

AHIT Success Story:

Jim Ullom of Certified Home Inspections



Jim Ullom, owner and founder of Certified Home Inspections, Valparaiso, In., and a 2003 American Home Inspectors Training Institute graduate, has some 4,000 plus home inspections under his belt. AHIT asked Ullom about how he built a successful home inspection business in Northwest Indiana, what he might have done differently and his best advice for today's home inspectors.

AHIT: What is your advice for a home inspector just starting out?

Ullom: I believe preparation, education and a solid marketing plan were our biggest assets in the beginning stages. AHIT provided us with all of the required information, training, additional resources, education, equipment and our first little giant ladder. Our inspectors are AHIT-certified, meaning we adhere to AHIT's standards of practice. We were able to obtain all of the licensing and proper certifications required to meet all the real estate needs of homebuyers and sellers in our region's market.

A second bit of advice I can offer an inspector entering today's real estate industry is to become a good listener. Learning from mentors, realtors, lenders, title companies and others can be invaluable to your success. Watching how other successful businesses operate and grow, and listening to people with experience can open doors, build business relationships and fast track the success of your own business.

In addition to our 300-point home inspection, many of today's clients are requesting a larger scope of work from home inspection companies. For example, many prospective homebuyers are in need of pest inspections; air-quality testing; radon testing; well/septic testing and environmental screenings; water quality testing; and more.

Beginner inspectors would benefit from obtaining as many of those aforementioned licenses, certificates and equipment to enhance their marketability. Most clients appreciate and would rather hire a one-stop-shop inspection company capable of performing the inspection and any other additional testing that may be required by the lender or buyer.

After carefully researching our competition and the services offered, we decided one of our goals was to offer the real estate community a broad spectrum of services in an effort to stay ahead of the average local home inspection company and their respective benchmarks.

AHIT: Once that was in place, how did you build the business?

Ullom: Persistence and consistence, doing the next right thing, every day. Professionally and respectfully answering calls, being prompt and friendly, inspecting each home as if it were our own and producing quality, in-depth, detail-oriented reports. Our

top priority is to accurately inform each client about the true condition of their prospective investment enabling them to make a more educated decision in regards to the property.

AHIT: You've added commercial inspections to your list of services. Does the commercial side help when residential real estate slows?

Ullom: The addition of commercial inspections and property condition assessments does provide us with supplemental income and a variety of different style buildings to inspect, and helps to fill some slow weeks throughout the year. Fortunately, we don't experience many slowdowns these days; the phone is normally always ringing.

Certified Home Inspections is property condition assessment-certified to run the full spectrum of building and property inspections for commercial buildings, which includes high-rises. Our company adheres to ASTM standards of practice for all commercial building assessments, walk-through surveys and report writing.

We began experiencing an increase of requests for commercial-lite inspections. For example, smaller office buildings, churches, retail space, historic buildings in our downtown districts, multi-family housing and smaller commercial buildings. As northwest Indiana continued to grow, the need for commercial building and property assessments increased as well. We are excited to meet the needs of local investors purchasing commercial and investment properties in northwest Indiana by providing this additional service.

AHIT: Is there anything in business that you might have done differently had you known what you know today?

Ullom: I think the biggest and most important thing we could have done differently was to implement the development of our website, nwihomeinspections.com, a few years sooner. By development, I mean creating and frequently publishing original and current content that clients can access and easily understand. By establishing this valuable resource and sharing the information through blogs and case-study articles we are creating a connection and trust with clients online during their search process.