

## More Than Just "The Safety Guy"

**Anthony Krake**  
Alpine Painting  
& Sandblasting Contractors

When Alpine Painting & Sandblasting Contractors of Paterson, N.J., wanted to outfit their project management practices for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond, they turned to one of the youngest members of their team and his self-described "adult millennial" skillset to take the lead.

At just 23 years old, Anthony Krake, the company's environmental, safety and quality manager (ESQM), developed a cloud-based, mobile management system for small businesses. Using 4G-enabled iPads, Anthony's application allows Alpine's five field crews and its shop team to access and log job information on the spot, in real time. Functions of the application include document management, safety procedures and data sheet storage, records for compliance with OSHA and SSPC-QP standards, production tracking, and several other quality control- and safety-related features.

According to Alpine President Sam Scaturro, the program has increased efficiency across all of the company's field operations, and has even expanded to streamline the company's financial activities and other facets of management. "This system's ability to get endless information has improved more areas than initially expected, and because of its success, we have begun talks about expanding this system into multiple departments and processes," says Scaturro.

In addition to its effectiveness in the field, Anthony's program earned an honorable mention in the American Society



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of Safety Engineers' (ASSE's) 2015 Award for Innovation in Occupational Safety Management. "For a small company from Paterson, it was huge," Anthony said of the worldwide recognition.

Anthony's ability to think outside the box in a traditionally old-school-mentality-ruled industry set him up for that kind of success. "Don't lose your creativity," he says. "If it wasn't for my idea and the perseverance I had to put it through, I really wouldn't be much more than just the quality and safety guy, who just goes to work every day and fills out paperwork. That's not who I am, and I have a whole different relationship with my company."

Technology and the paperless way of doing things is ingrained in Anthony's DNA. "I don't even have a notepad on my desk — 100 percent of my job is on an iPad or the computer. I don't do anything by paper anymore," he says. "People look at this like it's crazy and overwhelming, but it's how I've always been."

Anthony started interning for Alpine as a mechanical engineering student at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), spending that first year learning the basics of the industry — from office work to blasting and painting out in the field. This "crash course" was crucial for Anthony to carry out his ESQM duties, and when it came time for Anthony to develop his app, he understood the work that was being done and the resources needed. "I had to know what these guys were going through out there in the field to do my job effectively," he said.

The challenge in developing his own paperless project management application for contractors, though, was designing it with others' not-so-tech-savvy tendencies in mind.

Anthony said that the idea for his program came from an existing program developed by another company that had pitched their product to Anthony's superiors a couple of years before. "These companies had project engineers and superintendents who were educated, who grew up with computers, who use tablets and smart phones, and so for those guys, picking up a tablet to do the work was

second nature," Anthony explains. "Our guys just aren't that. One of our greatest foremen used to be a cop over in eastern Europe, came over here 15 or 20 years ago to be a painter, so he didn't grow up using computers his whole life. I had to take a different approach."

Scaturro appointed Anthony to tailor a similar system to Alpine's own needs. The goal, Anthony says, "was to give people in the field a system that made them quicker, and didn't put a burden on their job. It had to make life easier." To ensure this, Anthony spent four months, full-time, testing the program, and he says that "four or five" versions of the application had to be developed before a workable version ever hit the field.

There were some bumps along the way during the testing phase — having to create a new drop-down menu on the screen after workers found themselves struggling to complete forms with protective gloves on was just one of them. Anthony admits, "I spent a lot of that time pulling my hair out," and that he even had to completely "start over" more than once.

All of the hard work and frustration during the testing phase paid off, though, when the program hit its first jobsite in June of 2014. "The implementation was

seamless," remarks Scaturro. "Within two weeks, all jobs were fully functional on the digital system."

Anthony explains that all the hands-on time spent in the field with his crews during the testing period helped him design a program that was best suited for their needs.

"A lot of companies go and hire a consultant that might build a dynamic platform, but doesn't work on the job," he says. "With my program, everything is in the exact same place as it is on paper, so the guys don't have to do anything differently than they're really used to. There was no real learning curve other than just getting used to it and eventually taking full advantage of it."

There's little time to rest on his laurels, though. According to Anthony, "Part of our five-year plan is to evaluate everything about the program and completely re-develop it," he says. It's safe to say there will be many more long days and nights in front of the computer in Anthony's future.

In addition to evaluating and redeveloping his program, Anthony's got his hands full with other industry endeavors. He's currently training to become a NACE-certified Level 2 Coating Inspector, and plans to return to NJIT this fall — hopefully, on a

## NEXTGENERATION

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scholarship from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) — to earn a Master's degree in occupational safety and health engineering. He's active as the social media and technology chair with the New Jersey ASSE chapter, and he serves on SSPC's newly formed Digital Documentation Committee. However, he plans to keep a healthy balance between bookwork, committee work and his duties in the office and in the field. "I can have all the certifications I want, but if I'm on a job and don't know what I'm talking about, those go out the window," he says. "There are no books that can teach what we really do out there."

And while his skillset can be applied to a number of other industries, Anthony finds enough in coatings to keep him interested.

"Three of our interns were my fraternity brothers, and they were all different kinds of engineering students. Every single one found different aspects in coatings that interested them," Anthony says. "My friend who was a chemical engineer looks at paint from the chemistry side, at the chemical structures, completely different than how I view them as a mechanical engineer. The biomedical engineer, I asked him to research some of the hazards associated with some of the compounds



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It's hard for Anthony to pinpoint just where he might be a few years down the road. "I'll be in this industry, but what my job title will be, I don't know," he says. "My title represents the holes that we had that I needed to fill. In small companies, you have to wear a lot of hats." That's part of what keeps Anthony happy right where he is. "I've had companies come to me and offer me other opportunities, but I like the small business environment, doing something different every day," he says.

Another part of what's keeping Anthony's roots in place is his sense of loyalty to those he works with, and like just about everything he does, that's tied tightly into safety, as well.

"My friends here are hard workers, working as engineers and sandblasters on our projects. I train them, I watch after them, and I make sure that they're safe. I'm always looking out for the company, but it's a little more personal now that my friends are up there on the water towers," he reflects. "That's where my real interest is."

And it's not just about running his program, or making sure quality and safety procedures are followed. Anthony points to the little things — taking water or Gatorade out to workers in the field on a hot day, or buying them insulated work suits and gloves for winter work — as some of the actions that resonate the most.

"Loyalty is a huge thing, and my guys know I'm loyal, I'm there for them," he

says. "And when I need something from them, there are no questions asked — 'you did this for me, now I'll do this for you.'"

Anthony's loyalty extends to his bosses at Alpine too, for recognizing that a young newcomer to the industry can have as big an impact as anyone.

"The reason I've been so successful in my field is because my bosses realized that I was different, that I had different ideas, and they were open to them," he says. "As soon as they were open to listening to me and embracing that technology has changed, they gave me the freedom I needed. I expect to stay with them for a long time because we have a mutual understanding of how we're going to develop, and I'm at the forefront of that."

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