



**a bit about your background and how you got started in the one-call industry?**

# Proven Processes

*Special Interview*

*Exploring the World of Damage Prevention with PelicanCorp CEO Duane Rodgers*

★ “...regarding the current North American model, I would challenge some people and say that maybe their model is not the best one out there.”

—Duane Rodgers

Well, it goes back to 1990 when I was a software engineer, and I was asked to build a Windows-based one-call program for a client called Melbourne One Call Systems in Australia. They have since changed their name to Dial Before You Dig, and the evolution of that product was that it got adopted state by state, until eventually it needed to be rewritten. So in the late 90s, we took control of the program back from DBYD and formed a joint venture partnership called Dig Safe, rewriting the program to make it more of a web-based system.

By 2000 we started to redeploy it across the states of Australia, and by 2002, I decided that we needed to take it to an international level, so we brought the system to New Zealand. We had all the same needs and problems that one-call centers anywhere might have. We had to get membership, we had to look out after the utilities, we had to market the brand and the product and adhere to any amount of legislation that might exist, and that's basically how we got started. In 2006, we gathered up all my diverse companies supporting DBYD and created Pelican-Corp in 2007 expressly for this purpose.

**So after expanding the company's reach to New Zealand, where did you have your sights set on next?**

With New Zealand, we proved that we could take this concept and deploy these applications and processes to call centers outside the boundaries of Australia. Ironically, around 1996 or so, Asplundh, which was one of the one-call operators in the U.S., came to Australia and secured a three-year contract with our New South Wales state. After that contract they came on board with Dig Safe, so we were exposed to the North American systems and their ways of doing things.

Their systems and the market seemed mature and set in place, so we made a conscious decision not to expand into the US at the time. We decided we should attempt to move into more "virgin ground," so we investigated the UK and Europe and decided that's where we wanted to be. We sent one of our directors up there in 2007 and started what is known as "beforeUdig." This eventually allowed us to move into not only England, but Ireland, Wales and Scotland as well.

And we didn't stop there! Parallel to that we had a lot of interest in Southeast Asia, especially Singapore, which is a very small country but has a lot of people. We have an agency that runs all the technology for us up there, as well as the outreach to help explain the one-call concept to the Singapore market.



**When you're researching other countries to potentially expand into, what are some of the challenges you might face when learning the particular system they have in place there? Do you have to adapt to pre-existing systems, or do you try to introduce your system as the proper approach to one-call?**

That's a good question because you can go to a country that speaks English and yet culturally, from a business point of view, not know how to deal with the logistics of that country. It's all good to bring a proven process or a proven technology to another country, but that doesn't mean you understand the challenges that they might be facing. It's an interesting point, and that's why we often used a local agent to help understand the business culture, especially when it comes to utilities of a certain country. It all affects how they want to engage with you, what their expectations are on pricing and so on.



*PelicanCorp CEO Duane Rodgers*

One of the major challenges when going into a brand new country, especially today in 2017, is that if there's not a one-call system there already, there's most likely other systems in place. So these individual utilities are doing their own thing, and with the technology and GIS systems in place today, that probably means putting a web portal up and allowing people to log straight onto their website. They believe that this satisfies any requirement they might have to provide information to a contractor. You have to realize that outside of North America there's no legislation that forces utilities to mark out or locate their facilities.

**Does PelicanCorp offer guidance or advice to a country on newer or better methods to decrease damages or improve the efficiency of existing one-call systems, or do you just arrive in a new country and work with whatever system might already be in place?**

We take the first approach rather than the second, though we're careful not to tell people that their existing way of doing things is wrong. We have a philosophy on how one-call systems should be run and how the industry should function. Some people may disagree with us, but I think that's one of the challenges for the world. Until first-timers have a comprehensive way of collating damage

information, and understanding how and why damages are happening, I think that internationally speaking, no one can say they have the best model for doing this. I believe that there are probably models out there that reduce damages to the greatest extent, and regarding the current North American model, I would challenge some people and say that maybe their model is not the best one out there. But we must be careful, there's always nuances and unforeseen challenges to consider.

Australia does not have a big locating culture, I don't have the exact numbers in front of me, but something like only 10-15 percent of the facilities were being located by utilities (most locates are done by contractors). When we went to New Zealand, they had a completely different attitude towards utility locating, and something like 30-40 percent of the utilities were doing their own locates (the balance were being done by the contractor). What was very interesting, is that the utilities expected the customers to ask them if they wanted a locate, and if they did, the customer would then get charged for a locate, so there was also a very different culture around the billing

process. We had to alter some prompts within the one-call process, which allowed the customer to ask the question of whether they wanted a locate, and if so, where and when they wanted it. This aspect of the system, which was never part of the original Australian system, now had to be put into the New Zealand system.

**Have you ever gotten any pushback from governments or utilities when you come into their country and start to tell them how this one-call system should operate?**

So far we haven't really had much pushback from governments or the industry. Singapore for example, is a democracy, but heavily controlled by the government. Most of their facilities are fully or partially government owned. Our model is that the services we provide are free for the contractors, that this information is free for them and paid for by the government. But when the government says, we're not going to pay for this service, well that was a bit of a different challenge for us. Also, the utilities there don't provide locates, they only provide plans, which the contractor then must pay for. So, if the contractor has to continually pay for these plans, where's the incentive for them to use

this service? Over there, the incentive is that they could receive a \$100,000 fine and/or go to jail, so it's pretty easy!

I don't advocate that system at all, I think they're pushing the cost to the wrong people. Ultimately, we're talking about lowering the cost of locates, the cost of plans, and the cost of processing tickets, and whether it's the American system or the Australian system, someone somewhere is paying for this.

**And really, in the grand scheme of things, you're paying to avoid damages which could cost you a much greater amount of money down the line.**

Right! I have an interesting case study about an electric and gas utility that did a three-year analysis on what was happening with strikes to their infrastructure, even though they were locating everything. And at a certain point, they had chosen to stop locating everything, except what they considered to be "critical" locates. When this happened, within weeks, contractors out on a job simply picked up locators and started doing their own locating, thereby shifting the responsibility of the locate from the stakeholder to the contractor. The utility noticed in their analysis not only a reduction in the cost of doing these mandatory locates, but a reduction in the number of damages too.

This just says to me, that if you put the responsibility on the people actually digging the hole in the ground, you're going to have a different, more positive outcome. When PelicanCorp first came to North America, and we put this concept forward to the industry, I think people thought that we didn't believe in locating, and that's the furthest thing from the truth. We absolutely believe, 100 percent, that everything should be located, the only difference is who should pay, and who's in control of that locate. I think that if a contractor is working side by side with the locators,

basically they're saying, look, we have to mark these right and I have to dig this right, and we have to work together otherwise the utility is going to hit us.

**Does it all just come down to liability avoidance, and people not wanting to take responsibility for locating these lines?**

Certainly in Australia and New Zealand, if a contractor hits an asset, it doesn't matter what information has been given

in terms of a locate, the contractor is liable. And I think that's a totally different situation than in North America, where there's always a lot of discussion about who did what, and who is liable for what. I think now is a great opportunity to rethink what we're doing with legislation, along with the liability issue. If we give the contractor the ability to do his own locates, a couple of things happen. First, you take the timeline away from the utility and give it back to the contractor. They often have their own locate guys on their crews, and now they can confirm or re-mark lines in hours, instead of waiting days for a re-locate. And the benefits of giving the contractor more power, responsibility and information all basically leads to the result we need—fewer damages.

**So when did PelicanCorp first make inroads into the North American market?**

A company called Navteq (now known as HERE) was heavily into mapping technology, and via their Global LBS challenge (in which PelicanCorp was 1st runner up in the Asia-Pacific Region in 2010), we started working with them, and they encouraged us to come to Chicago for a meeting. Long story short, in 2012 we eventually got a meeting with a director of a one-call center in the States, and he gave us a tour of their facility and showed us some of the software they were using. And I said to myself, wow, this is where we were 20 years ago!



*An Australian based call center team member processing an inquiry for the Dial Before You Dig service, entered into the PelicanCorp OneCallAccess software platform*

**“If you start relying on the data, then you start improving the data.”** —Duane Rodgers



*The Australian based call center team processes incoming calls for both Australia and New Zealand. They also provide additional support to web based service inquiries.*

So we started thinking about the North American market, and we came up and pitched an offer to a couple of vendors, and for a variety of reasons, we finally settled on Asplundh One Call Inc. They had the Call Before You Dig contract and the Dig Safe contract for the rest of New England, and although they were primarily known as tree-cutting specialists, they did have this fairly large one-call division at one point. But by the late 90s, they had scaled down the one-call part of their operations, and I think it was just good timing for them, and good timing for us to move in. So, we now run operations in Connecticut and supplier services to Dig Safe, which covers the other five states in New England. We're really quite happy with how this is going, as it's been a nice stepping stone into the North American market.

**How do you feel the US one-call system compares to the Australian system, or the UK system? Does one way have stronger attributes than another and why?**

We believe that the call center has had its day as a call center. Our call centers in Australia and New Zealand are mainly contact centers now, most of our input comes from our online website or iPhone apps. This reflects our basic philosophy that we want the software to be so easy to use, that the novice user can go to our site, register, launch a

ticket, and never have to be trained. If you go a website for an airline, or even Facebook or LinkedIn, you don't get trained in how to use those applications. You must be able to bring users to your site, we get about 8,000 new users every month to the Australian website, and none of them are trained, they can just go on and put their ticket in and it gets sent off to the utility.

Now people might say, well that's good for Australia, but we have different problems here in America. Well, we just converted Connecticut over to this system in January of last year, and their rate of website penetration went from 38 percent to 70 percent in just over three months. And this isn't just about the software, that's not the silver bullet answer, it's more about changing the process and the way in which we do things. Last month, they were up to 85 percent, which I think is one of the highest web usage rates in the US.

**You mentioned before, the importance in communicating with excavators and contractors, how crucial is it to keep these communications open. What kind of role should one-call centers play in maintaining that relationship between themselves and the excavating community?**

That is the challenge and the only way that we can solve that is by having our user group meetings where we get our contractors and utilities and municipalities in the same room so they can discuss the problems they are having. We hear feedback from the city groups that this is the only chance for them to get facetime with the contractors. It's also very interesting to hear from the utility side of things, when they say that they never knew that was a problem, or that they weren't aware of certain concerns from a contractor. So we've had several small wins because of these meetings, mainly because the one-call is in this unique position to bring the industry together.

What's interesting to me, is that in Canada they have a similar locating culture to the States, but with a few key differences. They have these ALAs, alternate locate agreements, where a contractor can negotiate with a utility to be exempted from receiving information—plans or locates from them—when doing certain methods of excavation for them. This happens on the basis that you can work immediately, but without obtaining a traditional field locate. Contractors like ALAs because it means they don't have to wait days and days for paint on the ground locates, they can just roll in there and start working with safe digging practices. And as I was saying before, these contractors are taking on more and more of the responsibility. You may think that it's crazy for a contractor to take on more risk and liability, but for them, having more control over their timelines and schedules leads to greater efficiency on their end. That, combined with the fact that they are doing more and more of their own locating, makes the locating done by the utilities an even more unnecessary part of this process.

I see a lot of this within the GIS market as well. In Australia, as thousands of these maps and plans are going out to people, the quality of the GIS, and the quality of the data within, has gotten better and better. In North America, there doesn't seem to be a desire to map these underground assets, or to get the data right, because everyone assumes that the locate guy will get it. If you start relying on the data, then you start improving the data.

**As I understand it, maps are immediately provided to anyone who calls the one-call in the UK and Australia.**

**What exactly is an Alternate Locate Agreement (ALA)?**

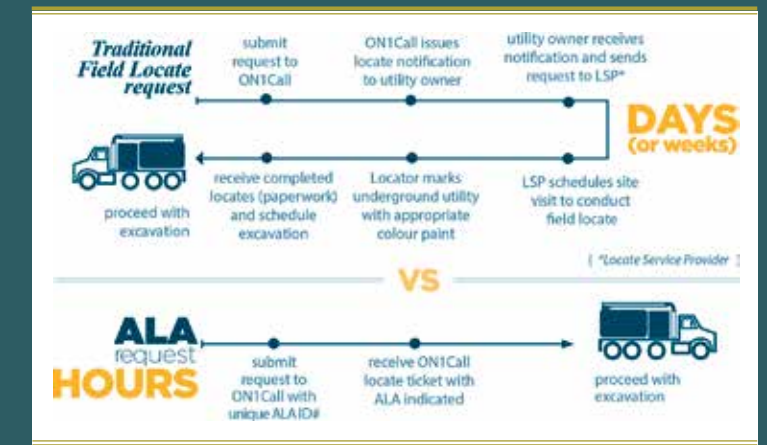
An ALA is a legal agreement, between a plant/facility owner and an excavator, outlining the conditions and terms agreed to by both parties, whereby the indicated excavator can safely proceed without a traditional field locate, aka "paint on the ground," when using a specific method of excavation for low risk work. The documentation contains information regarding excavation methods and procedures that must be followed, as well as details surrounding "allowable work." As a legal agreement, there is a start date, term limit and an expiration date indicated, and contains termination, insurance and legal liability clauses.

**What does this Alternate Locate Agreement (ALA) allow the excavator to do with respect to underground facilities?**

The "allowable work" component of the agreement is outlined in the document's "Schedule A". This section lists the specific criteria under which the excavator can proceed without obtaining a traditional field locate. This includes the method of excavation as well as excavation specifications, and industry guidelines and best practices to be followed.

**Why should a facility owner sign an Alternate Locate Agreement? What are the benefits?**

An ALA benefits both the utility plant owner and the excavator. It can reduce the number of unnecessary locate requests, reducing locate service provider (LSP) costs substantially. ALAs also reduce paperwork load and administrative costs. Excavators benefit as they can get to work quicker and more efficiently. Ultimately, ALAs can save utility owners money.



**Does an Alternate Locate Agreement increase the risk of damage to underground infrastructure?**

In the past, some utility owners have expressed concerns related to potential plant damage. However, according to research undertaken by ON1Call (Ontario One Call), there has been no damage increase related to the correct use of an ALA.

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**Will this seemingly much better system ever get adopted by North American facilities? What are some of the stumbling blocks you face when trying to change the system over here?**

Yes, in New Zealand when you call, they'll ask you, "Do you want the locate AND the maps?" In the UK, we have a utility company up there that's processing about 80,000 tickets a month, and within four minutes of a call, they will respond with maps for the contractor. In Australia with Dial Before You Dig, I recently had a customer tell me how impressed he was with the system, and that within 20 minutes after making the call on a Saturday, he had every single plan for every single utility in his email.

I think one of the problems is that we're treating the professional contractor out there as a complete dummy, and we're saying that we're going to have to do the locate for you, you're not able to do it. I think that things like the Canadian ALAs are a stepping stone to improved processes in the one-call industry. If you had told me four years ago that something like this would be a reality, I would've said no way. I'd rather give the contractor the plans so he knows for sure what is there, including water, which most people don't locate because they assume it's the deepest. But I think we are making some inroads, where we suggest that maybe we locate AND send plans out to people. Eventually, these contractors are going to say, I would love to do my own locates because I'm basically doing them already, and this will eventually shift the liability, which I see as the biggest stumbling block in North America.

**With the booming economies and tech markets in South Korea and Singapore and other places in Southeast Asia, do you actively try to find these emerging places to set up shop for PelicanCorp?**

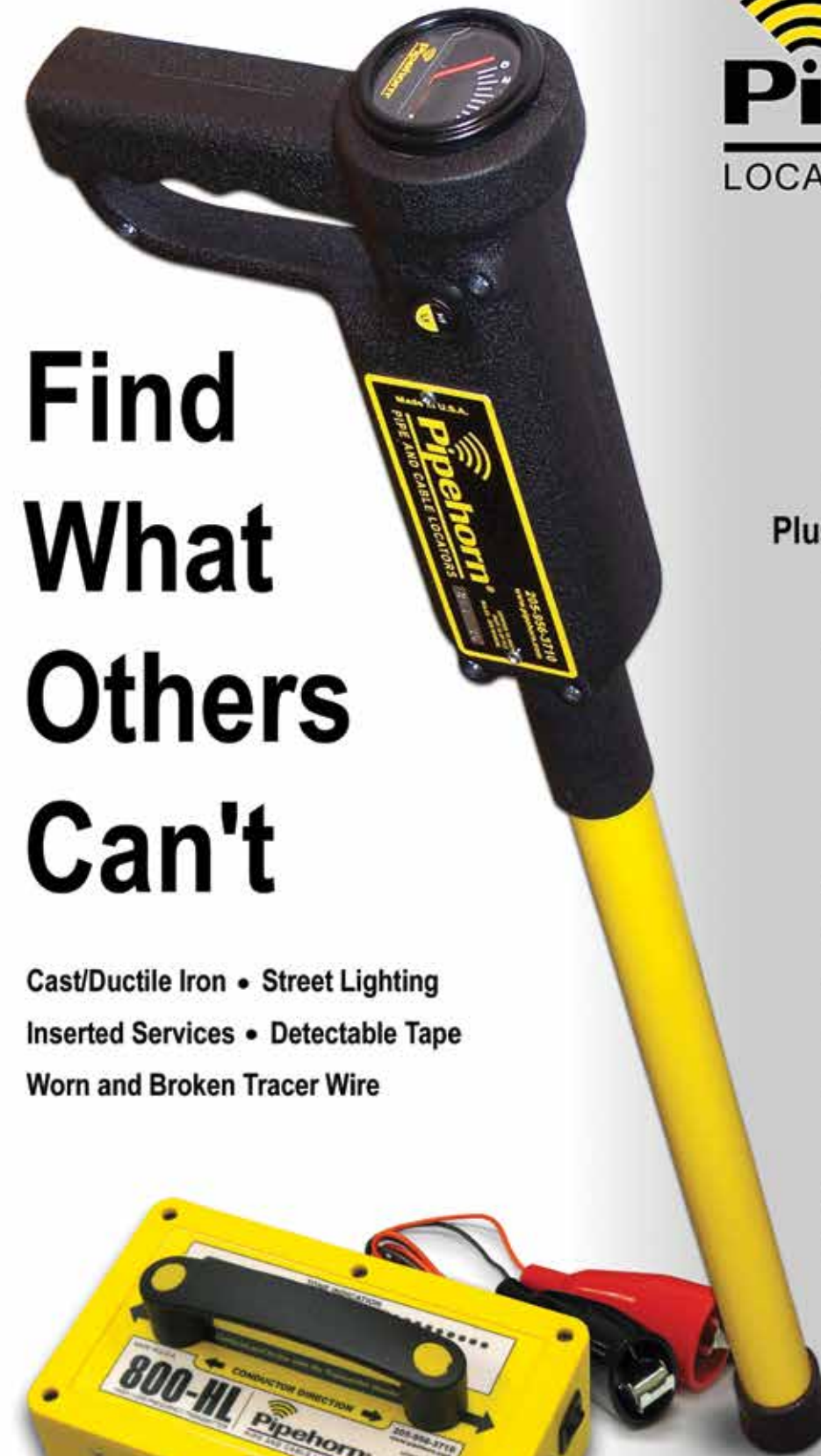
We have a sales director for EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) that's looking at the emerging markets space. We are working on some more opportunities in Asia at the moment, and even some things in South America, so we've been quite active lately. I would say we're the only truly international company that's bringing one-call systems in at a global level. Our experience in these international markets over the last 10-12 years is actually beneficial to everybody, including the North American markets. I think we're challenging lots of ideas that have never been confronted before, because we're saying, hey, there's other ways to do this.

**Do you feel some of these ideas have had their day? Should we still be relying on systems and methodologies designed in the 1970s, when our technology has moved so far past that?**

That legislation that was passed in the late 70s required utilities to locate their own facilities, but wow, technology has moved on! And because we are now locked into that system, we will always have this problem with liability. So here's a challenge for us, we need to watch things like this new Canadian legislation, that actually has a small wedge that allows utilities to do locates or send plans. It looks like it's going to pass, so hopefully in the next few years, American companies will be able to see what their Canadian counterparts are doing. Legislation like this allows you to locate when it's needed or when it's risky, otherwise give the plans or other information that will support the contractor doing the locates themselves. My only hope is that with all the younger people coming into the industry, that it will give us enough time in the next 10 or 15 years to make some of these changes.

**"...giving the contractor more power, responsibility and information all basically leads to the result we need—fewer damages."**

—Duane Rodgers



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