

SPECIAL SECTION

FOUNDATION COMPANIES

Working Their Way Through the Downturn

By Larry Kahaner

Navigating through the current economic downturn is tough for foundation, and foundation-related businesses (new installations, repairing old foundations, testing and manufacturing); but many of the most successful firms are weathering the storm by keeping their debt low, expanding markets, increasing offerings, responding to trends and helping their customers to save money.

For example, GRL Engineers (www.pile.com) in Cleveland, Ohio took note of the trend in increased testing which allows engineers to design for the actual pile capacity. "If you do more testing, you can design more aggressively," says Gina Beim, P.E., Senior Consulting Engineer-Marketing. "Because of that, we're seeing more testing and also a tightening of budgets for bridges and roads... We're trying to find ways to save our customers money, and our response has been to introduce remote testing." She notes that remote testing is more common overseas, e.g., in Sweden and Australia. "We're only sending an instrument instead of an engineer to the project site. We save on travel and other expenses." Beim says that they use the internet to send

data to the office, where an engineer can give simple instructions to the job crew on how to set up the instruments and sensors. She adds: "We're just starting to do this and offering it to our clients."

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