

# Washington logger moves to full service logging

Starting a small business is never easy. When Brad Whalen, founder of Whalen Timber in Orting, Wash., expanded from independent handcutting to a full-service logging business in 2003, his challenges – like the trees he fells – were enormous. “Everyone said I was too young,” says Whalen, who founded Whalen Timber at just 29 years old. “It takes a lot of work, a lot of time, and a lot of support to get an independent logging company off the ground.” Despite doubts from others in the industry, Whalen bid aggressively and won his first

contract with Kapowsin Tree Farm – even up against a number of well established logging companies – and proved he was in the industry to stay. However, when Whalen first launched his company, his equipment was less than ideal. He purchased his first heavy machinery in 2003 – a well-used CAT 518 skidder and a Kobelco SK 120 excavator – but they weren’t up to the task. That’s when Whalen turned to Papé Machinery for his equipment upgrades. “Brad started up a new business in a mature industry, which means he needed quality

equipment to compete with well-established companies,” says Chad Thompson, territory manager for Papé Machinery in Tacoma. A leading construction and forestry equipment dealer serving markets throughout the western U.S., Papé Machinery became one of Whalen’s biggest supporters and has supplied him with the equipment and service needed to keep his business up and running. Over the past several years, Whalen has moved from handcutting to ground cutting and eventually to cable-based services. His equipment now includes a Hitachi 250 Forester Log Loader, a Waratah HTH622



The vision: “Grow the business by maintaining high quality, modern equipment.”

processing head, and two purpose-built 2554 John Deere log loaders. With its unique Delivery and Revisit program, Papé delivers equipment and provides comprehensive orientations for Whalen’s staff, including maintenance and safety training specific to each piece of equipment. Papé representatives also revisit the site in months following the delivery to ensure the equipment is meeting expectations. This is especially valuable to Whalen because he doesn’t have a mechanic on staff, he says.



“Communication and employee involvement is one of the keys to success in this industry.”

“You start with just one or two pieces and build from that. By working primarily with one equipment supplier you can build up a relationship. I work with the Papé team nearly every day so I know the guys and they know my business,” Whalen said. As Whalen made the leap from a handcutting operation to moving high volumes of wood, the profits have grown exponentially. “Loggers in the timber industry say they haven’t seen a tougher economy in Washington than what we have now. With housing on the decline, interest rates rising, fuel costs in the stratosphere and competition for each job intense, only the best business people survive,” says Bill Pickell, CEO of the Washington Contract Loggers Association. “Brad has carved a niche for himself and has been competitive in his arena. He has good business sense, which has enabled him to thrive in this rarified air.” Whalen, who regularly puts in 60+ hour weeks, has 10 experienced loggers on staff and plans to grow his business by maintaining high quality, modern equipment rather than adding staff. “When you get too large it can create headaches trying to find the best people, but you always need to stay on top of the machinery. It’s your lifeblood in this business,” Whalen says. “Papé helped me get on my feet when I was just starting out and they will be an integral part of my growth in the future.”

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