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With Products like Plastic Downspout Nozzles, End Metal Theft is Preventing Thieves from Creating Expensive and Unsafe Situations



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End Metal Theft

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CEOCFO: *Mr. Ridenour, what is the overall idea behind End Metal Theft?*

Mr. Ridenour: The overall idea is to provide products to customers across the United States and eventually internationally. The items that are either completely secure and can't be stolen, or they are made of PVC for the plastic downspouts and there is nothing to steal. Therefore, that business can focus their energy and business on operating the businesses and keeping the facilities up and running. They then don't have to worry about leaving opportunities for thieves to ultimately create expensive and unsafe situations.

CEOCFO: *Are people going around and ripping metal things off walls? How big of a problem is this?*

Mr. Ridenour: Metal theft in the United States is a multi-billion-dollar problem annually. It is not just that which we are covering; it is a lot more than that. It is from stealing wire in light poles to going into vacant buildings and stripping every precious metal out of the building and ultimately costing the owner of said building tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars to replace it. As an electrical contractor, I can share one story where we went to a building, and somebody had tried to get into the main gear where utility comes in and they didn't know what they were doing. They used some prying tools and it blew up in their face. We saw the boot mark burn prints on the concrete below. Not only was it unsafe for the individual who did it, but it ended up costing the owner of the building quite a bit of money to get that all replaced. That was here in Phoenix, Arizona.

It put that individual at safety risk, had there been one of our devices on that gear to keep them out, then it would not have been an opportunity for them, so they wouldn't have gotten hurt. Secondly, it would have saved the owner of that building well into the thousands or tens of thousands to get that repaired. It is a big safety risk and a big cost impact. It is just unnecessary. In desperate situations, people do what they do and if they see a situation where they see something that might resolve that desperate situation, then some people will steal.

CEOCFO: *Are most business property owners aware of this problem?*

Mr. Ridenour: It is generally area specific. There are some areas where we have talked to different city personnel and different facilities managers and we asked them if they ever had a problem with metal theft and they said no. Then there are other areas where they said they had a problem every day.

Mr. James: There are also a lot of organizations when their parking lot lights are out, they know there is a problem, so they must go in and replace it right away. Our light pole hand hole locking mechanism will make it very difficult to get into those wires the next time. The City of Los Angeles has a bridge they finished in 2018 which is two miles long in downtown Los Angeles. Thieves took all the wiring out where they had no lights on that bridge, which is a safety factor as well. It is a big problem.

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CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the products you offer?*

Mr. Ridenour: We have a plastic downspout that replaces the brass or bronze downspouts. It looks the same, functions the same, it can be painted. The point behind that product is there is nothing to steal. People steal the brass downspouts all the time. We show them what they look like, and they start looking at buildings in their area and they realize that so many are missing. So, it is the plastic downspouts which have been a huge hit for us.

If you look at every single light pole there is some access point to it so that the electrician can disconnect and reconnect the light pole. The cover, generally speaking, has a flat-head screw on it, so anybody who has a flat-head screwdriver in their vehicle knows what they are doing enough to do it safely can open up that cover and disconnect the wires and pull out their wire between light poles and steal the wire. Our Hand Hole Lock covers secure those with heavy duty puck style locks; plus, it has a heavier grade bolt and bracket that secures the cover to the pole, making it extremely difficult for somebody to get into.

Our latest cover is a heavy-duty version of that. We had a team of city workers try to get it off with a sledgehammer. They were able to break it, but they were not able to get into the wiring system. Multiple workers hit it for a total of 42 times between multiple personnel and it was still secure. I asked them how tired they were after doing that and all of them said that they were. It is a huge deterrent for thieves just trying to get into it.

Mr. James: Regarding the Plastic Downspout Nozzles, they are connected to drainpipes that come out of commercial buildings where the roof is draining the water off the buildings. These drainpipes are a little bit above ground level and come out at a 90-degree angle from the wall. These downspout nozzles attach to that, and their use is to extend the water away from the foundation. Therefore, when the metal ones are stolen, it is important that you replace them so that you do not have any issues with the foundation of the building.

CEOCFO: *Mr. Ridenour, you stated, "The In-ground J Box is a game-changer in our fight against metal theft" Would you tell us more about how you are getting it out into the public sector?*

Mr. Ridenour: As an electrical contractor, we get customers sometimes that ask us to come in and repair lighting and outdoor electrical systems. One of the questions I asked a city in 2010 was what they are doing to keep thieves from getting into these things. They said they have nothing, but they are open to suggestions. That is where the original product came out, which was the Light Pole Vault. Here we are fifteen years later, and those devices are still protecting the wire that my company provided. Previously, every year they would end up getting that wire stolen and removed. Now they no longer have that cost, and the lights stay on.

The In-ground J Box system was designed because it is very difficult to try to lock up the In-ground J Box. Our In-Ground J box locking cover secures and replaces the lid so that it completely secures the box itself. We have an anchor option for those boxes that are set in dirt, and it makes it quite difficult for somebody to pull out. These things get hit all the time. Our customers said their current solution was to bury them so that no one could find them. What unfortunately happened, is their own facilities staff couldn't find them. It made any kind of repair or maintenance much more difficult and added so much cost and created frustration for the teams. I had some ideas in my head for years and we finally found a customer who was interested in purchasing something that would work. That is when we came up with the new system. We tested it and it is incredibly solid.

I have also talked with electrical contractors that do this kind of repair all the time. I talked with lighting contractors and electrical supply houses; everyone loves the idea. We got a ton of great feedback. One of the 'best' methods they are using is to epoxy the lid down to the box. The first time you go to take the lid off you are going to destroy the lid and/or the box, so now you have added another set of complications to something that should be simple to get into and be able to be worked on. Being an electrician myself, I wanted to make sure it was easy to use, very robust and secure, would stand the test of time, and it had to be slip-resistant. It took a few iterations but what we have, we are extremely proud of and looking forward to getting a lot of these installed protecting customers' assets and keeping lights on so that people are safe.

CEOCFO: *Are you reaching out directly to cities or contractors that work for the cities; what is your plan?*

Mr. Ridenour: It is a multi-pronged approach. We have press releases and ongoing marketing to get the word out there so that when people search for something and they are trying to find something, they can find us. We are talking directly to the cities, electrical contractors, plumbing contractors, and contractors that work for municipalities. We are also talking to plumbing, electrical, and lighting supply houses.

Something we have learned about plastic downspouts is once plumbers and facilities managers know that plastic downspouts are a viable solution instead of bronze or brass, they buy them. At the end of the day, why would you put something on your building that is potentially going to get stolen tonight versus putting the plastic downspout on your building where there is nothing to steal?

We are finding that when we get into situations with these customers who have a team that is possibly looking for news articles about different cities, buildings, or police reports that have wire theft around lighting systems, we try to contact them. We tell them we have an option if they are interested. It is tested, and proven, and it works.

CEOCFO: *What is involved in the manufacturing and what type of inventory or lead time do you need?*

Mr. Ridenour: There are quite a few different configurations both to the Hand Hole Locks as well as the In-ground J Box locking covers. The most common ones are on the shelf ready to ship within one business day. The ones that are not as common, or if somebody were to come to us with something we didn't have on the shelf, generally it takes about four to six weeks to ship their product.

CEOCFO: *Do you see particular types of facilities that are more interested than others?*

Mr. Ridenour: I don't know if it has much to do with the type of facility, maybe a little bit because if you have a place open 24/7 and people are in and out all the time, then it is harder to steal wire. If you have something like most buildings where when the lights are off, you have empty parking lots or in some cases empty streets and highways, thieves pull over and pull on a yellow vest, and people driving by think that they are actual workers. We have seen that. They go through and just steal everything. Most of what we are seeing in rougher areas where a lot of homeless are set up. Some of it we are seeing in prestigious areas where there is no security as well.

At the end of the day, for the thief, it is about risk. If there are no cameras or security and they can get in easily, and they are in a desperate situation, they may go in and take everything. We have seen it in churches, schools, streets, highways, parks, and parking lots of various types of buildings whether it is a manufacturing plant, all the way down to a retail store. It has touched every part of the built environment; it is just a matter of who is around or walking by and sees that low-hanging fruit opportunity that crosses the line and becomes a criminal.

CEOFCO: *Is the value so easily recognizable that people are willing to pay for the protection End Metal Theft provides?*

Mr. Ridenour: We have done a good job of getting our costs down to some very reasonable numbers. When we first rolled out with the original product, it was a lot more expensive overall. We were new on the manufacturing side of things, but we have learned a lot about manufacturing and learned how to value engineer without taking any of the robustness out or in some cases even adding some robustness in, to figure things out.

I think we have done a great job of putting together a well-priced product line that is very cost-effective. As an electrical contractor, I have done some of the case studies based on customers and projects and we've found it is cheaper to buy our cover and install it than it is to pay for one theft by a significant amount

CEOFCO: *Do you foresee a point where insurance companies could require something like this?*

Mr. James: That could happen. We are probably going to be talking to some insurance companies as we go along. It is obvious if they had two or three theft issues in a commercial building it is a risk. They will have to look at that building and say you have to fix this, before they insure it.

CEOFCO: *What surprised you as you reached the point where you are with the J Box today?*

Mr. Ridenour: The thing that has surprised me the most is the interest we have had specifically from some of our existing customers. We thought there would be some "oh that's cool" kind of interest but our prototype which we handed to a supply house because he wanted to start making the rounds to his customers, he did not even get into the office. One of his customers looked at it and said "Dude I got to show this to the boss now" then he asked if he could take it with him. It was not even on property for ten minutes.

CEOFCO: *Are you seeking funding, investment, or partnerships?*

Mr. James: At the time Jon and I are in a position where we are not necessarily looking. If we had somebody who came in with the right tools, resources, and ideas, I think we would be open to entertaining it but I would not say we are seeking anything right now.

CEOFCO: *Why should End Metal Theft stand out?*

Mr. Ridenour: The biggest thing for us is Jon has a background as a property manager stakeholder in a lot of facilities where he has had issues like this, so he understands the pain from a stakeholder's perspective. From my perspective, being on the technical side as an electrician, I understand having to be the one that has to charge customers to go back and fix something that should not have been broken like this, to begin with. The despair of wondering how to keep this from happening again and when you have to tell your customer, it is not a good feeling.

What Jon and I did was come together and we found a solution. We look forward to finding additional solutions for additional metal theft problems throughout the United States and possibly eventually internationally as well. I think what sets us apart is we have been on both sides of the fence. We understand the pain because we have been there on both sides of it. We are just here to solve a problem. We have the right mix of people, the right innovation and ideas, and the mindset to keep parking lots and streets safe as well as protecting our customers' assets.