

A CUSTOMER'S SUCCESS STORY

Volvo Construction Equipment

THE DEMO DIVA GIVES NEW ORLEANS, AND DEMOLITION, A MAKEOVER

"I came from a world where I had to decide whether to put organza on a tablecloth. Now it was juxtaposed against machinery. I wanted to be right alongside the people. Demolition was it."

— Simone Bruni



Demo Diva makes an extra effort to keep the surrounding environment dust and pollutant free by hosing down the jobsite while hard at work.

When Simone Bruni walks onto one of her jobsites, her employees know she's there.

It's not just the pink that she nearly always is wearing. And it's not just the fact that she's a woman, not a typical sight in a demolition zone.

No, her employees know she's there because of the energy she brings with her. Bruni has a boundless energy — a pacing, observing, critiquing, joking, and laughing kind of energy. It's the larger-than-life kind of energy that stands out in any crowd.

And it can't be missed when the crowd gives way to the steady churning of heavy equipment. She's the Demo Diva after all. "You definitely know it when she's around," says Tank Gillard, who operates one of Simone's Volvo EC210C excavators, which is painted bright pink to be as conspicuous as its owner.

The story of Simone's company is all too similar to that of New Orleans itself, built virtually from the ground up in the heart of New Orleans out of the wreckage of Hurricane Katrina. She left her life as a corporate event planner and launched into the hardened world of construction, which she admittedly knew almost nothing about.

But with a savvy bit of marketing, a heavy dose of strong sales technique and three of Volvo's excavators, she's built a business that's positioned for the long run. Her pink excavators have been the talk of New Orleans, especially in the construction circles where the Demo Diva has fast become a rising player.

It's a story that's left even the most seasoned in the industry scratching their heads.

"I've been doing this for 12 years, and I've never seen anything like this," says Rodney Guggenheim, a sales representative with New Orleans'



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Scott Equipment Company LLC. "In demolition, a lot of it is the same. Same companies. Same equipment. It's pretty cut and dried, and it's usually not a pretty thing. But you know how demolition is — she makes it pretty. It's unique. How else can you say it?"

Life-changing

Not long ago, Simone was living in what she calls "the world of lace." She spent 10 years as an event planner, putting together multimillion-dollar parties for one of the top firms in New Orleans. It was high-end stuff.

But in 2005, Simone's world changed. "I was flooded and laid off," she says. "My house was in Katrina."

Simone snuck back through the barricades before New Orleans officially was reopened to the public following the hurricane. She had to park blocks from her home and climbed over huge live oak trees that had fallen, criss-crossing her street. Everything was insulated with gray mud. Her front door was swollen shut with the moisture.

"There was a smell of death in the air, and a silence that really hung heavily," she says.

Simone was offered work in New York — another event planning gig and a chance to leave all the ugliness behind. But she stayed, and in doing so found her future within the devastation. "I remember just standing on my front porch with no job, flooded property, and I could see all these men," Simone says. "I didn't know what a dually was, but the sound of an F250 just rocked my world. It was so attractive. I just knew it was the sound of men who were here to help."

Seeking her place

It was a life-changing moment. Suddenly, the sound of heavy equipment was mesmerizing to Simone. "I was really just moved with jealousy. It was a jealousy for my community, 'Wait, I want my place in this, too!'" she says.

Simone started asking questions. What kind of machine is that? Who are those men working for? Where did you get your sand? Who owns that truck? And then her neighbors started asking Simone questions: Should we tear down our homes?

She realized then that if they were going to demolish their homes, she should be the one doing it. She wrote contracts on the hood of her car and gathered a crew. The latter was easy enough to do. Simone and her customers could pay. The government and FEMA, whom many contractors rushed to New Orleans to work for, were taking weeks to produce cash.

The Demo Diva

And that's how it started. "I came from a world where I had to decide whether to put organza on a tablecloth. Now it was juxtaposed against machinery," Simone says. "I wanted to be right alongside the people. Demolition was it."



Simone Bruni has the power of pink behind her.

The name Demo Diva was part of her marketing strategy. Simone wore pink shirts. She spent about \$350 on fliers and yard signs, all in pink. She targeted women. Tearing down one's home is an emotional proposition, and it's one where the woman of the household calls the shots.

With her hired crew bringing their own equipment, Simone's company was launched. She started doing about two houses a day. That went on for three years.

Buying her own

Then Simone started having trouble with her crews and decided she wanted more control.

Rodney Guggenheim, with Scott Equipment, had called on Simone once, inquiring whether she was interested in looking at a Volvo. She pushed him off then, intimidated by the prospect of buying. But she did her own research.

She talked to people around town. Her hired crew had shifted its own equipment from Caterpillar to Volvo and swore by their new machines. They said they were fueling up a lot less with Volvo's higher efficiency machines.

"Not being an operator myself, just being the one paying the bills, that was one of the biggest things to me. That is what stuck out in my head," Simone says.

She also asked one of her competitors what he knew. He said it's not only the Volvo machine, it's the service that Scott Equipment provides. "He said if you have a problem, Scott Equipment within a few hours will be there with a part in hand and putting it on your machine," Simone says.

So she went down to visit Rodney. "He really held my hand through it," Simone says. "My experience with Volvo, I feel like I have been working with a big brother — the Scott Company, all of them. The service guys, they are my friends. I really feel that way."

Rodney remembers it well. "It took over a year to sell her her first machine. It



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took me about 20 minutes to sell her the second one," he says.

Something to see

Her first purchase, just a year ago, was an EC210C. She leased another one about two months later. On order now is an EC210CLD, with Volvo's full demolition package.

To fit with her branding, Simone painted each machine pink. The reaction, she says, has been amazing. You don't see a pink excavator every day. "Just this morning we were tearing down a residential house," she says. "I had 10 neighbors come out to watch. They were like, 'You go girl!' They love it."

Tank Gillard, Simone's chief operator, says his Volvo is the best machine he's run in his 17 years in the business. It's quiet, he says, and has the requisite speed to keep up with him as he loads debris onto trucks to be hauled away.

On this morning, he was looking at a 1,700-square-foot home, rotted out by termites. It already had been a busy,

attention-grabbing morning. Just getting the machine to the site meant passing by a group of gawking school children, curious about the pink excavator. Sitting in front of the house, Tank was confident.

"Five minutes, it's done. In five minutes, I'm walking on it," he says.

That's because, he says, of the power behind the EC210C. It's equipped with Volvo's 147-horsepower D6E engine. During his year sitting in the cab of his Volvo, Tank has torn down everything from wood-framed houses to concrete-block commercial buildings.

"It's all muscle," he says.

Being passionate

Residential work remains the core of Simone's company. She tore down a three-and-a-half story home that was owned by the owner of Popeye's Fried Chicken. And she once tore down an entire city block. But Simone also has been doing some commercial construction jobs, too.

The way Simone describes it is she's "got the power of pink" behind her. She's teamed up with Radio Disney and the NFL on starting an all-girls flag football team in New Orleans. She's been to games to talk to the girls about their ability to break the mold, to take the non-traditional route. Cheerleaders have created cheers in her honor.

Simone also has attracted broad media attention both locally and from trade publications. She's met Reggie Bush, the New Orleans Saints star. She also sells Demo Diva gear, from pink shirts to hard hats.

The brand has taken hold. Recently, a couple of girls stopped her on the street and asked if they could be the Demo Diva for Halloween. She said she'd set them up with hard hats and shirts. And so it goes for the one-time party planner.

"I think when you have passion about something, you really come alive," she says.

Pink excavators set Demo Diva apart. They bring an undeniable flare to the dirty world of demolition.

