and less expensive. The company also launched a program at Altogether Recycling that allowed customers to recycle without sorting, in order to encourage more people to recycle.

“That’s healthy, and hopefully we’ll do that same thing in compost,” Griffith said.

Compost and waste diversion, which encompasses ways of disposing waste without adding to landfills, could be the industry’s next big trend, he said.

Alpine invested \$345,000 and received \$155,000 in state money to fund the construction of Denver’s second composting plant, which will open in September.

Griffith declined to reveal its location yet. It, too, will be open to Alpine’s competition, with the goal of making composting more affordable, Griffith said.



Kathleen Lavine |
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John Griffith,
president of Alpine
Waste and
Recycling, sits in
front of one of the
company's natural
gas-powered trucks.

Griffith, who has a business degree from the [University of Colorado](#) and a background in sales with Sears and Browning Ferris Industries (BFI), founded Alpine Waste and Recycling in 1999 with about \$700,000. He was the sole employee and operated from his Washington Park home.

His original concept for the business was simple: Be a different kind of garbage man. From the beginning, Griffith expected his drivers to be friendly, efficient and “kind of opposite of what you’d think or what a trash truck driver would conjure in your mind.”

“We focused on customer service being our niche,” he said.

Alpine has grown to 150 employees, but has retained its commitment to customers, Griffith said. He described Alpine’s business strategy and plan as “fluid,” saying the company’s future would be shaped by customer demand.

“We compete against three monolithic national companies ([Waste Management](#), [Republic Services Inc.](#) and [Waste Connections](#)) through customer service and responsiveness to the pulse of what customers demand in the marketplace,” Griffith said.

From 1999 to 2008, Alpine generated average annual revenue growth of 51 percent. Then the recession hit in October 2008, and Alpine’s revenue grew just 6 percent from 2008 to 2009. The market turmoil cost Alpine a few big accounts when major companies such as Circuit City closed.

“It was a tough year for us last year, but we continued to retain because I think that our customers are customer service- oriented rather than price-oriented,” Griffith said.

Alpine’s focus on green services also helped the company stay strong, Griffith said.

In addition to pioneering alternative green waste-disposal projects such as Altogether Recycling, Alpine has begun a 10-year process of replacing its entire truck fleet with natural gas vehicles (NGV).

Waste collection is the fastest-growing natural gas vehicle sector, according to Natural Gas Vehicles for America, a national organization advocating the development of a NGV market. Griffith said the new trucks will reduce greenhouse emissions by 21 percent and will be 90 percent quieter than traditional vehicles.