



RENOVATOR PROFILE

Dun For You Home Improvements

Turning small projects into big growth



Don Vloet never turns down a reno job for being too small. "I believe that the small jobs lead to large jobs," says Vloet.

Based out of Welland, Ont., and covering the Niagara region, this 36-year-old contractor has often

seen small projects expand.

For example, one day he helped a friend on a bathroom renovation, by installing a faucet and a fan. After meeting the homeowners and impressing them with the quality of his work, he was hired for a series of projects: renovate another bathroom, then the basement, the main floor, and then build a new sunroom – all totalling about \$170,000 in work over several years.

Originally, Vloet started his career as a licensed bodyman and painter in the auto industry. When he got

tired of working with chemicals, he took a job with a friend at a renovation company. From there, one of his first solo jobs was a shed he built in the shape of a lighthouse, which snowballed into more projects as he built his business. It helped that his father-in-law was a painter who referred clients who needed small handyman jobs done. A major renovation on Vloet's own house also attracted customers: "That brought in a lot of business, from people watching me transform a small box into an 1,800-sq.-ft. bungalow."

Today, most of his renovations are in the \$10,000 range, with a lot of kitchen and bathroom renos, although he likes being a generalist. "I'd like to grow more. I'm trying to

let go of some control, and getting more into management," says Vloet.

He gives credit to the trades and subs he works with, including one very dedicated apprentice; plus the kitchen supply store; and the flooring and tiling installers who refer clients to him. And that's his biggest tip for contractors who want to succeed in this business: "Find key people right off the start. Find a great network of people, they will help you a lot along the way."

Never without a business card and the time for a friendly conversation with a potential client, Vloet also belongs to a local networking group comprised of 30 businesspeople in different lines of work, including a mortgage broker, a graphic designer, a florist, a financial

planner, and an alarm installation expert. Each Tuesday morning, one member will discuss his or her business. The group allows members to learn from others' experiences over the years, plus it leads to referrals.

And while 10 years ago Vloet would drive anywhere for a job, today he has reached a point where he is debating whether he should charge potential customers a fee for estimates. "There's so much time spent in our business on estimates, and we don't get paid for that. If every-



one started charging for estimates, it would create a level playing field." He's thinking about charging

\$200 for the hours it takes to prepare a detailed estimate, with the fee coming off the project fee if the client elects to go ahead with the work, which a few customers have said would be reasonable.

His client base now is largely referrals and repeat customers – in one case, this led to a dream of a job for Vloet, an avid fisherman who loves to hit the rivers and go ice-fishing with the guys for a little R&R. Two of his longtime clients bought a fishing camp in northern Ontario. Combining holiday time with a little strategic networking, Vloet booked a fishing vacation in July at the same time the owners would be there. "We fished, we met the camp manager, and we got along with everybody. It turned out the owners wanted to build a new sauna," says Vloet. Returning in October, he built the sauna, and now he has been booked to build decks this spring. And yes, he found time to catch some trout, pike, and bass while he was there. Nice work, if you can get it.

—Susan Peters

FAST FACTS

Company name: Dun For You
Founded: 2003
Location: Welland, Ont.
Number of employees: 4
Gross revenue (2013): approx. \$350,000
Website: DunForYou.com