

# Pest Control

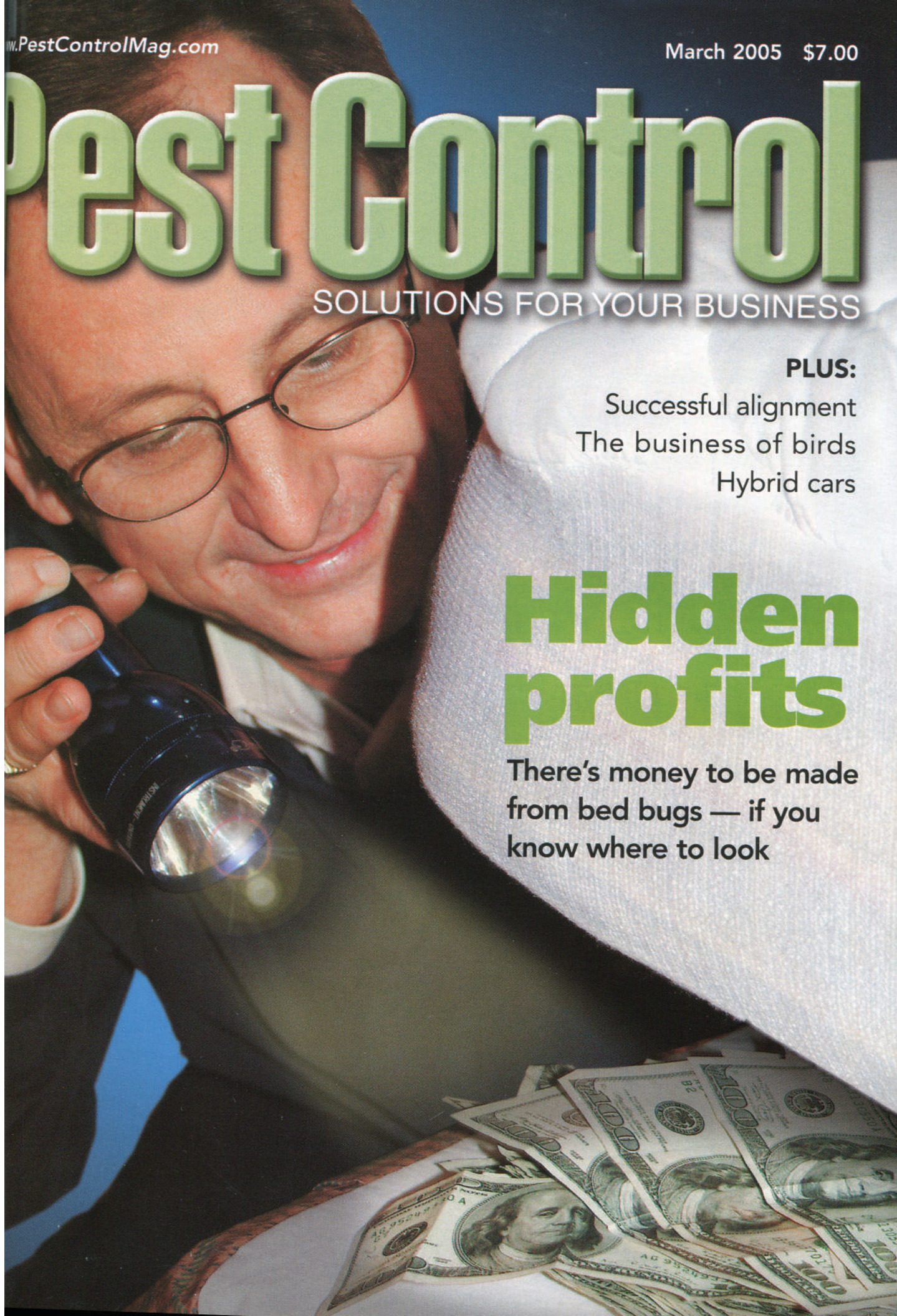
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## Hidden profits

There's money to be made from bed bugs — if you know where to look





## POTENTIAL LANDMINES

Because of the blood-feeding nature of bed bugs and the social stigma attached to the pests, the liability on a PMP is immense (see “The liability factor,” page 31). Aside from accusations of misapplications, probably the hardest aspect of bed bug accounts is in the beginning, when the commercial client weighs the decision of whether to alert other parties involved.

Blake, whose bed bug accounts center mainly around apartment and condominium complexes — often upscale ones at that — leaves the task of telling affected residents to the property management company.

“We provide management with all of our information on bed bugs and what to expect, and then we suggest they send letters to the units above, beside, behind and below the infested unit,” he says, adding the process continues for each unit until they find no more activity.

Communication is key, stresses Greg Baumann, technical director of the Fairfax, Va.-based National Pest Management Association. It’s not just a poor man’s pest, and it’s not easy to control. By showing that you are a competent professional, however, you can not only educate but also allay fears.

“This is not going to be an instant problem solved — it could take several visits,” Baumann says. “At the same time, we could be making customers feel relieved that it’s not as widespread, dangerous or even life-threatening as they may have feared. We’re the experts. We need to present ourselves that way.”

Springer’s Mitchell agrees: “Educating and communicating with our cus-

“If you say ‘I’m going to spray your mattress for cockroaches,’ they’d look at you like you were nuts. If it’s for bed bugs and they’ve been bitten, it’s *‘Do whatever you have to do.’*”

MATT NIXON



## The public bites back



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24 hours after the bites.

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On the Web site [www.holidayinnbedbugs.com](http://www.holidayinnbedbugs.com), a young couple had such a horrible experience with bed bugs at a New York hotel — replete with a trip to the emergency room — that they felt compelled to post a stern travel advisory and graphic photo their bites on the Internet.

What’s a vacation bumper for the public is a downright nightmare for hoteliers and the PMPs who serve them. Hotels, colleges, apartment complexes and (to a less extent) hospitals and nursing homes, are demanding solutions and preventative methods. The trouble is, it’s often a Herculean task.

tomers is our most important dynamic. We do all the other things mechanically, but we’ve found over the years that this industry is less to do with insects and a lot to do with people.”

## THE FUTURE IS NOW

Baumann and Potter will be devoting this spring to traveling around the country with other experts, training PMPs on how to get the upper hand over this pest (see “NPMA, *Pest Control* reach out to PMPs,” page 27). Everyone agrees

that only proper training can lead to profiting from this pest. Baumann notes he’s encouraged by the direction the industry is headed.

“Every month, we get calls from people who are new as well as

those in this industry a long time, ‘Gosh, we’ve never dealt with before,’” he reports. “I think the industry really has adapted well and rising to the occasion.”

Sprague’s Weier believes one day, nearly every PMP will have to incorporate bed bugs into their general pest program as part of the regular contract as an add-on: “Every company needs to look at its procedures and come up with something that works.”

Yet, with all that’s riding on the outcome, Baumann notes that it’s to back away and refer customers to someone willing to take on the challenge and the liability.

“I truly believe that anyone who runs into a situation they are not comfortable with should not try to treat no matter what the pest is,” he says. “Either way, I believe bed bugs are here to stay.” **PC**

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