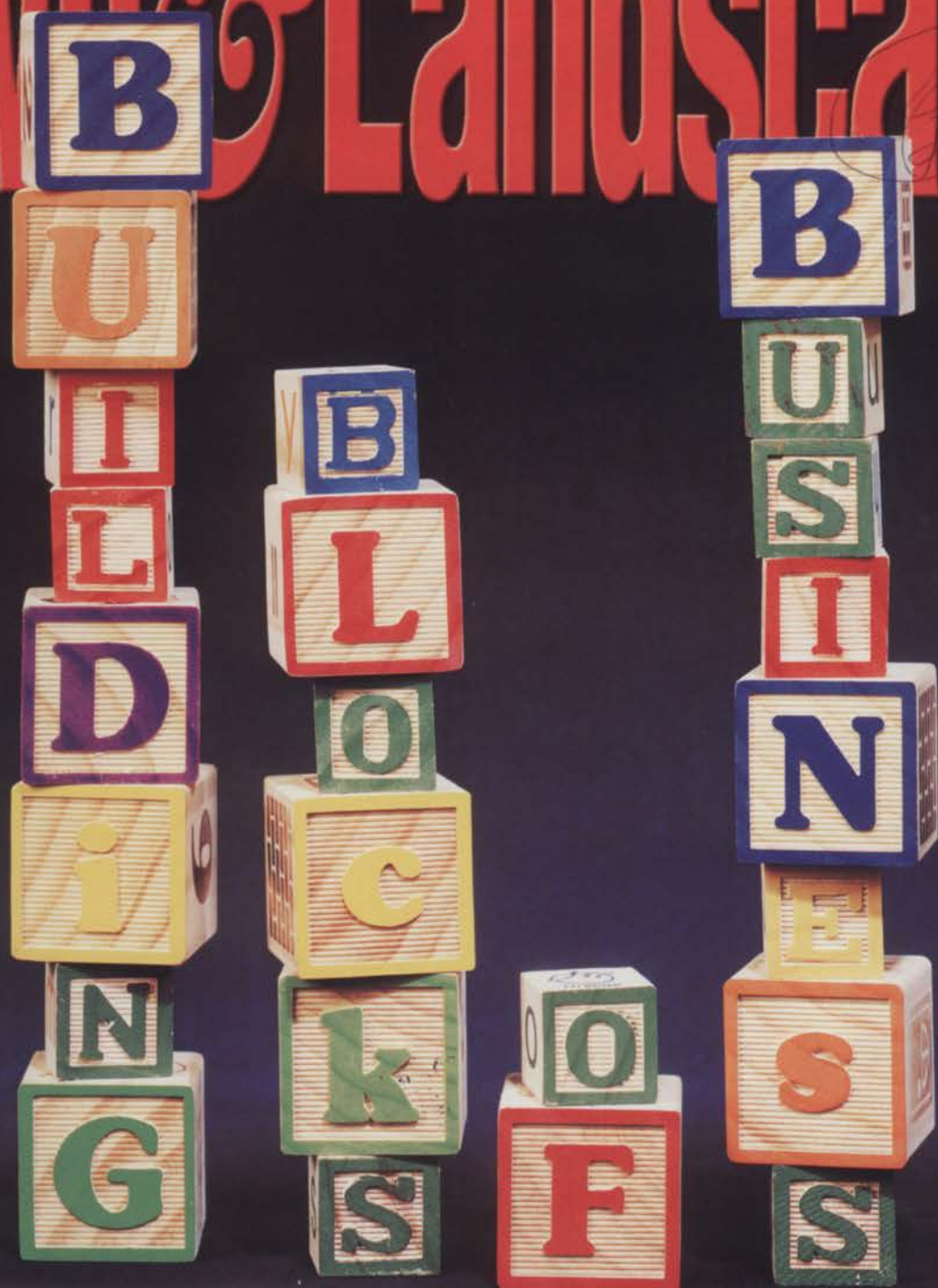


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18 building blocks you can use
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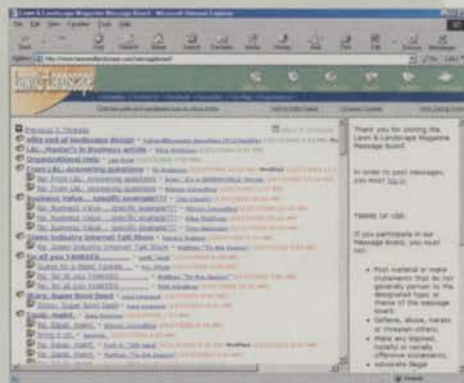
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- Additional *How We Do It* tips and photos from landscape contractors featured in the *Building Blocks of Business* special section.

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Traveling with a Map

"What men want is not talent, it is purpose; in other words, not the power to achieve, but the will to labor."

— Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Have you ever piled into a car with friends or family for a trip? Everybody loves a road trip – there's just something natural about exploring someplace new that appeals to us.

Of course, the prep work is key to the trip. If your voyage lacks the right food, drink, creature comforts or other necessities at the outset, then you're ultimately making your life more difficult. One must-have is usually the map.

The map's purpose is obvious – this jumble of colors and lines tells you how to reach your destination. Without it, your trip may end up rivaling a Chevy Chase film, which, entertaining though it is, probably isn't what you envision when setting out on your own vacation.

Few people will dispute the value of maps – how can you debate the merits of something that tells you how to reach your desired destination as safely and efficiently as possible? Yet, how many of you have a map for your business? How many landscape professionals have spent time creating a business plan or strategic vision for their company that lays out where the firm is headed and how it will get there? I think we'll all agree this number is small.

A friend of mine once described maps as "the enemy of the spontaneous experience," and that's true to some degree. But business isn't supposed to be spontaneous. You're hopefully creating a company that will stand the test of time, not simply enjoy a moment in time. That makes a map crucial.


No, business plans don't offer the same guarantee that we get from Rand McNally's work. You can create a flawed plan, the numbers might be wrong, the company's direction might change after a year or two, or outside factors can force you to reevaluate targets. But the plan still has merit. Even if you don't rely on this document over time, which you should since it needs to be viewed as a "living document," you'll still benefit from going through the planning process.

Creating a business plan forces you to answer tough questions. Where will the business be in five years? How many employees will it need? Who will run different parts? How many new customers will it have?

No, you won't have all of the answers to these questions right away. You might have to wait two or three years to figure out some of these issues. But at least now you've identified the roadblocks in your path.

I once visited a company where the owner had the division managers create an organizational chart for what their part of the business would look like five years from now. Many of you will consider this frivolous given that you don't even have such a chart for how your business looks today. But this owner knew that having his managers go through this exercise made them think about the future now and give them a vision. That piece of paper became

the brochure for the company's destination, and that motivated everyone to create a map for getting there.

Everyone enjoys vacations. We get excited about going somewhere new and exciting. Don't you think the same might be true for your employees and your business? 



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USE READER SERVICE #13

In The Office

PART ONE

Organizational Change Strategies

EDITOR'S
NOTE: This
is the first
of a two-part
series.

As organizations continue to confront challenging market realities, many are faced with difficult decisions related to workforce structure and size. For some, routine seasonal fluctuations result in annual layoffs. For others, the "official" recession or declining revenues after Sept. 11, 2001, have forced staff reductions. Either way, restructuring the workforce is never easy. Some of our clients have even described the task as "heart-wrenching," especially when long-time, loyal employees with families are forced to pack up and say goodbye.

Before resorting to a layoff, there are other less disruptive ways to cut costs and preserve your investment in recruiting and training staff. Let's review a few of the more popular options. Here are some alternative strategies:

Hiring or Wage Freeze. Both of these offer effective alternatives to eliminating people. Even though employees may initially balk at a wage freeze, they soon realize that it's better than no paycheck at all.

Delayed Wage Increases. The concept is the same here; no increase is better than no job.

Attrition. This is perhaps the least painful alternative. Simply do not fill employee vacancies when they arise. Although regular employees may feel the burden of extra work, most are grateful and perceive the added responsibilities as "job security."

Schedule Reductions. This method usually leads to an immediate decline in morale. Although you are "saving" staff, most employees perceive (and begin to resent) an expectation to accomplish the same amount of work in fewer hours and for less pay.

Voluntary Unpaid Time Off. You might be surprised to find that some of your employees welcome the opportunity for some extra time off without pay.

The challenge this option creates is handling vacancies of key people who choose to take this leave.

Required Unpaid Time Off. With this alternative, a company requires employees to take unpaid time off, usually in accordance with a planned schedule and advance notice. For example, you could ask salaried employees to take one day off per week for the next quarter. As another option, you could require employees to work six weeks and then take two weeks off without pay. (Keep in mind wage and hour requirements when reducing the workweek of salaried, exempt employees.)

Temporary Pay Cuts or Benefit Suspensions. During a particularly difficult time, one of our clients implemented a three-month, 10-percent wage decrease for all positions including the president. Another client suspended company-matching contributions to the 401(k) for one full quarter. Although these cuts weren't pleasant, employees were comforted by the fact that they were temporary.

Requiring Employees to Take Vacation Time Instead of Carrying It Over. In this case, if you have a policy that allows for carrying over vacation time, you are eliminating future financial obligations by getting accrued paid time off your books.

Voluntary Early Retirement Packages. Usually seen at larger corporations, this alternative often results in the loss of key people at a time when companies need these employees the most. It does, however, reduce costs.

ALTERNATIVE MEASURES. Regardless of which method you choose to save staff, you must be able to establish a nondiscriminatory rationale for which positions and departments are affected. If your company is small and the changes apply across the board, then there is no chance of discrimination since everyone is equally impacted by the action.

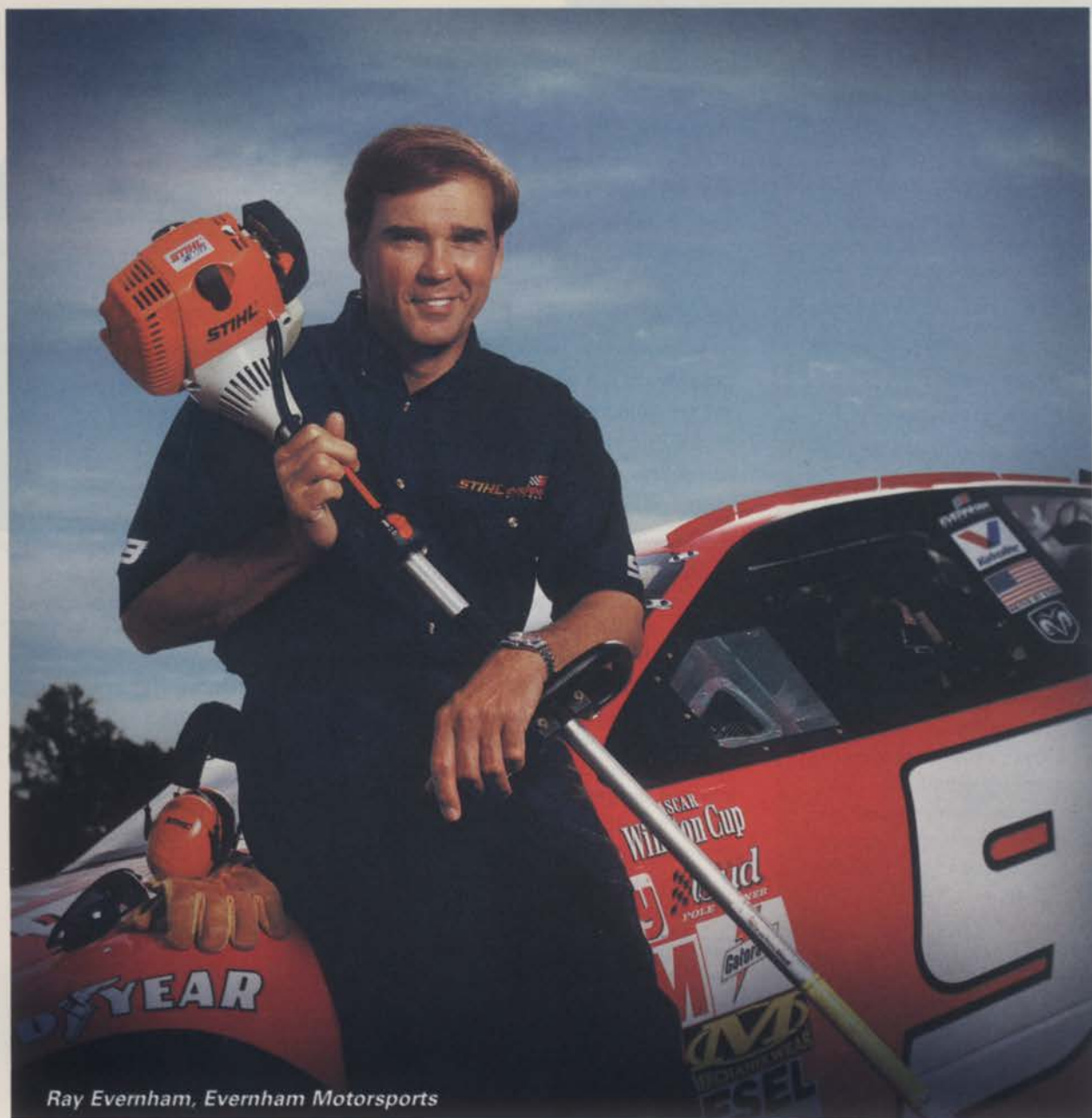
While legal liability is one important consideration, morale is another. To avoid immediate and significant morale problems, make certain to include your salaried (not just hourly) employees in any cost-cutting measures.

In fact, to send a strong message that the "last shall be first" and to foster loyalty during tough times, some companies implement changes like these at the top leadership level first, before including front-line workers.

Although in the eyes of employers, staff-saving options are better alternatives to laying off employees, they do not come without a cost. Aside from morale implications, after cost-cutting changes take effect in a business, productivity often declines as employees struggle with feelings of fear, lost trust, and uncertainty. When this occurs, employers find themselves caught between the throws of psychological and economic pain. Talk about a challenge! To minimize this dilemma, manage change properly and always consider the impact of your decisions on the survivors.

Jean Seawright is president of Seawright & Associates Inc., an H.R. management consulting firm located in Winter Park, Fla. She can be reached via e-mail at jplleggi@seawright.com or at 407/645-2433.





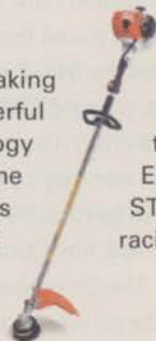
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USE READER SERVICE #14

Market Trends

IN THE NEWS

Turfgrass Troubles Ahead

Turfgrass sod producers may have some water struggles ahead, which could mean a lack of sod for landscape contractors, according to Stan Gardner, president of Turfgrass Producers International. As forecast in the TPI's annual state of the industry report, the coming year could be one of water shortages and storm water runoff woes.

Gardner expects such water issues will become increasing factors influencing the economic health and sales of turfgrass, especially for rapidly growing western regions of the country. Reduced water supplies may also influence new home lot sizes and therefore overall landscaping and maintenance opportunities.

Based on the continuing instability of the worldwide economy and the uncertainty over conditions in Iraq, Gardner suspects 2003 will look similar to 2002. "All signs point to another roller coaster year from a financial perspective, preventing customers from resuming their normal buying habits," he estimated.

But because of the complex nature of the economy, Gardner foretells some areas will grow stronger and expand, while others will droop.

(continued on page 18)



According to BizMove.com, there are nine key steps to starting a business, one of which is "Do something you love." The site points out, "If you are in a business that you hate, then it is a good bet you won't be successful. Find where your true talents and skills are and get in a business that exploits them."

Most landscape contractors must have used this advice when starting their businesses. Sixty-five percent said they entered the green industry because they love the outdoor work, whether it's for the sunshine, the smell of freshly cut grass or flower beds' bursting color displays.

Other contractors – 15 percent – saw a business opportunity in the lawn care and landscape industry and jumped in. Ten percent of contractors were looking for work and that's what brought them into the industry – one with an abundance of open positions, particularly during summer months. Only 7 percent of contractors inherited the business from their family members and, finally, approximately 3 percent of contractors felt drawn to the industry because they wanted to focus on improving the environment.

The Great OUTDOORS

Why did you enter the landscape industry?

| RESPONSE | % OF CONTRACTORS |
|--|------------------|
| Love the work – plants, being outdoors, etc. | 65% |
| Saw a good business opportunity | 15% |
| Needed a job | 10% |
| Got into a family business | 7% |
| Wanted to help/beautify the environment | 3% |

Source: www.lawnandlandscape.com

REGIONAL REPORTS

Outlook Ohio

Green industry sales in Ohio totaled \$2.78 billion, according to a survey conducted by the Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association.

The state's nursery and landscape industry also employed more than 96,000 workers with a total payroll of \$882.9 million and experienced a 42.3 percent increase in total sales of goods and services in the five-year period between 1996 and 2001, the association reported.

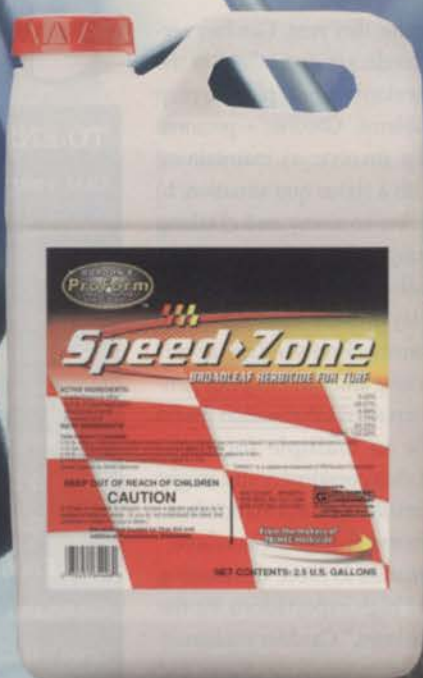
Wholesale production and distribution accounted for the most – \$834 million – of the \$2.78 billion total, while landscape construction and installation came in second with \$752 million; retail garden center sales placed third at \$534.8 million; landscape maintenance accounted for \$403.1 million; and other activities, such as snow plowing, reported \$263.2 million in sales.

Additionally, the green industry statewide paid \$274.9 million in property, sales, employee and income taxes, according to the survey.

The report, based on 2001 sales, was conducted recently by Gary Gao, John Smith and Jim Chatfield, all Ohio State University Extension employees. The Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association financially supported the survey.



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USE READER SERVICE #15

Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

In preparation for this year, Gardner recommended turf producers and others in the green industry develop business plans to prep for potential problems. Gardner's personal contingency plans involve: a) maintaining profit margins with a status quo situation, b) adapting to a weaker economy and c) taking advantage of an improving economy.

Gardner also discussed the changing role consumers will play in 2003, stating: "Consumers have more knowledge about turfgrass specifically and landscaping generally based on increased information that is easily accessible in multiple formats." Gardner warned that consumers still might be influenced by erroneous information from tainted sources found online or elsewhere.

"Today's consumer is more demanding than ever and has high expectations for the products he or she buys," Gardner explained. In response, he urged turfgrass producers and landscape professionals to focus on providing high-quality products and services and responsive customer service. — Ali Anderson

Calendar of Events

TO ENSURE

that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to **Lawn & Landscape Calendar**, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113.

JAN. 14-16 Virginia Turfgrass Conference and Show, Richmond, Va. Contact: 540/942-8873 or www.thevtc.org.

JAN. 14 Southeast Turf Conference, Lake Worth, Fla. Contact: 800/882-6721 or www.ftga.org.

JAN. 15-19 Sports Turf Managers Association's Conference & Show, San Antonio, Texas. Contact: 800/323-3875 or www.sportsturfmanager.com.

JAN. 15-17 Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 847/526-2010 or www.midam.org.

JAN. 15 Pesticide Applicators Recertification Conference, Perrysburg, Ohio. Contact: 614/292-4070 or www.pested.osu.edu.

JAN. 16 Southwest Turf Conference, Ft. Myers, Fla. Contact: 800/882-6721 or www.ftga.org.

JAN. 20-22 CENTS 2003 – Central Environmental Nursery Trade Show, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/825-5062 or www.onla.org.

JAN. 20-23 41st Annual North Carolina Turfgrass Conference, Charlotte, N.C. Contact: 888/695-1333 or www.ncturfgrass.org.

JAN. 20-23 73rd Annual Michigan Turfgrass Conference, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660 or www.michiganturfgrass.org.

JAN. 20-22 Mid-Atlantic Horticulture Short Course, Virginia Beach, Va. Contact: 757/787-9451 or www.phcv.org.

JAN. 21-22 Maryland Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show, Baltimore, Md. Contact: 301/345-4199 or www.md turf council.org.

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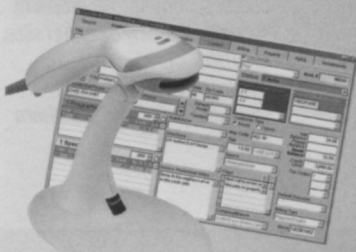
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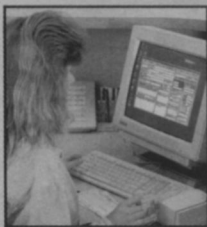
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BUSINESS BASICS

Study Abroad

Off-season means retiring equipment, shaving hours off the schedule, trimming the workforce and, for some, plowing through snow. But when winter kicks in, so should strategic planning—the winter months spark reflection on progress and give business owners time to consider their goals.

So, why not say "bon voyage" for the sake of business? After all, a new environment sparks fresh ideas for many. Drake Snodgrass, president, Drake's 7 Dees Landscaping, Portland, Ore., took off to the Oregon coast during his planning session and found a peaceful place to dream about his company's future.

"For me, I work on things indirectly in the back of my head until a light comes on, and then when that light comes on I go, 'OK, I think I can do this,'" he described, noting that the time away from the office helped him organize his thoughts. "You need to be mentally prepared to [plan.] If you do it

JAN. 21 Winter Conference – Lawn Care Association of Pennsylvania, Allentown, Penn. Contact: 800/577-6801 or www.lawncaofpa.org.

JAN. 21-23 MAGIC 2003 – The Convention, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/561-5323 or www.magiccouncil.org.

JAN. 21 Tampa Bay Turf Conference, Tampa, Fla. Contact: 800/882-6721 or www.ftga.org.

JAN. 22-24 Idaho Horticulture Expo: The Best Little Show In The West, Boise, Idaho. Contact: 800/462-4769 or www.inagrow.org.

JAN. 23 Mid-Florida Turf Conference, Orlando, Fla. Contact: 800/882-6721 or www.ftga.org.

JAN. 26-28 Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association's 2002 Winter Conference, Omaha, Neb. Contact: 816/233-1481 or www.nnla.org.

JAN. 29-31 Iowa Nursery & Landscape Association Annual Convention & Trade Show, Des Moines, Iowa. Contact: 816/223-1481 or www.iowanla.org.

JAN. 29 North Florida Turf Conference, Jacksonville, Fla. Contact: 800/882-6721 or www.ftga.org.

JAN. 29-30 New Jersey Trade Show, Somerset, N.J. Contact: 800/314-4836 or www.gardennj.net.

JAN. 30 Gulf Coast Turf Conference, Milton, Fla. Contact: 800/882-6721 or www.ftga.org.

JAN. 30 Northeastern Pennsylvania Turf School & Show, Wilkes-Barre, Penn. Contact: 814/863-1368.

JAN. 30-FEB. 1 The Gulf States Horticultural Expo, Mobile, Ala. Contact: 334/502-7777 or <http://www.gshe.org>.

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Market Trends

when things are crazy, you are probably not going to succeed."

Snodgrass doesn't necessarily turn to solace for strategic planning, however. In fact, he said trade shows are a motivating atmosphere to cull creative thinking. At the 2002 Green Industry Expo in Nashville, Tenn., he arranged his own "breakfast of champions" with the four other employees that attended the show with him. Modeled after the morning roundtable discussions, Snodgrass hoped the informal conversation would allow the group to tap into what they learned at the show.

"I took a little sign and wrote 'Table One' on it, and put it in the middle of the table," Snodgrass said, laughing. "It was super. I said, 'Let's not try to set the world on fire, let's just debrief.'"

This type of brainstorming offers owners valuable employee insight, and collecting thoughts from those outside of management paints a true picture of the company.

Mark Clark, president, Clark Landscape

(continued on page 22)



L&L

Book Report

The Loyalty Effect

by Frederick F. Reichheld

When business is booming, many owners rush to climb the next flight to profits rather than concentrating on the base that founded their success – the customer base, that is.

"Having long-term customers and having them provide us with a consistent cash flow to build our business has been a key building block for the Brickman Group," pointed out Jeff Topley, regional manager, The Brickman Group, Columbia, Md.

The Loyalty Effect, by Frederick F. Reichheld, discusses the importance of customers and the team, addressing topics like the economies of customer loyalty, the right customers, the right employees, determining whether staff members are

assets or expenses to a business, and what qualities define a "loyalty leader."

Case studies from companies like State Farm Insurance and Chick-Fil-A offer out-of-industry insight on loyalty issues and how particular management styles foster a dedicated client base. "There are lessons to be learned in reading these stories – why making investments in your employees can increase cash flow," Topley noted.

The 323-page book, published by the Harvard Business School, reminded Topley that numbers are nice, but they cannot be generated without the business from devoted customers and help from workers. "It got me back to the reality of who really drives your business," he said. "We are naturally focused on our customers, but the deeper you get into making money, the further away you get from taking care of your customers."

– Kristen Hampshire

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Market Trends

People

Industry veteran **Zenon Lis** joined Burlingham Seeds as vice president of sales and marketing.

David Truttmann was named the new national golf sales manager for irrigation, landscape and nursery products at John Deere.

Kevin Wade signed on as vice president, chief information officer for LESCO.

New sales managers for the L.R. Nelson Corp. include **Tom Kane** for the mountain states region, and **Chris Pine** for the northeastern United States and eastern Canada regions.

Three personnel moves at Ferris Industries include the promotion of **Bill Shea** to vice president of sales and marketing, **Bill Bower** to director of marketing, and the addition of **Erik Memmo** as general sales manager.

At Seed Research of Oregon, **Scott Harer** received a promotion to sales manager.

Rae Ginkiewicz took on the position of residential landscape designer at Omni Facility Services, Landscaping Group.

Stephanie Hutnick will work on trade shows, advertising and Web site maintenance in her new position as communications coordinator at the Riverdale Chemical Co.

Midwest Arborist Supplies named **Kevin Spiller** as Sales manager.

At Miramar Wholesale Nurseries, **Bill Remmer** joined the team as key accounts salesman for Southern California, and **Kim Huxtable** will cover Inland Empire, Palm Springs and Riverside County as the new territorial salesman.

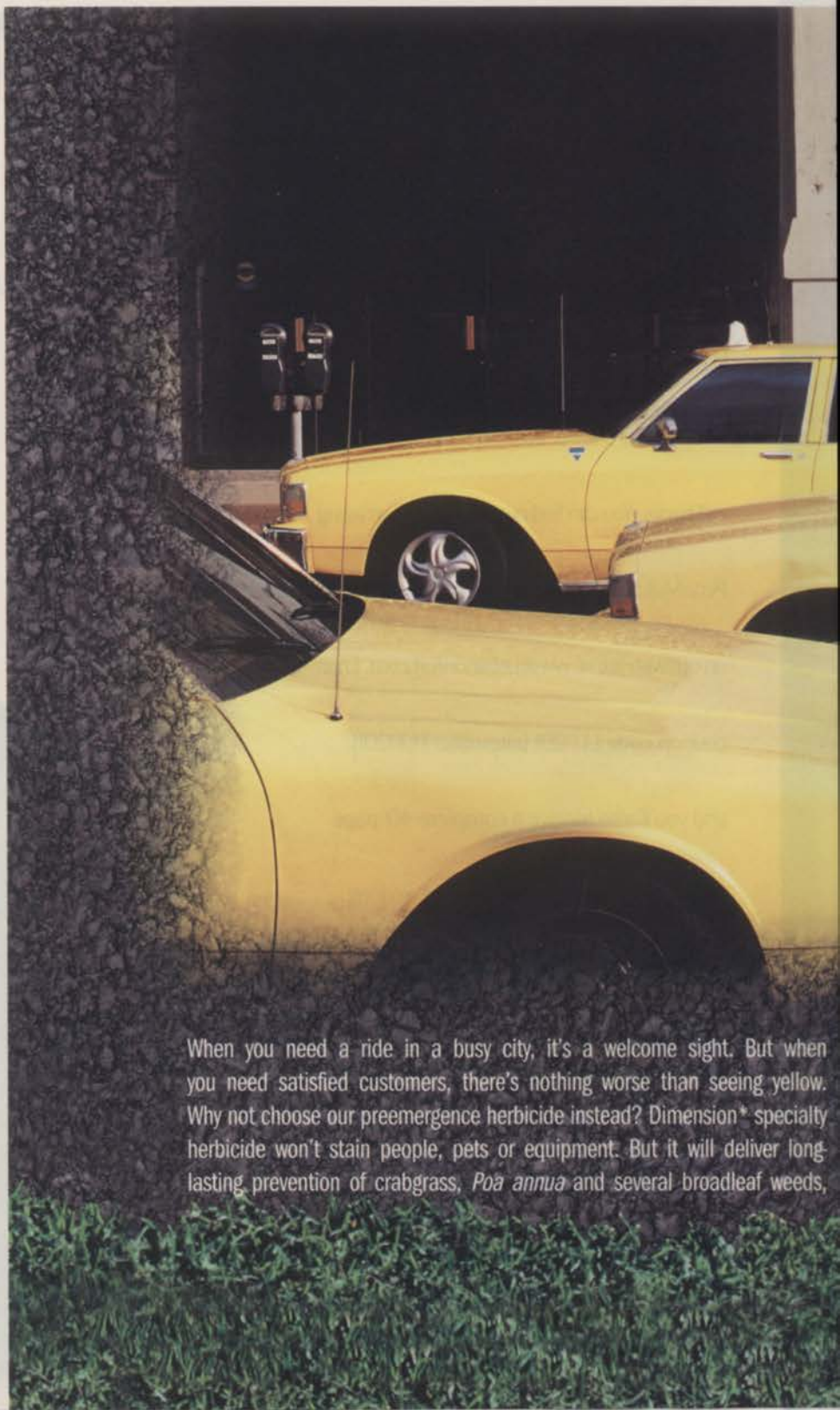
Bozzuto Landscaping announced two new area managers for the company. **Dean Ratliff** will cover properties in the Annapolis-Baltimore, Md., region, and **Jeff Lilja** will oversee Montgomery County and Prince George's County, Md., and Washington, D.C.

(continued from page 20)

Group, Monroe, N.C., said travel offers new perspective. While holding planning sessions out of the office offers obvious benefits, soliciting advice from others outside the company is helpful as well. "You look and you learn, you obtain information and knowledge on the way other companies are structured, their marketing, their images, etc." he

pointed out, adding that building relationships with owners in various regions provides an impromptu sounding board when planning questions surface.

"Have some key people in other parts of the country who you trust - it is an indirect board," Clark suggested. "You share information with them, and they share information with you. You need a support group of



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Market Trends

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other owners in other markets - that really helps out."

Instead of the boardroom, try:

1. Tradeshow
2. Local hotel
3. Bed & breakfast
4. A manager's home
5. Lunch or dinner at a restaurant
6. A park setting - *Kristen Hampshire*

LL

Association NEWS

The **Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA)** announced its 2003 Board Members at a dinner held during the Green Industry Expo in Nashville, Tenn. The new Board includes President Jon Cundiff, President-Elect Chuck McIntire, Vice President Jim Campanella, Secretary/Treasurer Ewald Altstadt, and Immediate Past President Bill Hoopes. Directors are John Gibson, Todd Graus, Louis Kobus, Gina Neher, Norman Goldenberg, William Hildebolt, Cindy Halm, Charlie King, Wade Walden and associate directors are Mike Dietrich, Ron Johnson and Neil Cleveland.

The **Washington Association of Landscape Professionals (WALP)** made several announcements recently. The WALP Executive Board of Directors for 2003 includes Susan Yager, president; Brian Skinner, president elect; Michael Murphy, past president; Todd Watson, treasurer; Debbie Caffall, secretary; and Kathy Jeppsen, associate representative. Also, WALP presented the 2002 Member of the Year award to Ken Yorozu, and Tom Demmer received the Supplier of the Year award. David Brown, Lloyd Glasscock and Peter Dervin all received the 2002 Presidential Award for dedicated service to WALP.

The **Snow and Ice Management Association** announced its 2003 Board of Directors at its Fifth Annual Symposium in St. Louis, Mo. The newly elected officers are: Jeff Tovar, president; Charles Glossop, vice president; Samuel Granados, secretary; Craig Geller, treasurer; and John Allin, past president.



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PLANTS FOR TEXTURE

Leafy Landscape Foliage

Lush landscapes and combination containers boast loads of color, yet these head-turners take on a new dimension when they showcase at least one vine, stalk or grass.

The breeders at Ball Horticultural Co. have developed a well-rounded collection of seed-grown foliage varieties that debut to landscape contractors in 2003.

These six selections are high-impact, long-performance component plants for mixed plantings in landscape beds and containers, and many also look handsome planted individually in landscapes.

Take a look at the 2003 lineup, from the tall and the trailing to the vibrant or the subtle and even the slightly eerie.

1. PURPLE MAJESTY F, ORNAMENTAL MILLET.

Pennisetum glaucum is a strong landscape performer and also works well in large, mixed containers. In fact, All-America Selections bestowed its rare gold medal to this selection for this breeding breakthrough. This first-of-its-kind plant grows to a stately 4 to 5 feet tall with dark purple foliage, stems and flower plumes that make a lovely backdrop for other colorful varieties. Purple Majesty performs well in full to partial sun.

2. SILVER FALLS DI-CHONDRA.

Silver foliage and a true cascading habit establishes *D. argentea* apart from other trailing plants. This tough


plant is heat and drought tolerant and perfect for mixed containers for as a hanging basket item. Silver Falls typically grows 3 to 4 feet long and as much as 6 feet with a longer growing season. Planted in well-drained beds, this ground-hugging, 2- to 3-foot-tall plant grows into a lush, long-lasting carpet. Silver Falls performs well in shade to full sun.

3. PURPLE KNIGHT ALTERNANTHERA.

When a client has a passion for purple, choose *A. dentate*. Striking, dark purple foliage and an upright, spreading habit make Purple Knight ideal for mixed containers – plants arch dramatically over the edges of the pot or basket. In landscape beds, each 16- to 20-inch-tall plant spreads up to 3 feet, with a shrub-like shape. Purple Knight performs well in full sun to light shade, and foliage is darkest in full sun.

4. PEEK-A-BOO SPILANTHES. Unusual flowers and an interesting bronze-green foliage color make *Spilanthes oleracea* a real eye-opener. Long, pendulant stems hold unique, olive-shaped, golden yellow flowers with deep burgundy red centers. Ideal for mixed containers, Peek-A-Boo also creates a nice mounded plant in the landscape. Plant height is 12 to 15 inches with a spread of 24 to 30 inches. It performs well in sun to part shade.

5. SILVER MIST HELICHRYSUM. Well-branched *Plectostachys serpyllifolia* makes mounded and spreading, 6- to 8-inch plants blanketed with silver foliage on silver stems. Growing fast and full, the fine texture and small, rounded leaves make this an excellent choice for mixed containers. Silver Mist performs well in partial to full sun.

6. PURPLE LADY IRESINE. *I. Herbstii* displays dark purple foliage on a low, spreading plant that fills in nicely as a ground cover. Placed in the landscape, 6- to 8-inch Purple Lady spreads up to 4 feet. In mixed and solo containers, as Purple Lady's branches get longer and heavier, plants cascade over the edge. Purple Lady performs well in partial shade. 

EDITOR'S NOTE: Contact your preferred grower or wholesaler to order any of these foliage varieties or contact Ball Horticultural Co. at 630/231-3600 to locate a supplier in your area. – Ali Cybulski

The author is Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at acybulski@lawnandlandscape.com.



Silver Mist Helichrysum and Madness petunia (below) make striking borders, while Purple Lady Iresine and Vista Red Salvia offer rich red hues for beds. Photo: Ball Horticultural Co.





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WHEN CHILDREN dump tubs of blocks onto a table, they can create just about anything – a monument, a house, a construction project – outcomes are left open to the imagination.

One could say a company owner has the same opportunity when looking at a business' blank slate. The pieces – marketing, budget, clients, employees – are all out on the table and an owner can stack them in any order he or she likes, leaving some sections out until they're needed and providing supporting pieces in between.

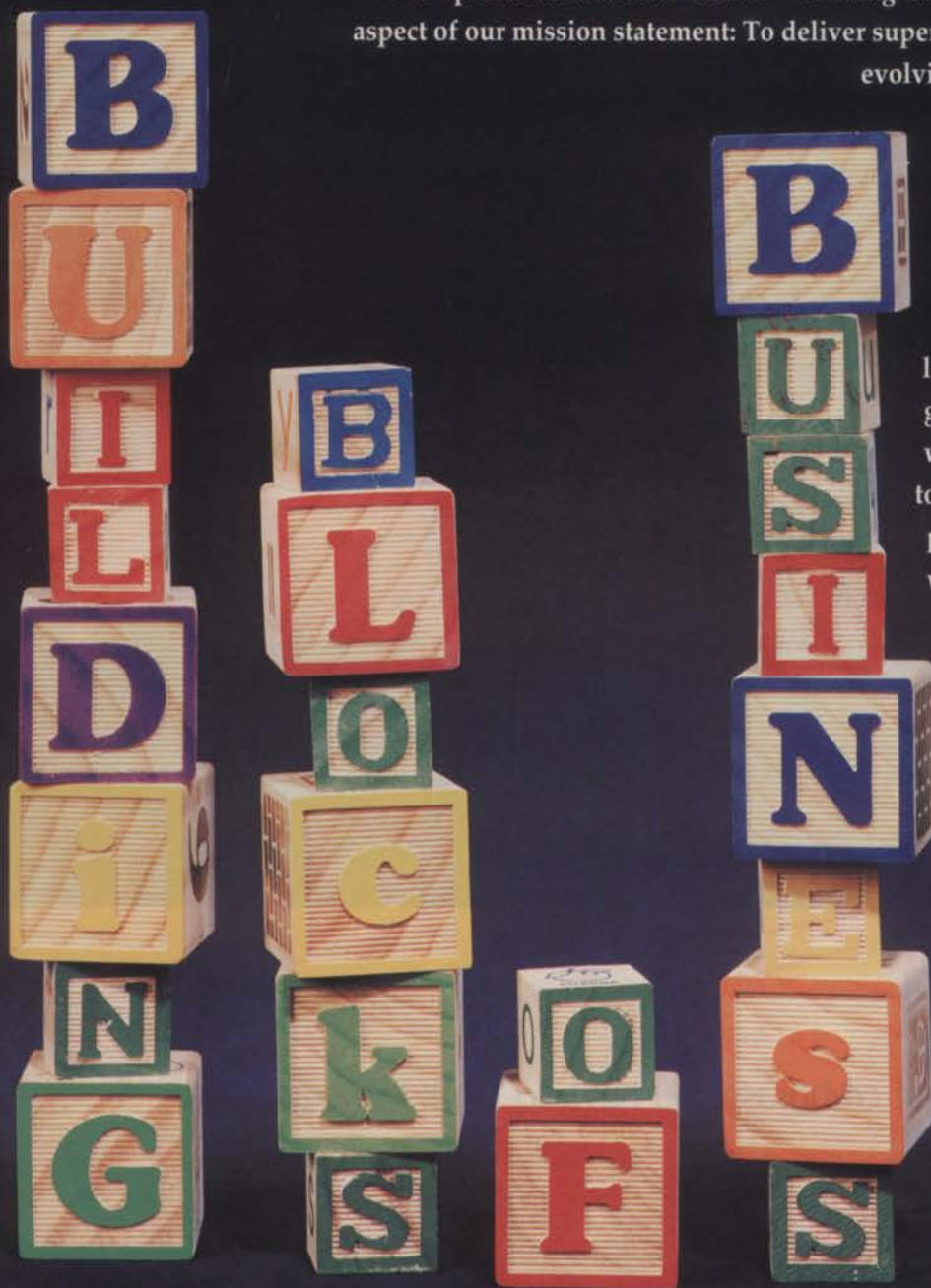
Our special section this month – *Building Blocks of Business* – represents every aspect of our mission statement: To deliver superior total coverage of the continually evolving professional lawn and landscape

contractor market. And this issue does so from the people who our readers appreciate hearing from most – other landscape contractors.

Each month, our *How We Do It* department, which we started in late 1999, identifies one specific program, philosophy or practice that works well for a particular contractor. We ask a contractor to write the piece and he or she explains the topic with enough detail so that readers can learn from key points and, if they want, replicate the program. Readers continue to embrace the department and *How We Do It* has won many first-place awards because it exemplifies our mission statement.

To honor this department, we bring you an issue full of "How We Do Its" and we arranged them in the natural order of running a business – from building a new shop and marketing for clients to structuring crews and drafting contracts to providing employee incentives and surveying clients.

In the following pages, we give you 18 building blocks you can use to strengthen your business. Start building.





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Using professional help, Southwest Landscape Management built an ideal shop by making careful decisions on location and amenities. Photos: Southwest Landscape Management & Land Creations

SOUTHWEST LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT & LAND CREATIONS

BUILDING A New Shop

Making the decision to build a facility can be both exciting and stressful. On one hand, the choice can be liberating, alleviating the burden of working out of the garage and giving one the chance to design, down to the last detail, a state-of-the-art landscape facility. On the other hand, the whole process takes a lot of time, research, planning, money and organization.

Two years ago, we decided to build a new facility that would house our two companies, Southwest Landscape Management, a landscape maintenance firm, and Land Creations Landscaping, a design/build firm. Although the two companies run independent of each other, we consider them partner operations. We already had worked out of the same building for eight years, our companies are the same size and we are all family – it just made sense.

The first step in the process was deciding to build. Our decision was based on necessity. We worked in an old barn that we outgrew. There was no heat or running water and there were zoning issues at our location. We wanted to construct our own building and accrue some equity. We needed more land and the freedom to create our own environment. Consequently, the decision part for us was easy.

The next step was to decide on a budget and secure financing. For us, a look at our profit margin and what discretionary capital purchases we could forego helped. To build a safety net, we planned to spend at least 10 percent more than we budgeted. We met with several bankers to discuss the project, examining issues like the different types of loans available; the necessary amount of money down

(this will vary depending on the type of loan, but generally we figured 10 to 20 percent of the loan value); the amount of money we could afford to borrow; the length of time necessary to process the loan; and the paperwork required.

The third step – deciding on a location – is the most crucial decision we made. There are many factors we considered, but the most important for us was figuring how far from our customer target area we were willing to be. We wanted to remain within 10 miles of our existing facility, and we let that standard define our search for a location. Also, since there are many commercial areas that prohibit outdoor storage of materials, such as mulch and topsoil, we addressed this question upfront to make sure a site fit our needs. The township we originally selected for construction wouldn't allow the type of facility we had planned, so we fell back on our more accommodating second choice.

Our commercial real estate agent helped us with zoning issues, building size restrictions and working with subcontractors, engineers and architects. Our real estate agent, who worked for the owner of the lot we sought, was the best guide in helping us with initial project aspects.

The building process came next. We visited many other landscape facilities to get an idea of different building types and layouts. Also, local and national landscape associations sponsor facility tours and we took full advantage of them. By doing this, we had a good idea of what we wanted before we ever met with our architect.

Choosing a builder can be a tedious process, but we had

(continued on page 32)

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Building Blocks of Business

(continued from page 30)

to decide on the type of building we wanted first. We decided on a pole building because we learned through research that it needed fewer materials for construction and was, therefore, less expensive to build. But we had to make sure the type of building we were planning was allowed on our selected property. The fallback property we were looking at, for example, restricted pole build-

ings. After some negotiation with the seller and the township trustees, though, we were granted permission for the construction.

We got quotes from four area builders found through our local *Yellow Pages*. The final decision on our part came down to communication. Only one builder delivered his bid professionally and in person. We felt that because he took the time to present his

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Check out this story online for a list of 11 key tips to building a new shop.

quote and early plans this way, we wouldn't need to chase him down later with any concerns. We also did some research and contacted references to make sure we were confident with our choice.

Next came choosing a general contractor. Though it saved money, contracting for ourselves caused serious headaches and took up a lot of our valuable time. Organizing electricians, plumbers and heating and cooling personnel was a bigger job than expected. If we had it to do over again, we would have hired a general contractor instead.

There are a few other basic tasks that helped us stay on top of a project of this size:

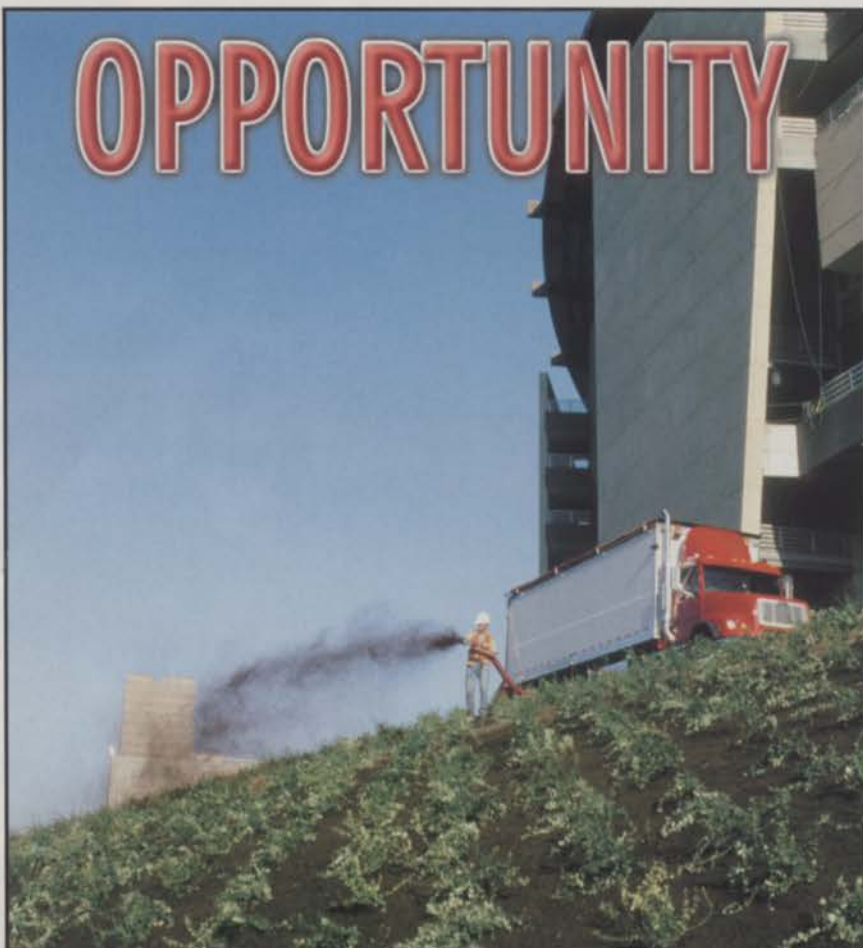
- We assigned duties to key people in our organization. For example, we let someone who excelled at finances and budgeting deal with the bank.
- We made sure to obtain a completion date from builders before signing any contract and we didn't pay them until the job was complete.
- We did a final walk-through with the builder and all subcontractors to make sure all of the work was complete.

Finally, we set a move-in date. This required an occupancy permit, which in turn required an overview by a building inspector. We could have received a temporary occupancy permit that would have allowed us to move in while some minor tasks, such as trim work, floor covering or painting, were being completed, but instead we were flexible with our move-in date. Of course, we were eager to move into the building as soon as possible, but we thought moving in before the work was complete would cause more problems down the road.

We've come a long way since we started looking at properties two years ago. Our facility is up and running, but we still have a lot of work ahead of us. If building a facility is your goal, take heart in knowing it can be accomplished with the right amount of planning and organization. — Steve Rak II

The author is vice president, Southwest Landscape Management, Eaton Township, Ohio, and can be reached at 440/238-0434.

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USE READER SERVICE #29

Not long ago, we experienced a large economic boom. But in times of abundance one can become complacent with budgeting practices, and this sloppiness can come back to haunt a business owner in times like the present, when the economy takes an inevitable dip.

This scenario was played out for Garden Gate Landscaping in the late 1980s. We were cruising along, riding the crest of the last big economic wave and were blindsided by an economic slowdown in our marketplace that grew into the worst recession we had ever experienced – one that continued until the mid-1990s. We found that although we had good systems in place, we did not have the *right* systems in place, and, therefore, we took some hits for several years.

I realized then that monthly financial statements were just historical information. What we needed was a budget and tracking system that would tell us weekly where the company stood against budgeted goals and would start with the realistic hours we could work (bill) each week.

Our starting point was to determine the number of crews the sales team could keep busy in each division. By knowing the number of man-hours by profit center, we could then accurately project revenue by multiplying the number of hours in each profit center by our historical gross revenue by man-hour.

Next, we needed weekly benchmarks by which we could effectively judge how we were doing year-to-date and from which we could be confident in determining a bottom-line outcome at year-end. Those benchmarks were determined by looking at past financial figures. Fortunately, we had been tracking sales bookings and billings by profit centers for years.

Then we were ready to monitor our numbers. In order to do this effectively, I developed a set of linked spreadsheets.

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USE READER SERVICE #30

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By linking cells from one spreadsheet to another, we can change assumptions and actual data one time and the value ripples through all the sheets automatically. If I were more programming-oriented, the system could have been developed in a database, but it was easier and faster to use technology with which I was already familiar.

In terms of a budgeting time line, growing companies should plan at least six months ahead for the next fiscal budget, revising a couple of months before the year starts and again when they get the prior year's numbers. We have kept Garden Gate at a fixed revenue size for the moment, so our only growth variable is sporadic subcontracting, which is driven by larger projects.

Comparison of Dollars and Hours Booked Year to Date 1998 to Goals & to 1997

New Date Period: 12/31/98

| Person/Dept | 1998 Actual | 1998 Goal | 1997 Actual | 1997 Goal | 1998 Actual | 1998 Goal | 1997 Actual | 1997 Goal |
|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| Planning | \$ 275,000 | \$ 101,200 | \$ (28,200) | 1,000 | 2,700 | 940 | \$ 84,800 | 10,000 |
| Henderson | \$ 86,000 | \$ 12,000 | \$ 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 40 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 20,000 |
| Headquarters | \$ 97,500 | \$ 700,000 | \$ (20,000) | 2,000 | 1,000 | 100 | \$ 10,000 | \$ 10,000 |
| Subtotal City | \$ 332,500 | \$ 673,200 | \$ (28,200) | 5,000 | 5,000 | 100 | \$ 96,800 | \$ 204,000 |
| Storage | \$ 12,000 | \$ 2,000 | \$ 0,000 | 0,000 | 0,000 | 0 | \$ 0,000 | \$ 0,000 |
| Subtotal | \$ 344,500 | \$ 675,200 | \$ (28,200) | 5,000 | 5,000 | 100 | \$ 96,800 | \$ 204,000 |
| Travel/Other | \$ 10,000 | \$ 10,000 | \$ 0,000 | 0,000 | 0,000 | 0 | \$ 0,000 | \$ 0,000 |
| Grand Total | \$ 454,500 | \$ 685,200 | \$ (28,200) | 10,000 | 10,000 | 100 | \$ 96,800 | \$ 204,000 |

Relative Percentages For 1998

| 1998 Actual | 1998 Goal | 1997 Actual | 1997 Goal |
|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| \$ 454,500 | \$ 685,200 | \$ (28,200) | \$ 204,000 |

100.0% 100.0% 100.0% 100.0%

The use of linked spreadsheets enables the immediate reflow of data when financial variables are changed. Image: Garden Gate

Lastly, to get employees to buy in to our budgeting process, we changed how they were rewarded, basing the system on measurable, traceable goals.

Each profit center has margin goals that need to be met for the company to meet its profit goals. We reward employees based on their contribution to gross profits (margins) vs. previous criteria like gross sales and focus on actual hours vs. estimated hours. Today,

This new budgeting and accountability system is proactive rather than reactive. It allows both tracking against realistic goals and a constantly adjusted projection of year-end profitability as each week comes and goes. Additionally, there is little cost involved. I can do the entire budget for our roughly \$4-million business in one day. We've got the process down to a science, and it only took 25 years to figure it out. — Charles Bowers

The author is chief executive officer, Garden Gate Landscaping, Silver Spring, Md., and can be reached at 301/924-8652 or charlie@gardengate.net.

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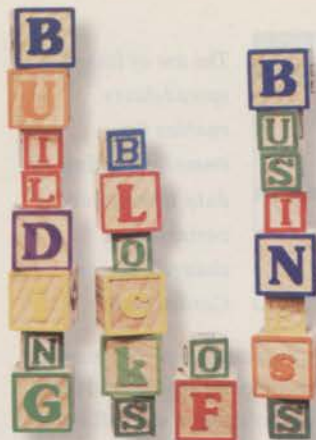
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THE LAWN DAWG

Telemarketing TACTICS

Telemarketing can be an effective and economical way to grow your lawn care business. I've been in the lawn care industry since 1983, and telemarketing was a method of advertising I relied on to grow my business. When The Lawn Dawg opened for business in 1997, we began – and have continued to use – telemarketing as our primary means of customer acquisition. Since then, our company has grown to five branches and more than 11,000 residential customers. We've worked hard and, like any other marketing effort, telemarketing only rewards us if it is properly planned out and managed.

The first step to an effective telemarketing campaign is to plan and prepare. To give ourselves plenty of time, we planned three months before our campaign's start date. Through research, we found that a good plan should include the number of sales we wanted, the number of leads needed to achieve that goal, how many prospects are needed to generate those leads, the number of employees available to implement the plan and the number of weeks expected to complete the program. Once the plan was created, we paced

out the accomplishment of these goals over a period of time to assure their completion. We made daily and weekly goals, tracked them closely and adjusted our strategy along the way.

The next step we took was determining who and where our future customers were. We mapped out the areas where we planned to market. We broke these areas down by zip code first, then by street within each zip code. We included all of the streets where our current customers lived, as they were likely to increase the company's visibility. Also, we drove any streets we

were unfamiliar with to determine whether they were good prospects. This was the best way to ensure we were not telemarketing underprivileged neighborhoods, condominiums, apartment complexes or businesses.

Once we finished these tasks, we created a list of every street within each zip code in which we wished to market and put them in route order. After these street lists were created, we protected and organized them in binders for our telemarketing staff to use to generate leads in an efficient manner.

Of course, there would be no telemarketing without phone numbers, so once the street lists were created, we acquired the lists of names and phone numbers. There are a handful of national data companies that can provide this information, but we used a company that suppressed people on the "no-call" registries. We found that data companies typically charge a fee per listing, and even though the price was only three or four cents apiece, we specifically requested only numbers for single-family homes to keep the cost down. We then confirmed that the company could provide the data in a format compatible with our software.

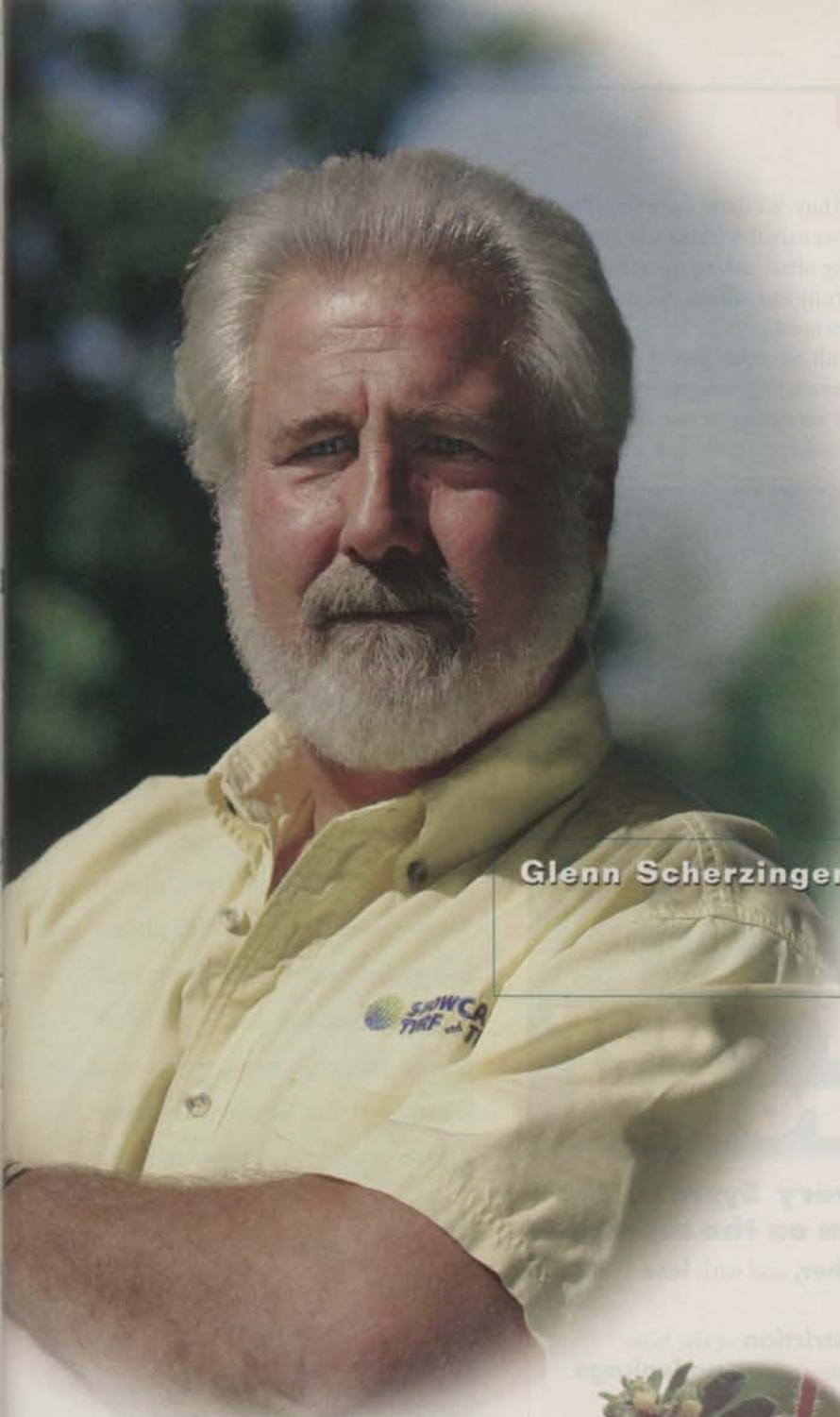
There are always good and bad times to make phone calls, and we found through trial and error that telemarketing to generate leads is best done during the evenings. We wanted to talk to people when they were home. The most productive calling hours for us are Monday through Friday from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Our employees use a script when they call to generate leads, and during the first call we are quick and get right to the point. We immediately identify ourselves and the name of our company and politely offer to provide a free estimate for our services. Many home owners consider telemarketing an intrusion of privacy, so we are brief and courteous to get the best results. Telemarketing is a numbers game. The more calls we make, the more leads we generate and the more sales we secure.

Once a lead has been generated, we get in touch with the home owner as soon as possible. We believe the faster we get out to the property, the more likely we'll get the sale. Our salespeople will run the lead within the two days following

(continued on page 38)

Lawn Dawg
President
Jim
Campanella
Photo: Larry
McHugh





Glenn Scherzinger

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USE READER SERVICE #33

Building Blocks of Business

(continued from page 36)

the telemarketing call and then follow up during the evening hours with the home owner to make sure everything went well. Persistence is necessary to show potential clients our sincere interest in caring for their lawns.

Making sales through telemarketing is a process during which we must establish a level of trust with home owners before

they will buy. We don't try to force the sale. Instead, we earn their trust and confidence by calling often, asking questions, listening carefully and offering solutions to their lawn care needs.

As with any other part of our business, our telemarketing campaign is only successful if we manage it properly. We track actual results vs. goals and make adjust-

It's in the SCRIPT

At The Lawn Dawg, we have our telemarketers use this script when calling our customers. We made sure that the statement was brief and to the point so as not to irritate any of our potential clients. When a customer accepts our offer of free pricing and program information, we ensure that we have their correct name, address and phone number. Should they decline, we politely thank them for their time and move on to the next lead.

"Hello, _____."

My name is _____ and I am calling from The Lawn Dawg, a local lawn care company. The reason for my brief call is that our technicians will be in your neighborhood this week, dropping off some free price and program information to some of your neighbors. I wondered if I could interest you in some free price and program information as well. There's no obligation, you don't have to be home and we can leave it right at your door. Would that be OK?

Thank you for your time." - The Lawn Dawg

ments to the plan along the way to yield the best results. We don't rely on telemarketing alone to grow our business. A balanced attack of direct mail, newspaper, television, referrals, Yellow Pages and telemarketing complement each other and improve the potential of achieving our goals.

- Jim Campanella

The author is president, The Lawn Dawg, Nashua, N.H., and can be reached at 603/879-9833.



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An array of informative and visually attractive direct mail pieces prove effective in spreading the word about Jacobsen Landscape's services.

Image: Jacobsen Landscape Design & Construction

JACOBSEN LANDSCAPE
DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

DEALING Direct

Direct mail campaigns are an integral part of our overall marketing plan. Some of the consistent strategies we use to market to our design/build clients include:

1. A quarterly four-page newsletter. Employees contribute editorially to our newsletter, which offers features, tips, employee highlights and seasonal information. We outsource layout and production of the pieces – roughly 2,500 copies four times per year – and mail them to current and prospective clients. Overall, the newsletters cost us about \$4,000 annually to produce and mail.

2. New home owners letters. Throughout the year, we find new home owners through deed lists and real estate reports and mail out packets we produce in-house to introduce our company. We usually receive less than a 10-percent response with this measure, but we consider the method a strategy to keep us visible in the community. Producing the letter costs us only time and postage.

3. "We're in Your Neighborhood" letters. We send information to neighbors along the streets of clients we currently service and invite them to the job site to see our work and talk to our supervisors. We also include information alerting folks to possible neighborhood disruptions, which homeowners appreciate. The response to these letters stands at 10-percent, but the cost includes only the time to produce and drop off the letters, and neighbors who see our

work often offer referrals.

To complement our residential efforts, we made a commitment four years ago to grow commercial maintenance to diversify our client base and ensure more recur-



ring business. Over time we have created a database of more than 1,000 commercial properties. We draw this roster from various association listings and our sales team continually canvasses target areas and adds to the list.

Marketing techniques for commercial clients include pieces that we tailor for specific topics (snow removal or commercial design/build, for example) and mail to our database several times a season; follow-up phone calls that we make to commercial contacts to set up appointment times; and careful tracking. Since our commercial marketing season is short – September to March – we create charts and graphs to monitor marketing efforts.

While the number of our commercial direct mail recipients is smaller than our residential ones, an ongoing stream of mailings – including letters, newsletters, invitations, a list of commercial references, commercial marketing flyers (produced in-house and sent out for glossy color copying at 45 cents each), and reply postcards (outsourced for 35 cents each) – drive commercial mailing costs 20 percent above those of residential. We are still tallying response rates, but based on a preliminary gauge we'd prefer higher returns. As a result, we are considering ways to refine these efforts.

Because we handle all of our mailings in-house, scheduling them in among normal office duties is a challenge. We utilize our part-time officers and college help, whose hourly costs are lower, to handle the bulk of the mailings. This is more effective than employing a mailing agency, which we learned is more expensive and less in control of timely mailings.

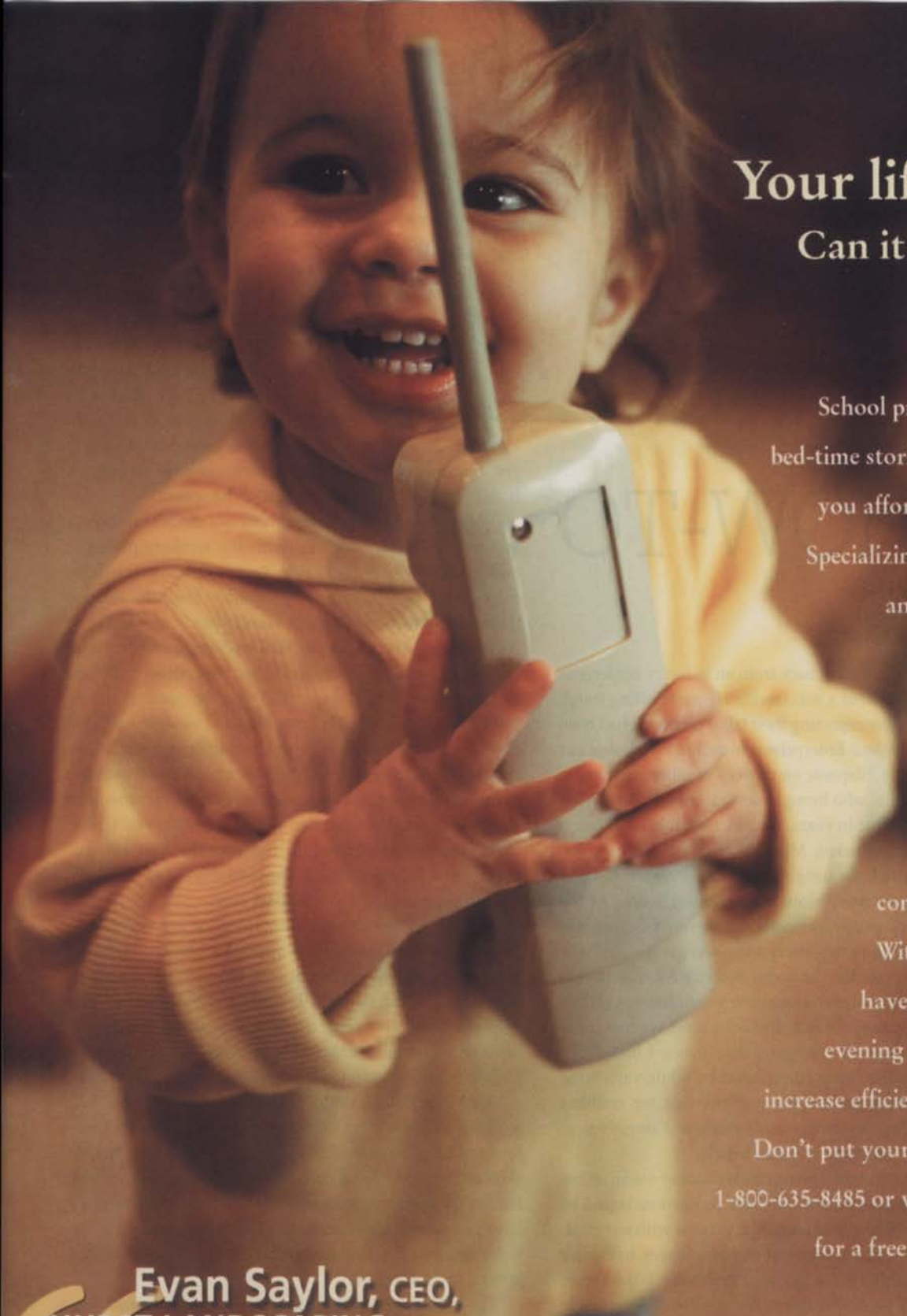
Traditional "mass" mailings – where consumers are randomly selected to receive material – do not work well for us. Returns as low as .01 percent do not justify the expense involved. Also, we forego fax and e-mail solicitation because we feel clients don't like them.

With a well-thought-out execution, direct mail can be a cost-effective and highly penetrating means of making an operation more visible and obtaining valuable new business. – Melissa Jacobsen

The author is chief financial officer, Jacobsen Landscape Design & Construction, Midland Park, N.J., and can be reached at 201/891-1199.

lawndandscape.com

Check out this story online for additional direct mail ideas from Jacobsen.

A young child with dark hair, wearing a light-colored sweater, is smiling and holding a large, grey toy mobile phone. The phone has a long antenna and a small screen. The background is a warm, out-of-focus indoor setting.

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DOWCO ENTERPRISES

H2B HOW-TO

Eight years ago, we came back from an industry conference with the realization of a nationwide Hispanic hiring trend. Many owners were reporting their labor problems had been solved. We at Dowco Enterprises chimed in by passing out business cards to Hispanic employees of other companies, netting one fellow who brought several friends.

For the first time in years, we had a reliable labor force. Absenteeism plummeted, Monday morning tardiness excuses disappeared, the temperature was never too hot and there were never complaints of unpleasant work. At the same time, work quality increased and we saw a reduction in the number of callbacks – everything was great.

Then, unexpectedly, the Social Security Administration presented us with a letter requesting verification of certain Social Security numbers and, upon checking, we found out we had several illegal immigrant employees. I had nightmares of our office being surrounded by white vans filled with immigration agents. We realized that we couldn't operate like this any longer and committed ourselves to employing our Hispanic workers legally.

We found a reputable immigration attorney via an online search for immigration and H2B legal professionals, and he implemented the seasonal work visa process with our existing Hispanic workers. Some of our employees had prior problems and didn't make the cut at the border, but we were able to keep 95 percent of them. We negotiated a favorable rate with our attorney, his ultimate cost per H2B employee being about \$400.

There are companies that can locate and transport employees to you, but here at Dowco we do it all in-house. New Hispanic recruits are friends or relatives of current workers, and we advance transportation, visa monies and the appropriate paperwork for them to Mexico in late winter. We bypass the Hispanic-provider-type companies by having a trusted employee manage the process while south of the border.

Upon arrival in the states each late February, we get Social Security numbers for new workers and encourage employees returning to us from winters in Mexico to obtain or renew their driver's licenses. Our local Department of Motor Vehicles office provides the driver's tests in Spanish. Rain days are great for getting these things done.

For living arrangements, we've made provisions with several landlords to provide homes for our Hispanic workers. In one case, we agreed to immediately fill a landlord's residential property if he would renovate his building, which was located in a largely Hispanic section of St. Louis.

Dowco pays the first month's deposits on workers' apartments – about a \$1,200 cost – and the employees handle their own rent for the rest of the season.

We offer four company minivans as a mode of transportation to Hispanic workers, with the workers paying a nominal \$30 per payday to ride. Responsible foremen drive the vans for the 10 months they remain in the states and use them to take care of shopping, laundry and other tasks.

Providing payroll for our H2B workers is an easily met challenge. Deductions are made for rent, visas, minivans and traveling expenses and repaid over the course of two or three pay periods. Our H2B employees work right up to the day they return home, and they receive their final pay before they go. They enjoy the same holiday and vacation package as other full-time employees – one week paid vacation after one year of employment; two weeks after two years. Still, most Hispanic employees do not take the time off and request that we pay this with their last check. Leaving early forfeits vacation and a job the next year.

As with all employees, communication is a priority, so Thursday mornings we have a meeting where our H2B staff can voice concerns and opinions. We post company announcements and news in English and Spanish with the help of a translation program. In addition, we have weekly sessions where bilingual employees teach several classes in various planting techniques, translating when necessary.

Most importantly, we try to remember that seasonal H2B workers, in many ways, become dependants. They are thousands of miles away from home, often with minimal English skills and no family to fall back on. The company becomes their family. These workers must feel they can come to us when they have problems, and we strive to be open on a casual level to tackle issues such as legal matters, health care, family, taxes and general social concerns.

The H2B program itself is costly and time-consuming, but the benefits are worthwhile. With a commitment to providing the support necessary to flourish, a company can enjoy adequate and dependable work, and immigrant laborers will welcome the fact that they have "good papers."

Soon, the real job becomes finding enough work to keep employees busy for a full 10 months. – Donna Dowell

The author is corporate secretary, Dowco Enterprises, Chesterfield, Mo., and can be reached at 636/532-2813.

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DESANTIS LANDSCAPES

THE EMPLOYEE Orientation Situation

The old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," is particularly appropriate when discussing employee orientation. For many years, we were reactionary in sharing company practices, rules and standards with employees. That is, when a question would come up or a mistake was made, we would "react" and tell the employee how the task should have been done or what the policy was – not a real recipe for success in terms of quality customer service or employee morale.

We felt that if the company was going to succeed, we needed our employees to succeed, and this meant we had to define and write down what success meant at DeSantis Landscapes – a big task indeed. We created our Employee Handbook and Policy Manual many years ago and have never regretted the time and money invested in its creation,

or the time we spend using it to orient new employees.

Regardless of size, season or even business mix, some form of employee orientation is critical to every company's

success. If we want or need tasks done a certain way, we need to communicate that to employees. To meet any expectation, we must first know what that expectation is, otherwise it's simply a stroke of luck if it's met.

Our employee orientation has evolved over the years. Currently, our orientation begins during the screening and interview process. In the initial interviews, we share our mission statement with prospective employees and ask them their reactions. We provide real workplace scenarios and ask them how they might respond in these situations. In addition, we interview prospective employees at least twice with different groups of people from management and the field. Our philosophy is that finding people with similar values is far more important than experience.

Once hired, we ask new employees to come in for a half-day orientation prior to beginning their jobs. This is probably the biggest change we've made in our employee orientation program. Taking the time to thoroughly orient new employees *before* we send them out to begin meeting company and client expectations is a worthwhile investment.

The next step of our orientation is the paperwork: filling out the W-4 and I-9 forms, checking driver's licenses and Social Security numbers and completing employee history forms, which include each employee's general and emergency contact information.

Then, we go over the Employee Handbook and Policy Manual, which was compiled by a policy manual committee that we organized. Once the committee had completed a draft, we hired a labor lawyer to review and suggest edits, changes and additions. This proved valuable, particularly in eliminating potentially libelous language and adding certain legally required statements. Our initial reaction in considering this legal review was quite negative – why involve lawyers if we didn't have to? In the end, though, we felt that since we had invested so much time in the manual's creation, we needed to end up with a document that was going to meet training needs and also protect the

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*DeSantis Landscapes
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Manual covered all
of the bases. Image:
DeSantis Landscapes*

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Building Blocks of Business

(continued from page 44)

company's interests. We hired a lawyer from a local firm we had worked with in the past, and after explaining our needs we were able to acquire her services for less than \$1,000.

Though we don't read line-by-line through the handbook when a new employee starts, we do go into detail on each item covered in the handbook. As much as possible we try to make this review process a dialogue rather than a lecture, recognizing that reciting and memorizing information is much less effective than being actively engaged and discussing the material. At the end of our handbook, we have an "acknowledgement of receipt and understanding statement" that we ask employees to sign and return to us at a later date, encouraging them to take the handbook home and read it fully before signing.

Our supervisors have also found this handbook useful for managing employee

performance. In the past, an employee would assume that a supervisor had a specific issue with him or her personally if the supervisor needed to discuss problems or provide discipline. Now, resolving the issue is simply a matter of enforcing the written policy, not a personal judgment call on anyone's behavior or performance.

After the paperwork and handbook review, we give new employees a tour of the rest of the facility. We go through the locker room and describe the uniform service and its procedures. We introduce them to the mechanic and have him describe the maintenance schedule for equipment and vehicles, the tool check-out system, and the protocol for dealing with equipment that needs to be repaired. We go through the material yard and nursery and briefly describe the inventory system. New hires typically are not responsible for this inventory accounting, but we like to have all employees somewhat

familiar with the system. Following this, we generally head back into the office to meet the administrative assistants and go over time cards, payroll and other office paperwork.

We provide employees with a lot of information in a short time, and though this is our orientation policy, we all know in this industry there are times when plans change and policies flex. We're not perfect about implementing this system, but we recognize that employees and the company benefit when we do. We know not all of the information is going to be retained and there will be questions later, but our efforts are a critical start and important investment in our new hires so they begin to understand the culture, values and procedures that make our employees and company successful. — Dean DeSantis

The author is systems manager, DeSantis Landscapes, Salem, Ore., and can be reached at 503/364-8376.

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SAFETY Secrets

Creating a safety program for HadcoServices was as much of a learning experience for me as it was for my employees.

In 1986, our company was given an opportunity to bid on a commercial maintenance contract for a large local company. As a condition of the contract, however, we were faced with obligations totally foreign to us, such as drug testing, safety exams, pesticide certifications, tailgate meetings and regular safety discussions.

Thankfully, the human resources safety manager for this company, who was as concerned for our employees as she was for those who worked with her, took us under her wing. She helped us by setting up periodic safety meetings, loaning us safety films and even signing us up for CPR classes put on by her company. We were able to get by with her help for about two years before she introduced us to the Safety Resources office at our local vocational technology center.

At no charge, the center invited several of our employees to take part in a semester-long class that met one morning each week. During this time, we examined a workbook, "Occupational Safety and Health Programs," which enabled us to write our complete safety and health program that included training and documentation on our equipment, complete with guidebooks.

Upon training completion, each employee receives a certificate, which we proudly frame and display in our employee break room.

Feeling pretty good about ourselves, we were ready for the ultimate test – an Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) audit of our facilities and crews. The vocational technology center sent an officer to perform the inspection, and we were amazed at the things he found and deemed unsafe. We had six months to let him know we had

taken care of these problems. The officer mentioned that most companies try to avoid him like the plague, but I felt his visit was a grade card for us and if we could meet and/or exceed OSHA standards, we would be doing well.

Implementing our plan took a lot of time and training, but we now have a safety program that works well for all members of the company. Our safety policy and training manual includes everything from basic workplace rules and driving regulations to hazardous materials and medical information. Upon being hired, all employees must sign a statement saying they've read and understand the safety materials, and will obey policies and warnings at all times.

We have disciplinary actions in place in case an employee violates our policies. The first action is a verbal warning, followed, if necessary, by the second penalty, which requires employees to stand up at our training meetings to explain what they did wrong and why the offense won't be committed again. This is not meant to be humiliating by any means. Its purpose – and one that seems to work well – is to reinforce the importance of safety for everyone at all times. These lessons mean even more when crewmembers hear them from their peers. If the offense is committed again, depending on the severity, the employee is either terminated or suspended for three days without pay.

Individuals in management positions, including foremen, are trained to lead by example, recognize hazards and enforce rules at all times. This ensures that employees at all levels in the company have the same concerns and understanding when it comes to safety. We also have kept in contact with the vocational technology center as well as agencies like the department of transportation and the highway patrol, which visit our office for occasional inspections.

We continue to strive to make our workplace as safe as sitting in an easy chair at home. We have won 16 safety awards over the past eight years and have created a culture at our company that our employees take with them to the job and home to their families.

As we continue to improve, we use as many resources as we can. For instance, as our Hispanic workforce grew, we began ordering all of our materials in bilingual form. Last year, we ordered a video series and required each employee to view the materials and then we tested them on the knowledge they gained.

Finally, remember that money should not be an obstacle to setting up a safety program. Anyone who has been fined for a workplace safety violation can explain that training materials and safety equipment is much less expensive. Really, all that is needed is a little time and the desire to see that each crew member will go home at night to the people who mean the most to them. Those people are the whole reason your employees work for you, and the reason that safety should be a top priority at every company.

– Wes Hadsell

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The author is managing member, HadcoServices, Bartlesville, Okla., and can be reached at 918/336-0364.

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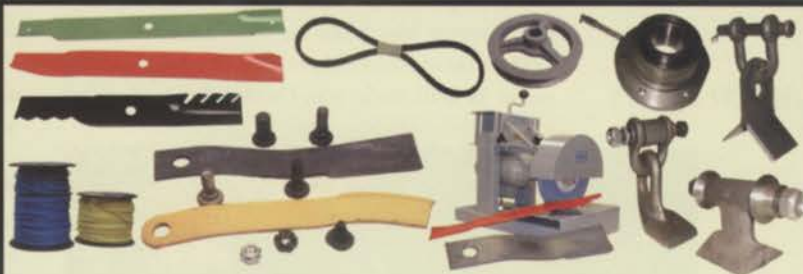
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THE Mower THE MERRIER

Manufacturers and contractors alike keep their eyes on new trends and developments in walk-behind and riding mowers.

By Lauren Spiers

Though most landscape contractors have put their mowers to bed for the winter, 'tis the season to consider what's on the horizon for walk-behind and riding mowers. For the most part, contractors and manufacturers have similar understandings of recent trends in the different mower markets. The consensus: there's always room for walk-behinds, but the commercial riding mower is where it's at.

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's statistics through August 2002 illustrate the trend in slowing walk-behind mower sales, which are down 3.8 percent since 1999 with an additional 6.2 percent decline forecast for the end of the 2002 model year. On the other hand, riding

mowers are forecast for yet another increase in unit shipments.

"The walk-behind market's been declining for the last several years," said Michael Fay, product manager, MTD Commercial, Peninsula, Ohio. "I don't see that trend changing any time soon."

"Walk-behinds in the whole industry are sliding down as far as quantity," agreed Dick Tegtmeier, president, Encore Power Equipment, Beatrice, Neb., "but there will always be some room for walk-behinds as far as entry-level, and there's always some need for them on regular crews."

TO WALK OR NOT TO WALK. Contractors are quick to point out that while their riding mowers may be more comfortable or can cover more ground, walk-behinds are often a necessity for tight corners, islands, bed lines and other restrictive areas. Jeff Sousa, president, Sousa's Landscape Management Co., Bermuda, stands by his walk-behinds. "I found that the hydrostatic 48-inch mower is a hard mower to beat," he said. Sousa emphasized that a talented crew member operating a walk-behind with a sully can maximize productivity, especially in tighter or more awkward areas.

Mike Graves from GroundMasters personally prefers walk-behinds over riding mowers as well. As account manager at the Cincinnati company's Dayton branch, Graves insists that the 52-inch walk-behinds GroundMasters uses are ideal because the deck is wider than the wheel base. "Having an off-set deck allows the operator to avoid putting their tires in the mulch when they mow around mulch beds," he explained. "They're able to hang the deck over." Certainly, crews and contractors don't want to disturb any work that's already been performed, so using walk-behinds in these instances ensures that a job done right the first time, won't have to be repeated.





More than speed or power, new consideration for ergonomics is the focus for manufacturers of both walk-behind and riding mowers.

Photos: Textron Golf, Turf & Specialty Products (left), Matt Sullivan (below)

Harris, marketing manager, Toro Co., Bloomington, Minn.

THE COMFORT FACTOR. Productivity is always top-of-mind for both contractors and manufacturers when considering new mowers, but with all the advancements made in the riding and walk-behind categories in the last decade, manufacturers are still working on the next big change in mower design. As a result, focus is shifting from speed and performance to comfort, giving ergonomics in mower design more attention in the industry.

"We've always strived to achieve comfort for the person who's going to be on a mower for eight or 10 hours a day," said Tegtmeier, who understands something contractors have known for a long time: A comfortable crewmember is a happy crewmember. In many situations, the landscape companies' owners and presidents are the ones doing the mowing, so safety and comfort are important criteria in purchasing new mowers.

"The fact is, the predominant base of the industry is smaller to medium-sized companies who are owner/operator run," acknowledged Bob Walker, president, Walker Manufacturing, Fort Collins, Colo. "That puts more focus on ergonomics be-

In terms of productivity though, landscape contractors prefer riding mowers. At Neave Landscaping in Wappingers Falls, N.Y., Product Manager Duane Neave uses a computer program to keep close track of mowers' estimated productivity. With 61-inch zero-turn riding mowers running at an average speed of 3.5 miles per hour, Neave Landscaping crew members can cover 2.66 acres (115, 870 square feet) in one hour. That's more than 2½ times the ground covered by the company's 48-inch walk-behinds.

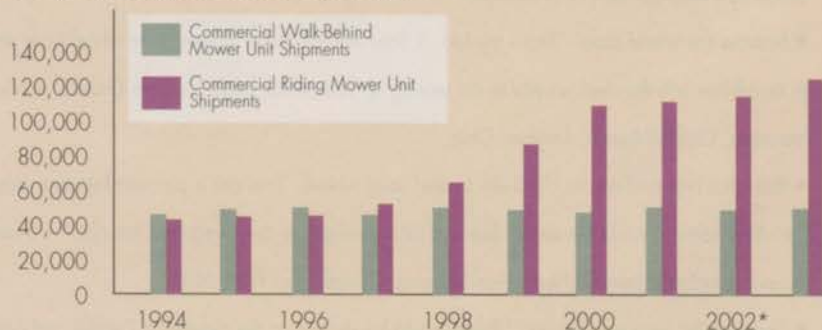
Of course, when obstacles come into play, productivity declines. But unless the terrain calls for a walk-behind mower, contractors said riding mowers move faster, cover more ground and are more productive machines. As Fay explains, even though products like mid-mounted zero-turn mowers may have slightly higher price tags, the ability to mow faster really has an impact. "Landscapers figured out if [they] buy a zero-turn machine and can go 150 percent faster, that affects their labor, their productivity and their profitability. That's why we've seen a tremendous explosion in the mid-mount zero turn market."

"In the first case, you want the machine to do the job as fast as possible but still deliver an excellent, manicured appearance," pointed out Randy

THE Numbers GAME

Since its inception as the Lawn Mower Institute in 1952, the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) has provided statistical reports on a range of outdoor power equipment. In terms of commercial walk-behind and riding mowers, the last eight years have shown some interesting trends in units shipped. The following graph illustrates that the initial trend in greater shipments of walk-behind mowers changed dramatically in 1997. Since that time, walk-behind mower shipments have essentially reached a plateau, while riding mowers have led the commercial mowing industry in unit shipments and show no signs of stopping.

Also, in a recent *Lawn & Landscape* reader survey of 622 respondents, only 12.5 percent specified that they prefer using a walk-behind mower for commercial mowing jobs, with 71 percent choosing riding mowers. For residential jobs though, respondents still prefer walk-behinds, while only 29 percent prefer riders. — Lauren Spiers



*2002 and 2003 are forecast years

Source: OPEI

FOCUS: Walk-Behind vs. Riding Mowers

cause the guy buying the equipment is the one running it, and they're interested in being comfortable." Really, contractors with crewmembers who are comfortable will benefit by having employees who enjoy coming to work.

As Mike Wilhelm, president, Wilhelm Brothers, Sarasota, Fla., noted, "keeping [the crews] happy is the lion's share of my business. Your labor force is very important." Sousa agreed, commenting that employees have better attitudes and attendance rates when they are comfortable at work and are involved in equipment selection.

To that end, contractors often send their crewmembers to dealerships in order to try out new mowers for themselves and then report back. Likewise, many companies, including Sousa's Landscape and GroundMasters, take full advantage of trade shows where hands-on equipment trials can make or break a sale. "It's really about trial and error," explained Graves. "Anybody can come up with any mower they want, but it really has to be put through the tests."

Graves noted several mower style advancements including a new gripping system that he was able to try out before making any purchases. One

significant change GroundMasters made in terms of comfort was to replace its pistol-grip style walk-behinds with mowers that have a more ergonomically correct above-deck gripping system. Because a large percentage of the company's employees are Hispanic and have smaller hands, the pistol grip machines were more difficult for them to control. Graves himself suffers from carpal tunnel syndrome, and explains that GroundMaster's new fleet is much easier on everyone's hands.

Similarly, Sousa described a time when he purchased a new trim mower at a trade show. His intentions were right, but the result was less than agreeable. "I bought a nice machine with a good strong body," he said, "but the men felt they were too heavy. You want to obviously get value for your money because you're purchasing the machinery, but you also want something the men are going to be comfortable using."

In addition to the personal comfort of mower operators, another factor influencing the value of ergonomics is the progressing age of some owner/operators. "Many of these people started out when they were young and could put up with a lot," Walker observed, but overworked backs and knees

can make continuing with the same amount of energy difficult and even painful. "You can put them on a nice riding machine and they can be just as productive as they were when they were 20," Walker explained.

THE SHOWROOM FLOOR. Though many manufacturers and contractors acknowledge that the recent slide in the U.S. economy has affected production or sales in one way or another, that hasn't precluded manufacturers from putting new designs on the market. "Competition remains intensely fierce in the marketplace," Fay remarked, adding that manufacturers are still improving quality on their machines despite the competition.

For some manufacturers, recent developments have included more compact machines designed to fit through 36-inch gates, better ergonomics and hand controls and independent suspension. Also, other manufacturers have entered markets they were not previously in to offer brand-loyal contractors more variety.

"We created a walk-behind that will take all the same cutter decks as our ride-on units," Walker said, adding that the company realized there would always be a market for walk-behinds because they offer a less-expensive alternative to purchasing a back-up machine. "The mower deck itself will interchange and fit on the walk-behind unit. So, once you've got an investment made on the cutter decks. You only have to buy the power unit."

As Walker and Fay both acknowledged, a proliferation of engine choices ranging from liquid-cooled to fuel injection has also come about in the last year or so. These additional options allow contractors to purchase mowers with longer engine lives, ultimately increasing the machine's value to the person who buys it.

Without a doubt, value is one of the most important things that contractors are looking for as they get ready to make new purchases this season. Extended warranties and services plans are essential and make maintenance issues less of a worry. "Probably the most important thing I look for anymore is warranty," said Wilhelm. "And the second thing is the service to back that up. A warranty is only as good as the service department that's there."

In addition to keeping warranties, dependability and cost in mind this buying season, Sousa's advice is to manufacturers and fellow contractors is simple: "Think ahead, plan ahead, be ahead." ■

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine, and she can be reached at lspiers@lawnandlandscape.com.

BY REQUEST

As always, manufacturers are doing their best to stay on top or ahead of the new developments in the industry, but contractors' wish lists are forever lengthening. As far as ideal machines go, only a few companies are experimenting with digital technology and labor-free mowers that move themselves. While waiting for such machines to become widely available to the commercial market, a few contractors offered opinions on what they'd like manufacturers look into on current machines.

- Make them lighter. "Look at a property with a lot of terraces where you require a man to help assist in lifting the mower. You want a lighter mower to do that." — Jeff Sousa, president, Sousa's Landscape Management Co., Bermuda
- Narrow the wheel base. "That's my No. 1 flaw with all of the mowers. The wheel base needs to be off-line with the deck so you're not tearing up your mulch beds." — Mike Graves, account manager, GroundMasters, Dayton, Ohio
- Reinforce tires and recoils. "[I'd like to see] solid wheels. Tires are a problem because they go flat. Also, springs inside the recoils break a lot and stretch or the string itself just rips." — Duane Neave, product manager, Neave Landscaping, Wappingers Falls, N.Y.
- Eliminate the language barrier. "There should be stickers on the mowers in English and Spanish. Anything that's printed in English should be printed in Spanish." — Graves — Lauren Spiers



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FOCUS: Buying vs. Leasing

Those in the know offer the ins and outs of mower financing options.

By Enloe Wilson

Let's face it: The ability to secure equipment – often prohibitively expensive, especially for smaller operations – is a vital part of surviving in any business environment. Perhaps the first and most important part of the survival strategy then is demystifying the financial options available to commercial equipment purchasers.

BUYING/LEASING DYNAMICS. Plainly put, when a customer chooses a purchase loan to buy a mower, they pay monthly installments for the length of their loan (unless they choose to pay it off sooner), after which the unit is theirs. Traditionally, a loan affords simplicity, flexible terms, few restrictions and a chance to build equity.

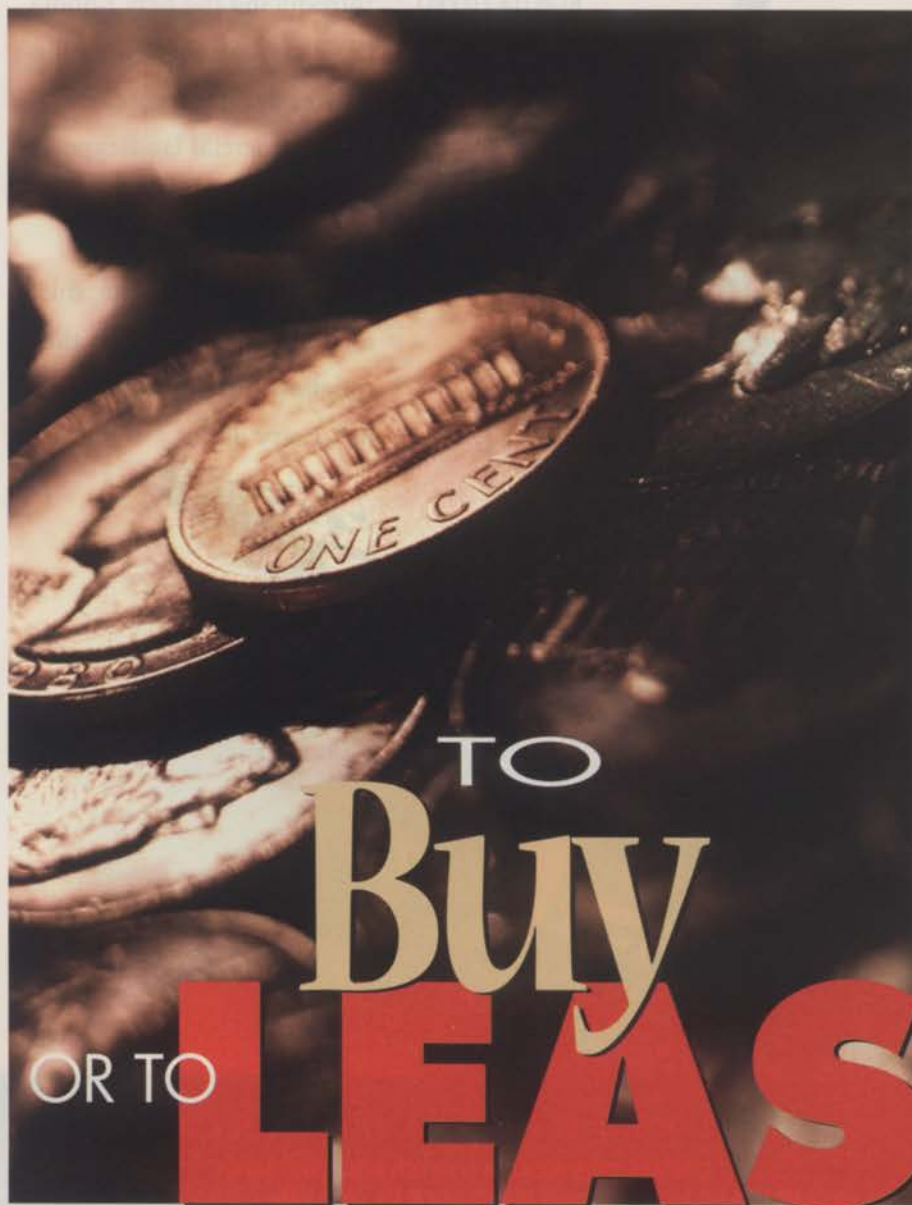
Leasing – long held to be buying's more mysterious alternative – is based on the notion that the user pays merely for the used portion of a vehicle or equipment unit. Monthly (or other interval) payments represent only the amount

the unit depreciates in market value over the leasing term plus interest. With that, leasing offers an option that is generally less expensive upfront than taking out a loan to buy a mower, with monthly payments averaging about 10 to 12 percent lower than those of a loan, explained Bob Cronk, vice president, Advance Acceptance, Plymouth, Minn.

A closed-end lease culminates with the customer simply returning the unit in marketable condition, with no further obligation. An open-ended lease – more common in commercial financing – ends much the same way, except that the unit's residual market value is left undetermined. The lessee assumes the risk for a residual value lower than the sum of their lease payments, and, in exchange, monthly payments are generally lower.

Under either leasing arrangement – with an option to buy, which should be specifically requested, Cronk pointed out – a lessee has the choice to either purchase the mower, negotiate a lease on a newer unit or walk away empty-handed.

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FOCUS: Buying vs. Leasing

an attractive strategy, Cronk said. "A [contracting firm] of any size that would like to use a mower during its useful life and doesn't have its own maintenance department could benefit from the advantages of working capital and possibly a lease," he suggested.

And while the assumption that commercial leasing is necessarily cheaper in the long run than a purchasing loan is wrong (monthly lease payments plus fees plus any residual purchasing balance often are comparable to a financed buying price), leasing does typically carry little to no upfront expense and offers several other perks, Cronk said.

Green industry consultant Thomas Oyler agreed.

"Actually, most companies can tell you – and therefore plan ahead for – the projected time and

cost of maintenance jobs that will arise. But the key driver here isn't truly the price tag of a mechanic," contended Oyler, co-principal of the Wilson-Oyler Group, Maitland, Fla. More importantly, "[break-downs] eliminate the ability to hold crews accountable for their productivity," the losses related to which are far more challenging to gauge. Smart leasing saves losses in both areas, suggested Oyler.

Some financial experts estimate that outsourced repair costs could be as much as three times higher than in-house maintenance. Smaller or newer operations that haven't had the time or resources to build an efficient in-house repair facility could benefit from leasing's short-term equipment turnover, which undercuts rising costs associated with aging machinery, Oyler said.

During his tenure in contracting, Oyler developed a four-phase schedule of hardware depreciation, with equipment passing from the stage of preventive maintenance to repair to repair/replace (the most expensive and unpredictable phase) to functional obsolescence. He said contractors should monitor repair-related losses throughout this cycle.

"For a small to mid-sized company," he contended, "when your repair costs begin to go over 2 to 2½ percent of sales, you're in trouble."

"The key is to negotiate a lease for the shortest term possible, while a mower will remain in the preventive maintenance stage," Oyler explained. Therein, not only will later, greater repair costs be thwarted, but there will also be less measurable decay in productivity and employee morale, he said.

Preserving working capital, or "minimal cash outlay," is another benefit to leasing, said Cronk.

A down payment to purchase a mower could be as high as 20 percent of the unit's cost, depending on a customer's credit. For an \$8,000 model, that's \$1,600 – money that could be used elsewhere, especially for a fledgling company. Devoid of the down payment, leasing affords the opportunity to invest capital in the purchase of other equipment and accessories, marketing, establishing a shop or various other expenses throughout the leasing term, Cronk explained.

Some lenders and manufacturers furnish 25-month leases with 0 percent down and no finance charge, Cronk said. With a 20-percent residual mower value remaining at the end of the term – hardly in today's market – all parties make out well, he remarked.

"For the dealer who understands this, it's a very attractive program," Cronk said. "The idea is that for a minimal monthly expense, the customer is always riding a new mower, and at the end of the term (if the lessee chooses not to purchase), the dealer still has a nice, 2-year-old mower to resell." All the while, a contractor's preserved capital remains available for investment elsewhere.

But aside from what a contractor could do with that untapped money, open cash flow has other merits as well, Cronk and Oyler reminded.

"In enterprise, the more important value is not profitability, it's liquidity," Oyler said. Money tied up in certain debts can weigh down an otherwise sound financial statement, he suggested.

With leased equipment units showing up in the books as mere recurring operating expenses – not permanent liabilities, as with owned goods – the "quick net worth" (current assets minus current liabilities) of a company stands less encumbered, buoy-

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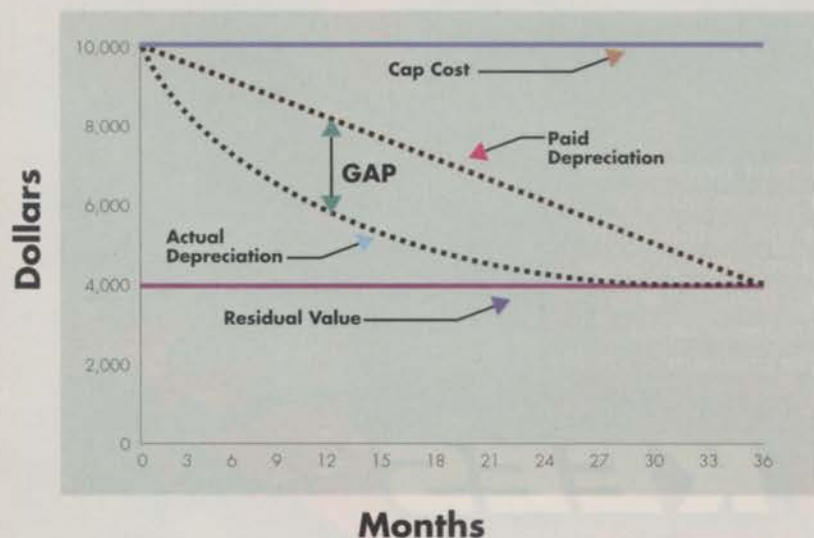
Don't terminate a lease early. It hurts. Here's why...

A mower's lease price is calculated to cover its expected depreciation by the end of the contract period. Mathematically, monthly payments represent the difference between the mower's original cap cost and its residual value by the end of the term plus interest – paid in neat, evenly divided intervals.

Of course, a mower, a skid-steer or a truck doesn't depreciate evenly – a unit's value erodes most rapidly at the beginning of its service life. (Some trucks, for example, lose up to 40 percent of their initial value in their first year alone, according to some lenders.) With this, when a lease is terminated early, a "gap" exists between a unit's actual depreciation and the portion of depreciation paid. Lessees often are contractually liable for this... and that can be ugly.

Some leases demand that the sum of all outstanding payments be paid before they will discharge a lessee. Other financial firms require an early termination fee of \$250 to \$450 in addition to unpaid depreciation. To avoid the pinch of these extra fees, be aware of the fine print.

– Enloe Wilson



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FOCUS: Buying vs. Leasing

ing a firm's bondability and chances of securing larger bids. Also, because a lease is not a loan, a company's credit line remains intact, and lessees often can avoid pledging certain assets as collateral, as required with secured commercial loans, Cronk said.

Further, in some cases commercial loan borrowers must obtain the permission of an existing lender to do business with any other lender, and it's

not unheard of that borrowers be required to maintain a prescribed compensating balance at their lending institution or provide periodic financial information suggesting the maintenance of specific financial ratios, Cronk said. Leasing, to some degree, presents a way to get around these regulations.

Of course, with all the talk of depreciation, bondability and cash flow, it's important that com-

panies make good practice of tracking where their money goes. To that end, some proponents of leasing say one of its greatest benefits is its easily followed costs.

A lease payment is a rather painlessly monitored expense, Cronk pointed out. A company can project – and always knows – exactly how much a lease payment is, how often it occurs and to the benefit of what job or company department. Costs associated with owned equipment are less defined, on the other hand, he said. Though abstract financial formulas may exist, a firm cannot as precisely quantify, for example, the intangible cost-effectiveness of owning a mower or its perpetual depreciation as it passes through its four-tier lifecycle.

"A (firm) of any size that would like to use a mower during its useful life and doesn't have (its) own maintenance department could benefit from the advantages of working capital and possibly a lease."

–Bob Cronk

NO CORNER ON THE MARKET. Despite leasing's appeal, many contractors still prefer buying.

"The most prominent route of contractors (in acquiring mowers and other commercial equipment) is still straight retail," said John Cloutier, national marketing manager, Exmark, Beatrice, Neb., whose estimate that less than 20 percent of new commercial mower owners choose to lease was supported by a recent *Lawn & Landscape* online poll finding that 83 percent of responding contractors always purchase their mowers.

Despite a slew of benefits, Cloutier acknowledged caveats that might curb leasing's appeal. From the buyer's vantage point, leasing doesn't save enough money, he said. First, "most financing packages now come with no-money-down offers," evening the playing field once dominated by \$0-down leases, he said. Second, "there's got to be a bigger 'gap' between monthly commercial lease and purchase payments to make leasing a more attractive option to landscapers." Amid a barrage of common fees associated with leasing – and given today's favorable finance interest rates – buying

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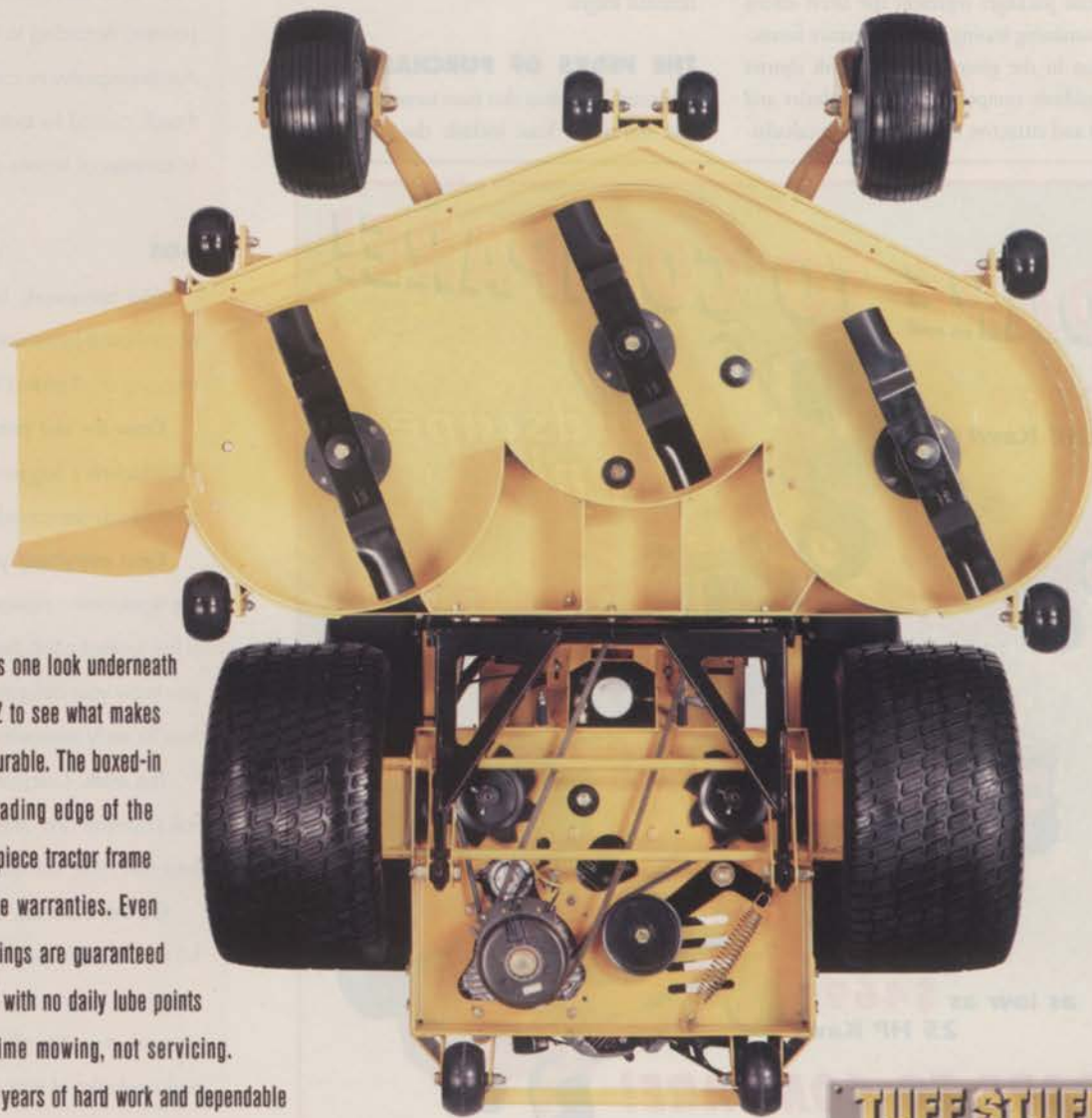


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FOCUS: Buying vs. Leasing

and leasing payments in the commercial sector have become decreasingly disparate.

The burgeoning number of manufacturer-driven lease packages represent the latest efforts toward sustaining leasing as a competitive financing option in the green industry. With shorter terms, residuals competitive for both dealer and customer and attractive money factors in calculat-

ing payment interest, these newer plans are poised to claim ground in a market that some experts are surprised has long scoffed at leasing's benefits to the financial ledger.

THE PERKS OF PURCHASING. Still, other considerations that steer some contractors to buy instead of lease include the advantages of

Leasing DOs & DON'Ts

Before committing to any lease agreement, a contractor should know the dynamics of the contract. To be safer, here are some preliminary pointers, according to Chart Software's Autoleasingsoftware.com. The guidelines, though created for automotive buyers, are handy to commercial lessees as well.

DOS

Your homework. Learn as much as possible about how a lease works, its variables and the meaning of all related terminology.

Know the unit price. Know the invoice and Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price of the product you are considering.

Read everything yourself. Scour the leasing agreement — repeatedly, if necessary — with a fine-toothed comb before signing it. Be sure you know your obligations and susceptibility to fees for early termination, excessive wear, etc.

The math. Calculate monthly (or other interval) payments and other fees yourself. If the numbers don't jibe, ask questions until they do.

Go the distance. Be prepared to honor the full term of the lease. Early termination of the contract is likely going to sting... badly. Be sure your circumstances allow you to meet all terms and timetables of your agreement.

DON'TS

Overpay. Would you buy the product for the capitalized cost? No? Then restart negotiations.

Lease without gap insurance. Gap insurance, often available at a small monthly premium, offers protection against painful penalties in the event of an early lease termination.

Lease without full disclosure. Be aware of all leasing terms including selling price, monthly payment, the length of the leasing term, etc.

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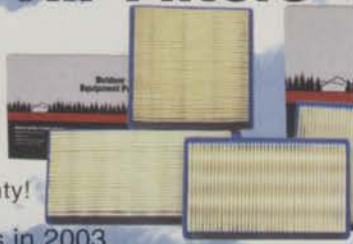
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FOCUS: Buying vs. Leasing

ownership – some tangible, others psychological.

Melissa Jacobsen, chief financial officer, Jacobsen Landscape, Midland Park, N.J., said her company has a "philosophy" that dictates it own its entire mower fleet.

"We find it more cost-effective to own our maintenance equipment, take care of it and repair it in-house when necessary," Jacobsen said, adding that ownership is less expensive for her firm in the long term than the pattern of leasing mowers for three or four years, trading them in and continuing in the cycle indefinitely.

James Ormond, vice president, Barringer & Barringer Landscaping, Charlotte, N.C., shares that view.

"We've found it beneficial to finance the equipment for a period, then buy it and not be worried about an ongoing monthly [leasing] expense," explained Ormond about his 15-mower fleet. Mower upkeep has not burdened the company, he added, thanks to routine preventive maintenance – far less expensive than repair or replacement costs for downed units.

"The transfer of responsibility for a piece of equipment from the company to a crew may also be another plus of ownership," Ormond speculated, citing one particular instance.

"We had a crew who allowed the oil to empty out of a mower. They used it the next day, and there was a bill for a new engine. There is a sense of ownership for equipment that is transferred to a

For a small to mid-sized company, when your repair costs begin to go over 2 to 2½ percent of sales, you're in trouble."
- Tom Oyler

crew, and a few days later they came to us with a plan to pay for the mower out of pocket," he recalled. "I'm not sure, but I wonder if that same sense of responsibility would be the case if the unit were leased."

Many contractors and dealers cite unencumbered equipment use as another deciding ownership dynamic. Free from the constraints of mileage limitations and clauses that prevent the modification of a unit – painting it, adding a company logo or affixing attachments, for example – Jacobsen Landscape maintains a comfortable level of productivity, Jacobsen said.

While heavy mileage and use restrictions apply more often to non-commercial leases, some commercial packages enforce limitations as well. Though increasing numbers of commercial lessors are minimizing or completely doing away with such restrictions, those that remain can be hard-hitting.

According to some lenders, in cases where dealers employ hourly use meters on leased mowers, for example, lessees could be subject to pay \$2 to \$5 per hour for time exceeding the hourly use allowance set within the contract.

"It is incumbent upon a lessee to investigate those restrictions, as well as others which may lay within the fine print of a leasing contract," said

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FOCUS: Buying vs. Leasing

Oyler. Charges for financing, early lease termination, disposition (when a lease closes without the customer purchasing the mower), renewals and an array of other circumstances often follow a lease and are missed by a lessee until the situation arises, surprisingly and often painfully.

THE TAX QUESTION. Another factor to consider is the effect of a financing decision on one's tax situation. Where once upon a time leasing was seen to carry no-brainer tax advantages, recent changes in tax laws have leveled the playing field, explained Anthony Polito, executive vice president, Preferred Capital, Brecksville, Ohio.

Properly structured lease payments are 100-percent tax-deductible business expenses paid from pre-tax earnings instead of after-tax profits. Yet, because commercial leases are depreciation-

based, monthly payments are fairly comparable to depreciation write-offs allowed for a purchased equipment unit.

Any real tax benefit to leasing nowadays is pretty much felt to the extent that while a customer can invest bare minimum upfront money into leasing a new mower, they still may take immediate advantage of up to a full \$25,000 in equipment write-offs as of Jan. 1, under IRS Section 179, Polito said.

Under the section, he explained, if a customer leases four \$8,000 mowers for a total of \$32,000 a year, they may take their entire tax deduction of \$25,000 and spread the remaining \$7,000 over the depreciation of the mowers, or they can defer the write-off to a period of the equipment's use when revenues may be in a slump.

"This is ideal for the customer who (may not have) a great income in the year they make a

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Check this article online for a lease/buy calculator to figure monthly mower financing payments.

purchase," Polito said, "while for a new contractor (which may have a not-yet-well-determined future income), they can defer the deduction to a time that is more favorable to them."


"It's an issue of 'pay me now, or pay me later,'" he added.

ASSESS YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS. Simply put, leasing and opting for a purchase loan are different sides of the same coin. Aside from the personal circumstances shaping each company's preference, most financiers attribute no great difference between the two where taxes or capital expenditure are involved.

The question of whether to buy or lease is infamously met with a lukewarm "it depends"

The most prominent route of contractors (in acquiring mowers and other commercial equipment) is still straight retail," said John Cloutier, estimating that less than 20 percent of new commercial mower owners choose to lease.

answer; and as new tax regulations, falling interest rates and capitalization features designed to make finance packages more competitive continue to surface, that sort of neutrality will remain.

Where financial issues are a concern, a firm should first consult its accountant. Elsewhere, the best bet in making the informed decision to buy or lease is to assess the company's distinctive needs, how it will use a unit of equipment, and what benefits of that unit it hopes to reap in the long term. 

The author is Associate Editor for Lawn & Landscape magazine, and he can be reached at ewilson@lawnandlandscape.com.

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As part of the fourth annual Commercial Mower Buyers' Guide, Lawn & Landscape provides an overview of the walk-behind and riding products many mower manufacturers offer contractors, as well as attachments for those products. In this guide, we also include a listing of participating companies, along with their contact information.

DISCLAIMER Lawn & Landscape made several attempts to contact all manufacturers in this product category for this Buyers' Guide. The inclusion or omission of any companies should not be taken as an endorsement or criticism of their products.

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USE READER SERVICE #415

BEST-SELLING BRAND OF MOWING EQUIPMENT FOR THE LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL

FOCUS: Mowing Buyers' Guide

| DECK SIZE (IN INCHES): | GAS OR DIESEL: | HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE: | MULCHING CAPABILITIES: | LIQUID- OR AIR- COOLED ENGINE: | ZERO-TURN CAPABILITIES: | OTHER KEY FEATURES: |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| RIDING MOWERS | | | | | | |
| BAD BOY MOWERS | | | | | | |
| 52, 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Electric deck lift, 1/4-inch deck, 0 to 15 mph |
| B & H MFG. | | | | | | |
| 52, 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Joystick |
| BOB-CAT - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS | | | | | | |
| 42 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp, grass collection system |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 19-hp, optional grass catcher |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp, electric ignition, padded seats with armrests |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 23-hp, hydraulic oil cooler, optional grass catcher, optional grass collection system |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 23-hp, suspension seat, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 52 and 61 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 20-hp, suspension seat, hydraulic oil cooler, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp, suspension seat, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 26-hp, suspension seat, hydraulic oil cooler, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 31-hp Briggs & Stratton, suspension seat, optional grass collection system |
| BUNTON - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS | | | | | | |
| 42 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp, grass collection system |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 19-hp, electric deck lift, optional grass catcher |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp, side discharge, electric ignition, 23-hp, electric deck lift, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 23-hp, electric deck lift, hydraulic oil cooler, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 20-hp, electric deck lift, hydraulic oil cooler, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 52 and 61 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 25-hp, electric deck lift, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 26-hp fuel injection engine, electric deck lift, hydraulic oil cooler, optional grass catcher and grass collection system |
| 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 31-hp Briggs & Stratton, electric deck lift, optional grass collection system |
| 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Liquid-cooled | Yes | |
| BUSH HOG MFG. | | | | | | |
| 48, 54 and 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Front-mount |
| 48, 54 and 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Front-mount |
| 55, 61 and 73 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | Mid-mount, pivoting front axle |
| COUNTRY CLIPPER | | | | | | |
| 42 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Flip-up deck, twin-stick or joystick steering |
| 52 and 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Flip-up deck, twin-stick or joystick steering |
| 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | Flip-up deck, twin-stick or joystick steering |
| DIXIE CHOPPER | | | | | | |
| 42, 50, 60 and 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | Yes | Both | Yes | |
| DIXON INDUSTRIES | | | | | | |
| 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| 60 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | |
| ENCORE MFG. CO. | | | | | | |
| 34 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Unibody, low-maintenance spindles |
| 42 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Low-maintenance spindles |
| 52, 61 and 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | Yes | Both | Yes | Low-maintenance spindles, articulating floating deck |
| EXCEL INDUSTRIES | | | | | | |
| 44 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 19- or 23-hp |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | 23-hp |
| 48, 54 and 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 17-, 20-, 23-, 25-hp |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 23-, 24-, or 25-hp |
| 52, 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp |
| 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 54-hp |
| 146 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 54-hp |
| 60 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 28- or 38-hp |
| 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | No | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 38-hp, hillside mower proven to 40 degrees |
| 146 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | No | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 38-hp |
| EXMARK MFG. CO. | | | | | | |
| 44, 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Standard Quick-Lift Deck Assist |
| 52 and 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Electric Start, electric deck lift, blade clutch |
| 52, 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Standard Quick-Lift Deck Assist, UltraCut Deck |
| 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | UltraCut Deck, EFI engine |

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John Deere combination of high-capacity 7-Iron[™]
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USE READER SERVICE #416

FOCUS: Mowing Buyers' Guide

| DECK SIZE (IN INCHES): | GAS OR DIESEL: | HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE: | MULCHING CAPABILITIES: | LIQUID- OR AIR- COOLED ENGINE: | ZERO-TURN CAPABILITIES: | OTHER KEY FEATURES: |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Quick-Lift deck assist; Donaldson canister air-cooled filter |
| 60 and 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Quick-Lift deck assist; fuel-efficient Daihatsu |
| FERRIS INDUSTRIES | | | | | | |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | Two-wheel front independent suspension |
| 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| 52, 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | No | Electric deck lift |
| 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | Four-wheel front independent suspension |
| 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Four-wheel front independent suspension |
| 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | No | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Four-wheel front independent suspension |
| THE GRASSHOPPER CO. | | | | | | |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 20-hp |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp |
| 61 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 20.9- or 28-hp |
| 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 24.5-, 27-, or 32-hp |
| 44 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 14- or 16-hp |
| 44, 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp |
| 48, 52, 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 20- or 25-hp |
| 48, 52, 61 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 20.9-hp |
| 48, 52, 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 24.5- or 25-hp |
| 52, 61 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 28-hp |
| 52, 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 32-hp |
| GRAVELY - AN ARIENS CO. | | | | | | |
| 44 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 19-hp Kawasaki |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 21-hp Kawasaki |
| 52 and 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 23-hp Kawasaki |
| 52, 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp Kawasaki |
| 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 27-hp Kohler or 28-hp Kohler EFI |
| 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 27-hp Kawasaki |
| 60 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 31-hp Briggs & Stratton |
| 50, 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp Kawasaki, or 27-hp Kohler |
| GRAZER | | | | | | |
| 52, 62 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| GREAT DANE POWER EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 36 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Stand-on rider |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Stand-on rider |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Stand-on rider |
| 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Stand-on rider |
| HECKENDORN EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 36 | Gas | Both | Yes | Air-cooled | No | |
| 62 and 88 | Both | Both | Yes | Both | Yes | |
| 91 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | |
| HOWARD PRICE TURF EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 23- or 25-hp, pivoting axle, floating deck |
| 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 23- or 27-hp, pivoting axle, floating deck |
| 80 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 29-hp, floating 80-inch head |
| 60 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 26-hp, out-front trimming floating deck |
| 72 and 91 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | No | 34-hp, out-front trimming floating deck |
| 126 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | No | 61-hp, out-front trimming floating deck |
| 198 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | No | 110-hp out-front trimming floating deck |
| HUSQVARNA | | | | | | |
| 42 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp, electric start |
| 42 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp, QuickLift deck, Electric start |
| 42 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp Kawasaki, electric start |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 21-hp Kawasaki, electric start |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 23-hp Kohler or 23- or 25-hp Kawasaki, electric start |
| 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp Kohler or 23- or 25-hp Kawasaki, electric start |
| 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 26-hp Kohler fuel injection or 27-hp Kohler, electric start |
| 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 23-hp Kohler, electric start |
| 61 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 27-hp Daihatsu, electric start, manual deck lift |
| 61 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 34-hp Daihatsu Turbo, electric start, hydraulic deck lift |
| JOHN DEERE | | | | | | |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | Standing platform for operator |
| 48 and 54 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | No | Differential lock increases traction |
| 54 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 7-iron, 7-gauge stamped steel deck |
| 54 and 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 27- or 29-hp |
| 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | No | Cruise control, side discharge |
| 42 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | No | Side deck |
| 60, 70 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | No | Side discharge |
| 62 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | No | Center deck |
| 62 and 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | No | Rear discharge, air-cooled intake system reduces debris buildup and lowers sound levels |
| 62 and 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | No | Side or rear discharge |
| 48, 54 and 60 | Both | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | |



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FOCUS: Mowing Buyers' Guide

| DECK SIZE (IN INCHES): | GAS OR DIESEL: | HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE: | MULCHING CAPABILITIES: | LIQUID- OR AIR- COOLED ENGINE: | ZERO-TURN CAPABILITIES: | OTHER KEY FEATURES: |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| KUBOTA TRACTOR CORP. | | | | | | |
| 60 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | ROPS, hydraulic clutch, shaft drive ROPS, hydraulic clutch, shaft drive |
| 72 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | N/A | Liquid-cooled | Yes | |
| LAND PRIDE | | | | | | |
| 44, 52, 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| LANDSCAPERS SUPPLY | | | | | | |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp |
| LESCO | | | | | | |
| 48 in. | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 19-hp, floating deck |
| 54 in. | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 23-hp, floating deck |
| 60 in. | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp, floating deck |
| NATIONAL MOWERS | | | | | | |
| 68 and 70 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | No | Reel mower |
| 84 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | No | Reel mower |
| CUB CADET COMMERCIAL | | | | | | |
| 48, 52, 60 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Three-year warranty |
| POWER TRAC | | | | | | |
| 48 and 60 | Both | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled/Oil integrated | No | 45-degree slope mower |
| 48 and 60 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled/Oil integrated | No | |
| SCAG POWER EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 42, 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Bagging mower |
| 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | compact ztr |
| 52, 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Both | Yes | full size ztr |
| 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Three-wheeler; catchers |
| 61 and 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | maximum ztr |
| SNAPPER | | | | | | |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | 19-hp, twin stick |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | 21-hp, twin stick |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | 23- or 25-hp, joy stick |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp, twin stick |
| 52, 61 and 73 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp, joy stick |
| 52, 61 and 73 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 23-hp, joy stick |
| 52, 61 and 73 | Diesel | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 21-hp, joy stick |
| STEINER TURF EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Both | Yes | Flip-up deck Front-mount; articulates |
| 48, 60 and 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | Yes | Both | No | |
| 60 | Both | Hydrostatic | Yes | Both | No | |
| THE TORO CO. | | | | | | |
| 44 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 17-hp Kawasaki |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp Kohler |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 19- or 23-hp Kawasaki or 20- or 23-hp Kohler |
| 52, 62 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp Kohler |
| 62 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp Kohler |
| 62 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp Kohler |
| 62 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 25-hp Kohler |
| 62 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 26-hp Kohler |
| 62 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 27-hp Kohler |
| VENTURE PRODUCTS | | | | | | |
| 44 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | No | |
| 60 and 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | Yes | Both | No | |
| WALKER MFG. CO. | | | | | | |
| 36 and 42 | Gas | Dual Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 13-hp, Optional built-in grass handling system |
| 36, 42, 48 and 56 | Gas | Dual Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp, Optional built-in grass handling system |
| 42, 48, 56 and 62 | Gas | Dual Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 20-hp, Optional built-in grass handling system |
| 42, 48, 56, 62 and 74 | Gas | Dual Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 26-hp, fuel injection |
| 42, 48, 56, 62 and 74 | Gas | Dual Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 25-hp, Optional built-in grass handling system |
| 42, 48, 56, 62 and 74 | Gas | Dual Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 29-hp, fuel injection |
| 42, 48, 56, 62 and 74 | Diesel | Dual Hydrostatic | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | 21-hp, Optional built-in grass handling system |
| WOODS EQUIPMENT CO. | | | | | | |
| 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-Cooled | Yes | Hydraulic deck height adjustment |
| 54 and 61 | Both | Hydrostatic | Yes | Both | Yes | Spring-assist Tilt-Access Deck™ TruFloat™ deck |
| WRIGHT MFG. | | | | | | |
| 36, 42, 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Stand-on mower |
| 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Flip-up seat, sit or stand, Rapid-Hite deck adjustme |
| YAZOO/KEES POWER EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 42 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | maintenance free battery easy-to-reach height adjustment, advanced spindle assemblies, |
| 52, 61 and 72 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | Yes | easy-to-reach height adjustment, advanced spindle assemblies, |
| 61 and 72 | Both | Hydrostatic | Optional | Liquid-cooled | Yes | Daihatsu engine, handle extention kit |

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|---|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| WALK-BEHIND MODELS | | | | | | |
| AMERICAN HONDA POWER EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 21 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Push mower |
| 21 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Two-speed |
| 21 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Two-speed with BBC |
| 21 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Higher horsepower, two-speed with BBC |
| 21 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Higher horsepower, BBC |
| BOB-CAT - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS | | | | | | |
| 21 | Gas | Push | N/A | Air-cooled | N/A | Rear discharge, metal or mesh screen grass catchers |
| 32, 36, and 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 13.5-, 15-, or 17-hp, easy-grip controls |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Fixed decks, 15- or 17-hp, easy-grip controls |
| 36, 48, 54 and 61 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Floating decks, 15- or 17-hp, easy-grip controls |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Fixed decks, 15-, 17-, or 21-hp, easy-grip controls |
| 36, 48, 54 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Floating decks, 15-, 17-, or 21-hp, easy-grip controls |
| BUNTON - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS | | | | | | |
| 21 | Gas | Push | N/A | N/A | No | Rear discharge, metal or mesh screen grass catchers |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15- or 17-hp, optional grass catcher |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Fixed decks, 15- or 17-hp, optional grass catcher |
| 36, 48, 54 and 61 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Floating decks, 15- or 17-hp, optional grass catcher |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Fixed decks, 15-, 17-, or 21-hp, optional grass catcher |
| 36, 48, 54 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Floating decks, 15-, 17-, or 21-hp, optional grass catcher |
| COUNTRY CLIPPER | | | | | | |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Both | No | Air-cooled | Yes | Patented stand-up decks |
| EASTMAN INDUSTRIES HOVER MOWER | | | | | | |
| 16, 19 and 20 | Gas | N/A | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Hover |
| ENCORE MFG. CO. | | | | | | |
| 26 | Gas | Gear | No | Liquid-cooled | No | Removable fuel tank, reinforced deck, low-maintenance spindles |
| 32 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Liquid-cooled | No | |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Both | Yes | Liquid-cooled | Yes | |
| EXCEL INDUSTRIES | | | | | | |
| 37 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15-hp Kawasaki |
| 48 and 54 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 17-hp Kawasaki or Kawasaki ES |
| EXMARK MFG. CO. | | | | | | |
| 21 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Push and self propelled or BBC |
| 32 and 36 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Feather-Lite Grip Tension |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Enhanced Control System (ECS) |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Quick-height-adjust, full floating deck |
| 32, 36 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Insta-Track adjustment system and ECS |
| 36 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | ECS, optimized comfort |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Electric/Air-cooled | Yes | ECS, optimized comfort |
| 52 and 60 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Electric/Air-cooled | Yes | Quick-height-adjust, ECS |
| FERRIS INDUSTRIES | | | | | | |
| 32 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | No | Single Hydrostatic drive |
| 36, 48 and 52 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | No | |
| 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| 32 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | No | Single Hydrostatic drive |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | No | |
| GRAVELY - AN ARIENS CO. | | | | | | |
| 21 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Bag or side discharge feature |
| 32 and 36 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 13-hp Kawasaki |
| 36 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Ergonomic controls, 13-hp Kawasaki |
| 36, 44 and 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15-hp Kawasaki |
| 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15- or 17-hp, floating deck |
| 36, 44 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15-hp Kawasaki |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 17-hp Kawasaki |
| GIANT-VAC MFG. | | | | | | |
| 21 | Gas | Push | No | Air-cooled | No | 12.5- or 13-hp |
| 32 and 36 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | No | |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | No | |
| GREAT DANE POWER EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 36 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15-hp v-twin |

FOCUS: Mowing Buyers' Guide

| DECK SIZE (IN INCHES): | GAS OR DIESEL: | HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE: | MULCHING CAPABILITIES: | LIQUID- OR AIR- COOLED ENGINE: | ZERO-TURN CAPABILITIES: | OTHER KEY FEATURES: |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| HOWARD PRICE TURF EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 36 | Gas | Both | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 14-hp Kawasaki, positive reverse or 9-inch pivot on deck |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Both | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 14- and 17-hp Kawasaki, positive reverse or 9-inch pivot on deck |
| HUSQVARNA | | | | | | |
| 32 and 36 | Gas | Gear | Optional | Air-cooled | No | 13-hp Kohler |
| 36 | Gas | Gear | Optional | Air-cooled | No | 13-hp Kohler |
| 48 | Gas | Gear | Optional | Air-cooled | No | 15-hp Kawasaki |
| 42 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 15-hp Kawasaki, electric start |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 17-hp Kawasaki |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 18-hp Kawasaki, electric start |
| JOHN DEERE | | | | | | |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Gear | Optional | N/A | Yes | 5-speed Dana-Spicer gear transmission |
| 36, 48 and 54 | Gas | Gear | Optional | N/A | Yes | Reverse assist lever |
| 48 and 54 | Gas | Gear | Optional | N/A | Yes | Thumb latches to shift from forward to reverse |
| 36, 48 and 54 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | N/A | Yes | |
| LANDSCAPERS SUPPLY | | | | | | |
| 36 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 14-hp |
| 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 15-hp |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Both | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 17-hp |
| LESCO | | | | | | |
| 32 | Gas | Gear | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| 36, 48 and 52 | Gas | Both | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | |
| CUB CADET COMMERCIAL | | | | | | |
| 32 and 36 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 14-hp, three-year warranty |
| 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15-hp, three-year warranty |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 17-hp, three-year warranty |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15-hp, three-year warranty |
| 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 17- or 19-hp, three-year warranty |
| NATIONAL MOWERS | | | | | | |
| 22 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | No | |
| 25 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | No | Reel mower |
| SCAG POWER EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 32, 36, 48 and 52 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | Fixed deck |
| 36, 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Fixed deck |
| 36, 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | Floating deck |
| SNAPPER | | | | | | |
| 36, 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | No | Air-cooled | Yes | 14-, 15-, 17-, or 23-hp |
| 36, 48 and 52 | Gas | Gear | No | Air-cooled | Yes | 12.5-, 14-, or 15-hp |
| THE TORO CO. | | | | | | |
| 32 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 10.5-hp Briggs & Stratton |
| 32 and 36 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 13-hp Kohler or Kawasaki |
| 36, 44 and 52 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 15-hp Kohler |
| 44 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 15-hp Kawasaki |
| 44 and 52 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 17-hp Kawasaki |
| 48 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 14- or 15-hp Kawasaki |
| 36 and 44 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 15-hp Kohler |
| 44 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 15-hp Kawasaki |
| 44 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | No | 17-hp Kawasaki |
| TRU-CUT | | | | | | |
| 20, 25 and 27 | Gas | Gear | N/A | Liquid-cooled | N/A | Front throw |
| 21 | Gas | Gear | Yes | Liquid-cooled | N/A | Cast aluminum deck |
| WALKER MFG. CO. | | | | | | |
| 36, 42, 48 and 56 | Gas | Dual Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | 15-hp, interchangeable decks also fit riding models |
| WRIGHT MFG. | | | | | | |
| 36, 48, 52 and 61 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Yes | Air-cooled | Yes | New product this year |
| YAZOO/KEES POWER EQUIPMENT | | | | | | |
| 32, 36 and 48 | Gas | Gear | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | 15- or 17-hp |
| 36 and 48 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | Floating deck, foot activated height adjustment |
| 48 and 52 | Gas | Hydrostatic | Optional | Air-cooled | Yes | |

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Fall, 2002

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You and I have so much in common! Having many years in the landscape maintenance business, personally cutting hundreds of lawns between 1964 and 1993, I have found that there is always something to learn about this business. Wouldn't you agree that on the job experience has the effect of finding better ways to get results?

I endeavor to apply everything I know to make the mowing business more profitable for you. In 1983, I developed the Grass Gobbler, now the best selling commercial grass catcher. In 1984, I wrote the original algorithms for the first version of CLIP, the first and still the most popular routing/scheduling/billing software in our industry today. In 1989, I worked with Jim Velke, Wright's Chief Product Designer to develop the Velke, the first and still the most popular stand-on mower in the industry. The highly productive Stander and Sentar mowers entered the scene in 1997 and 2000. We now hold over 25 patents on commercial mowing equipment.

To allow for total concentration on developing commercial lawn equipment, I sold the maintenance and software businesses 1993. I have now delivered many thousands of mowers to you and Wright Manufacturing Inc. has grown over five-fold in five years allowing us to move into a new modern plant!

Thank you so much for your confidence in Wright's highly productive equipment. I love hearing all those reports of 30-50% increased production per person! After a fuller understanding of the commercial mowing and mower businesses, literally from the ground up, I have discovered another effective way to save you money and increase your profits. Because so many commercial mowers are sold in only two months every year (about 32% in March and April), our industry wastes between 10% and 15% in inventory holding costs for the other ten months. Normally, these costs are passed on to you. I have now developed an easy way to build mowers in the "off-season," and allow you to pick them up from one of our several hundred participating dealers around the country in the fall and winter which enables you to save up to 20% of our MSRP. Our dealers, distributors, and Wright (the "Channel") are now partnering with you in what I am now calling "Channel Partners" to give you the savings which come from spreading the retail sales of our mowers throughout the year and saving you money.

Go to our web site, wrightmfg.com and click on "Channel Partner Discounts" to see immediately how to save up to 20% on your next mower as a Channel Partner! Your savings will vary depending on the time of year you act, so please go online now and begin saving!

Thanks again for buying Wright and have a great winter!

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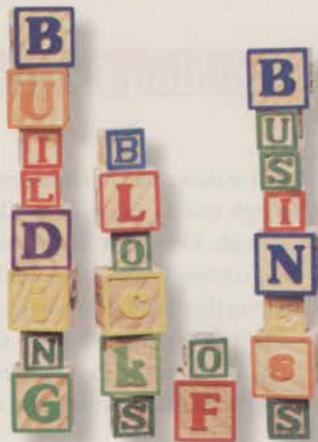
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WESTERN LAWN

Incentive INSIGHTS



Hourly production employees often lose site of company goals when they do not understand their roles in achieving them. As a result, incentive pay programs that base compensation on an employee's production can add value to both morale and a company's productive output. But they must be well executed to benefit all parties.

A couple of years ago, during an extended hot and dry spell when Western Lawns' maintenance crews should have been completing work faster than usual, we noticed crews were stretching every job to earn extra hours. Working more hours was the only incentive option they had to impact next Friday's paycheck.

The following November at a conference, one of our account managers sat at a roundtable discussion on incentive pay. He brought back the concept of paying employees for what they produced instead of for number of hours worked. Although this model had not been common in the green industry, it had been used for years in other markets, such as auto body repair and roofing.

After several weeks of planning, pondering, experimenting and testing, we developed an incentive compensation plan – our "Pay for Production" system – and implemented it the following season. The change, which required the commitment of all of our company leaders, was difficult to attempt, but the results were fantastic.

The incentive model we use is simple. Prior to beginning a new job, production crews are given a number of weekly



Western Lawns' Lorne Hall. Photo: Jerry Hymer

hours budgeted for the project based on the level of work involved. Our typical crew is comprised of three people, so if a crew is assigned 120 production hours for the week, each crew member is paid for 40 hours of work, regardless of the number of hours spent to complete the job. With this system, everyone is motivated to get the work done efficiently and quickly.

As the crews increase production, the company has more time to sell. And as we add more sales, we cover our overhead expenses more rapidly. Increased sales without increased overhead equals more profit.

The first season we used our Pay for Production system, our best employees excelled and consistently made more per hour than they had the previous season. Average employees made similar wages and some of our poorest-performing employees found themselves making less money. Over the course of a few weeks, the weakest performers gradually left for jobs at other companies. We were disappointed that some longtime employees found making as much money as they had in the past was difficult, but also pleasantly surprised when other employees increased their productivity.

To maximize the new system, we established a few rules. First, we set up a procedure for crews to ask for additional time on a job. Upon request, crew leaders from other sites are used as third party members to assess the job and suggest to an account manager whether the company should allocate additional time to the project. Also, we gave account managers the authority to adjust hours on a discretionary basis when something outside an employee's control, like running into unexpectedly rocky soil, creates more on-site job time. But for this to work employees must understand the

basis for budgeting production hours and know they aren't just arbitrary numbers management assigns to jobs. Our landscape crews know, for instance, that if they run into real problems, their account managers can afford adjusted hours but, otherwise, they receive the same production hours every time they perform a certain task, such as planting a 2-inch-caliper tree.

Through Pay for Production, crews also are held accountable for job quality. The

5 KEYS TO *Instituting Incentives*

1. Reward employee productivity, not hours worked.
2. Establish guidelines for budgeting hours consistently from job to job.
3. Give authority to trusted personnel to adjust job hours based on uncontrollable variables.
4. Offer a reasonable minimum production wage to protect employees during slow workweeks.
5. In compensating crews, weigh quality of work as heavily as output.

first season under our new system, we didn't weigh quality pay for crew leaders highly enough. Even crew leaders who had given the company consistent quality started to slip as they tried to maximize their production pay. Splitting a crew member's pay equally between Pay for Production and quality pay ensures they meet our standards.

We adapted a 25-point assessment form to gauge job site quality. We assess each criterion – from mowing to edging – up to four points for a total of 100. We award crew members quality compensation at a percentage of their production pay equal to the number of points received on the assessments (i.e. crew members earn a quality pay

that is 65 percent of their production pay for 65 points assessed). So far, we maintain a high level of quality with this system.

We cannot use Pay for Production to bypass overtime laws. We still track actual hours worked each week. When an employee's actual work hours exceed 40 hours in one week, we calculate their hourly pay and offer time-and-a-half for overtime.

Likewise, we cannot use Pay for Production to pay an employee less than minimum wage. Being an H2B contractor, we must pay a minimum wage to each employee we hire through the program. To alleviate the risk of violating H2B program rules with our Pay for Production system, we adopted an average hourly worker pay that is \$1.50 more than the minimum H2B wage for all production workers. Therefore, even on a bad week, employees still have a sustainable check.

The following success story explains the Pay for Production system's benefit. A few weeks into the new Pay for Production system, one crew leader asked an account manager if he could go from a three-man crew to a two-man crew. He realized he could make more money if he divided his weekly production hours by two instead of three. After the employee assured the account manager he would not let quality slip and that all work would be completed each week, the account manager agreed to try it. A couple of weeks later, another crew leader wanted to work on a two-man crew instead of a three-man crew. We now produced the same revenue with fewer people.

While his crews were getting smaller, the account manager was negotiating a five-year, \$100,000 maintenance account. We sold the job and the account manager started planning for a new crew when he realized he already had downsized two crews from three members each to two members and had two additional crew members who could handle the new job. Our Pay for Production system enabled us to sell a new contract without additional personnel.

More revenue without increased overhead and additional profit – this has been repeated several times under our Pay for Production system. – Lorne Hall **LL**

The author is president, Western Lawns, Oklahoma City, Okla., and can be reached at 405/943-4242 ext. 3004 or lorne-wl@swbell.net.

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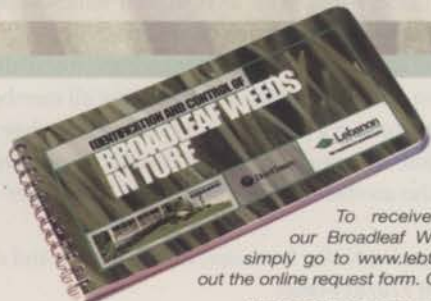
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5 KEYS TO *Moving Into Maintenance*

1. Before installation begins, meet with clients to determine their maintenance needs.
2. Pass on designs to maintenance crews so they can provide project feedback before it begins.
3. Encourage teamwork and project understanding by having maintenance crews work alongside installation crews during the final part of the installation.
4. Ensure that everyone involved has full knowledge of plant care and provide training when necessary.
5. Introduce clients to maintenance crews to create a smooth transition from one team to the next.

NADLER LANDSCAPE

MOVING INTO Maintenance

Turning over an installation project to maintenance crews requires thorough planning. In order to ensure a smooth transition, Nadler Landscape's maintenance crews perform some tasks other companies would consider installation crew responsibilities.

We start the process before we design the landscape. During the design interview, we discuss maintenance goals with the client. On commercial properties, for instance, budget drives maintenance, so designing a plan that does not require many maintenance man-hours appeals to clients. On the other end of the spectrum, high-end residential clients are open to full-service maintenance programs. In either case, having this kind of information ahead of time determines the amount of training necessary for installation and maintenance crews, the number of people needed for the project and the amount of time necessary to devote to installation and maintenance on the schedule.

Once we know the customer's maintenance needs, we make design decisions. Then we share designs with maintenance crews so they can see the properties they will be handling. A maintenance crew's input at this stage can positively affect the design. Then I review the final design plan with the crew leader who will be in charge of maintaining that property. This preview with the crew leader helps us budget time, labor, money, special materials, tools and other items needed for planning the adequate maintenance level.

As the installation reaches completion, maintenance crew members perform closing cleanup services on the job site while the installation crew finishes the construction. Introducing the maintenance crew to the job while the installation crew is still on-site aids the transition and the new landscape's overall chance of success.

The final part of an installation job challenges crews. Having maintenance crews assist job completion ensures we remember easily missed details, such as providing bed lines with clean, crisp edges; rolling and tucking pine straw, clearing beds of sod scraps and washing down hardscapes. These tasks are important because clients typically judge jobs and our company's reputation by how well we complete the last 10 percent of the work. Bringing in maintenance crews near a project's end also boosts morale and energy, helps complete the job within the scheduled time and increases crew members' attention to detail.

The transition period between installation and maintenance creates an educational opportunity for everyone involved. Crew leaders confer about property appearance and employees work together. While the installation team teaches the maintenance crew how to plant and layout the material, the maintenance team has a chance to teach installation crew members proper plant maintenance techniques. These two entities working together ensures that our landscape design and installation flourishes.

After we finish the project, we introduce the customer to the maintenance crew and crew leader. This comforts customers and places names with faces in their minds so they know with whom to speak when issues arise.

As in most companies, our maintenance and installation crews are two different entities. But by having all members of both crews work as a single team before we complete an installation job, the result isn't only a friendlier work atmosphere, but also another satisfied customer. — Todd Nadler

The author is owner, Nadler Landscape, Alpharetta, Ga., and can be reached at 770/619-0660.

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USE READER SERVICE #43

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R.A.R. Landscaping's Field Supervisor Gill Plantagenett (far right) meets with crew members for an on-site training meeting. Photo: R.A.R. Landscaping Co.

R.A.R. LANDSCAPING CO.

CREWS Control

At R.A.R. Landscaping Co., we currently field 24 commercial maintenance crews. Our crews range in size from two to five crew members, and managing that many people is no easy task. To make scheduling and organizing our crews easier, we developed a system that keeps everyone in line and on task.

We have three types of crews in our maintenance division:

- Lawn maintenance crews visit a site approximately 24 times per year. They mow, trim, edge, spray cracks and crevices and perform detail work.
- Landscape maintenance crews visit a site approximately seven times per year and perform shrub pruning, tree pruning, weeding, flower rotations and bed work.
- Utility crews handle clients' special requests, such as mowing brush fields, aerating and seeding, or other tasks that require specialized skills or equipment rather than design or installation talent.

Beginning with this crew organization, there are several factors we consider in our crew design and implementation.

First, crew size is important. Although we feel smaller crews are more efficient, we maintain some sites that are more than 25 acres and simply don't lend themselves to two- or three-member crews. At the same time, the manpower of a four- or five-person crew is wasted on small ½-acre properties. Therefore, we try to match crew size to property size, and for large sites we will often combine crews to finish the job efficiently.

In the past, we assigned multiple crews on various sections of a commercial site with instructions to help each other after

finishing their section. But crews resented helping each other and became determined to be last to finish the work. Our solution was to assign each crew to a defined area for the day and let them leave the site when their work was complete. This greatly reduced the hours spent on the job and avoided the problem of having the crewmembers become one large, inefficient crew.

To account for each two- or three-member crew, we developed a visible chain of command to maintain organization. First, a foreman is responsible for supervising each crew. In terms of maintenance, a foreman's primary task is to detail areas by weeding, redefining beds, hand pruning, etc. Additionally, the foreman knows the crew's assignments for the day, completes required paperwork, enforces safety, cares for vehicles and equipment in the field, and communicates with the client. Because the foreman must train and monitor crew members and enforce teamwork, we found that having him work *with* the crew members rather than above them had a positive impact on our organization.

Having a chain of accountability also is important. The crew members are accountable to the foremen and the foremen are accountable to the field supervisors. For example, if a crew member continually shows up late, the foreman's job is to solve that problem. If the crew is getting out late because of this tardy employee, the foreman must then answer to the field supervisor. We try to have clear lines of responsibility, provide employees with job descriptions and perform semi-annual performance reviews to keep everyone on track.

Before sending crews out to a site, the foreman must become familiar with every aspect of a client's property. When we have a new landscape to maintain, the foreman visits the site and meets with the property manager or salesperson. To make scheduling easier and create a sense of continuity for the client, the same crew maintains the property throughout the season.

Training foremen and crew members also ensures that scheduling runs smoothly. In addition to daily training performed in the field, we have weekly 30-minute training sessions where we cover topics like the employee handbook,

(continued on page 88)

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PRO Landscape Proposal

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City: Kansas City Phone: 816 / 555-4123
Salesperson: Lisa Date: 01/14/02
Tax Exempt: Yes No Exp. Date: 02/13/02

Options Defaults: ☒ Defaults ☐ Install ☐ Guarantee

Comments:

| Qty | Category | Description | Quantity | Unit | Price | Total |
|-----|-------------------|------------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Soundscapes | Top English | 1 | sq ft | 4.50 | 4.50 |
| 1 | Tree, S | Maple, Sweet | 1 | tree | 45.00 | 45.00 |
| 1 | Tree, S | Apple, Pink | 1 | tree | 12.50 | 12.50 |
| 1 | Tree, S | Red, Star Fraxinus | 1 | tree | 14.00 | 14.00 |
| 1 | Tree, S | Japanese, Cherry 2 | 1 | tree | 82.00 | 82.00 |
| 1 | Shrub, S | Japanese, Blue Chip | 1 | shrub | 10.00 | 10.00 |
| 1 | Flower, Perennial | Hosta, Purple | 1 | plant | 12.00 | 12.00 |
| 1 | Flower, Perennial | Campanula, Mountain | 1 | plant | 8.50 | 8.50 |
| 1 | Tree, S | Black, Olive (Juniper) | 1 | tree | 20.00 | 20.00 |

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Building Blocks of Business

(continued from page 86)

communications skills, safety, proper paperwork skills and maintenance techniques. With everyone on the same page, the crews are ready to head to their sites.

Scheduling and organizing crews is all about saving time and money, which is why another important aspect of our maintenance operation is the budgeted hours we created for each annual maintenance

contract. Without budgeted hours, employees can take any amount of time they wish to complete a day's work, with hourly employees periodically stretching time to reach overtime. To alleviate the situation, we created an hourly guideline for foremen and crew members to follow for each task. We generated these budgeted hours by timing tasks in the

Budgeting BONUS

An office building we maintained hired us to sweep the curbs on a weekly basis. The only day that made sense to do the work was Saturday when the offices were closed. I arranged for two employees to work each Saturday, but did not give them a time frame to complete the job, knowing that crews usually finish at 1 p.m. on Saturdays. The crew started at 8 a.m. and, as expected, finished at 1 p.m.

After a few weeks, I mentioned to the crew that this job didn't seem like a 10 man-hour assignment and that it should be completed in less time. That week, they finished at noon. Later, two new employees took over the job and I indicated that the curb sweeping should be completed in six man-hours. This goal was reached with no problems and the quality of work was at the same level of a higher man-hour job.

A few weeks later I decided to try a new tactic. I gave the two employees five man-hours to complete the job, but told them if they completed it in less time they would each still be paid for a 2½-hour day. By using budgeted hours and providing incentives, the job that once took 10 man-hours was eventually completed in fewer than five, saving time and labor. — Allan Davis

field and keeping historical records of the information.

We also use budgeted job hours as way to reward employees with incentives. Crews that beat their budgets for the week share in some of those saved hours with bonuses. Nothing motivates employees more than having the opportunity to use their skills to make more money.

By making sure crews adhere to budgeted hours and delegating responsibilities, we can ensure greater profitability. If we lose control of scheduling and organizing crews efficiently and miscalculate budgeted hours, we are gambling with the company's profits. And isn't profit what this business is all about? — Allan Davis

The author is executive vice president, R.A.R. Landscaping Co., Baltimore, Md., and can be reached at 410/486-9080.

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STILL WATERS
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PREVENTIVE Measures

At Still Waters, we believe the first step in establishing or continuing a sound preventive maintenance program is to acknowledge that it is not an "expense" or "costly interruption" of our work. Equipment should be treated as an asset that generates profit if cared for properly.

When I was working as a one-man show, I knew landscape contractors who worked 50 to 60 hours weekly because they thought that was the only way they could succeed. They would maintain equipment on Sundays or rain days thinking they couldn't waste sunny weekdays working on equipment. Watching these contractors, I learned early that proper equipment maintenance must be as much a part of our operation as actually performing the work.

Preventive maintenance time needs to be figured into weekly schedules and the costs associated with it figured into overhead and pricing strategies. The first thing I did when I got serious about equipment maintenance was to establish a 10-year capital expenditure plan. This plan outlines all existing equipment, forecasts equipment life-spans based on planned

(continued on page 92)

5 KEYS TO *Preventive Equipment Maintenance*

1. Recognize that maintaining equipment is as important as performing maintenance work and that using dirty or run-down machines can hurt a company's image.
2. Establish a capital expenditure plan that outlines how often machines will need maintenance or replacement and plan your expenses accordingly.
3. Maintain an organized filing system and a stocked inventory so you can quickly access spare parts and equipment information.
4. Create a weekly maintenance checklist and set aside a few hours a week for crews to concentrate on maintaining their equipment. Determine which crewmembers are better suited for which jobs.
5. Encourage crewmembers to take pride in their equipment and the company.



Steve Leisring

*Vice President of Operations
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USE READER SERVICE #48

Building Blocks of Business

(continued from page 90)

usage, and identifies when each piece needs to be replaced.

The second step in our capital expenditure plan is to look at our growth objectives and determine what effect they will have on additional equipment purchases. Once this is done, we total up equipment expenditures for each forecasted year to prepare for future growth. If one year shows an unusually high need and the next a low need, we then determine if we can stretch another year out of certain pieces of equipment to balance our expenses from year to year. This process also helps us determine how many resources to allocate to preventive maintenance vs. equipment replacement.

Determining exactly when a piece of equipment's life ends is important to figure out. There are certainly times when a piece of used equipment may not be pretty but gets the job done. While using that low-cost machine may seem practical, it may hurt a company's image. A dirty or beat-up truck will get us to the job site as well as a clean one, but how much better does the clean one make clients, prospective customers and employees feel about professionalism? At Still Waters, vehicles and large equipment are replaced every 10 years with vehicles expending approximately 70,000 to 100,000 miles. We replace mowers and smaller equipment after approximately 1,500 hours.

Once a piece of equipment becomes part of our inventory, it becomes part of an extensive preventive maintenance program that starts with opening a new file for each piece of equipment. These files contain pertinent information, including model numbers and serial numbers, for easy reference later. We immediately establish a spare parts inventory of belts, tires and air and oil filters so we are prepared for unpredictable but inevitable service items. We store each piece of equipment's spare parts in dedicated shop areas so we can quickly locate them when we need them. Whenever we use a spare part, we promptly replace it in the inventory so we have it the next time we need it.

The majority of our equipment maintenance revolves around our weekly maintenance checklist. All crews spend three to four hours weekly maintaining their own equipment. The crew leaders, who are typically

Equipment should be treated as an asset that generates profit if cared for properly. — David Wigfield

more mechanical, handle minor repairs, blade changes, lubrication, etc. Other crewmembers handle the pressure washing and fueling of equipment and vehicles, as well as the general cleaning of the shop and yard area. Many people think having production people do this type of work is a waste of money, but we feel the continuity and sense of ownership employees feel because of this process is invaluable. This philosophy goes back to when I began the company and did all the maintenance tasks myself. I maintained my equipment well because I was the one using it. We try to instill that same sense of ownership in our crews.

Systemization continues to be an important objective at our company, and checklists have become crucial to simplifying our systems. Along with the weekly checklist, we also utilize monthly, semiannual and annual preventive maintenance checklists. The monthly checklist includes points less critical like dump truck hydraulic fluid checks. The semiannual checklist covers items like vehicle waxing, and the annual checklist is a comprehensive list that starts with winterizing all equipment and includes touching up paint on all mowers, loaders, trailers, truck beds, etc.

Oil changes and other periodic maintenance, which are dictated more by mileage or hours used, are posted on the corresponding maintenance crew's dry erase board. The board serves as a reminder to allow extra time during a particular day to handle additional items. Other necessary repairs that may not be critical to operations also are placed on the reminder boards and performed as time permits or on rainy days.

Each spring our objective is to roll out the doors with a "new" fleet, and a comprehensive preventive maintenance program enables us to do just that. — David Wigfield

The author is president and founder, Still Waters Grounds Maintenance, Emmaus, Pa., and can be reached at 610/965-7162.

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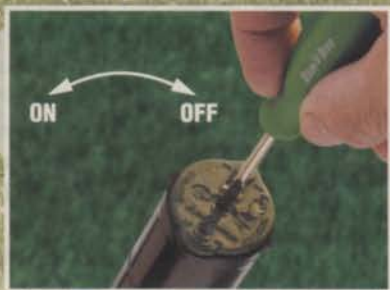
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*John Allin, president, Allin Cos.,
presents multiple-year contracts as
the only option when negotiating
with new clients. Photo: Allin Cos.*



ALLIN COS.

LONG-TERM Contract Lingo

The entrepreneurial spirit demands that business owners grow their operations to fulfill the goals they set when they started out. These goals, of course, require planning. When making the jump from managing a small operation to running a full-blown enterprise, projecting cash flow becomes one issue that requires attention. One way to address this is to have recurring business each year.

Among a number of benefits, multiple-year contracts give landscape contractors the chance to accurately project revenues for longer periods of time. This allows a more accurate budgeting process, thus affording the owner the luxury of being able to plan for necessary purchases and other needed expenditures.

First, when negotiating contracts with clients, we present a multiple-year deal as the only option. While we occasionally offers seasonal contracts to new clients to spur a period of "courtship," we generally sign all subsequent deals with the promise of an extended commitment. Most customers welcome the idea of keeping expenditures firm for two, three or even five seasons. Their budgets are locked-in for extended periods, negating the need to accommodate increased costs for at least a portion of their exterior maintenance budget.

With multiple-year contracts, customers benefit further because employees become familiar with their properties' idiosyncrasies. Workers also form relationships with clients and know what customers expect. Therefore, job efficiency perpetually increases with each passing season.

We offer our customers pricing incentives and added value when deciding on deal terms, and we allow some leverage in negotiations because it can be mutually beneficial. For instance, we recently had a client offer us a bid to service multiple properties if we could furnish a discount. We were happy to oblige, offering them a multiple-property reduction of 3 percent for a one-year contract, 5 percent for

a two-year contract or 7 percent for a three-year contract. The property owner chose the three-year agreement and he enjoys that we consistently maintain all of his sites at a discount with a crew that intimately knows the grounds. We seize revenue over an extended term with the minimal concession of a few dollars per season. This sort of "give and take" is a balance we learned we had to offer to secure more long-term contracts.

When setting up contract periods, we stagger the start and end dates among our client base. We can put more effort into soliciting new business if our contract periods are such that we only had to renew a third of our clients at a given time. This not only saves us the trouble of renegotiating with all of our customers at once, but also steadies cash flow, which is important for everything from profit projections to credibility rating.

Effective pricing is a crucial factor to consider when establishing long-term contracts. We calculate our expenses and prices with an eye toward the future. This benefits both our operation and our clients. With a properly set guaranteed price, we virtually erase the need for a seasonal escalator or an increased contract renewal price (an attraction for customers), because we know we will sustain our margins and offset any rising costs by increasing job efficiencies.

The most important factor in sustaining our customer base with multiple-year contracts is providing outstanding service over the entire term.

Customers shouldn't be afraid of a long-term relationship because its value increases over time. When clients understand that value, everybody wins in a multiple-year scenario. — John Allin

The author is president, Allin Cos., Erie, Pa., and can be reached at john@allinco.com.

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USE READER SERVICE #51



AKEHURST LANDSCAPE SERVICE

ADDING UP WITH Add-Ons

I Like many other companies, the effects of Sept. 11, 2001 were cause for change here at Akehurst Landscape Service, Joppa, Md. With a weak economy and the worst drought in the history of our state, we began to take a hard look at how we could expand sales within our current accounts. While responsibilities were changing throughout the mid- and upper-level management of the company, we activated systems to send our company to the next level.

Through research, I was amazed to find many companies averaging a 50 to 70 percent sales ratio on grounds maintenance accounts. Knowing this, I came up with a way to motivate our supervisors to realize the sales opportunities we had been missing. I created a scoreboard that listed supervisor names and a space to enter sales totals for each month. Displayed in our meeting room as "2002 Enhancement Achievements," the board created a game that would promote friendly competition. During our following supervisor meeting, I sold the concept to the team, explaining how it would work and some tips on what areas to look for on our job sites that trigger add-on sales opportunities. Whoever had the top sales each month won a lunch with the boss.

After just three months, the team members had already surpassed their annual goals. For their achievement, we hired a company to detail their company trucks or personal vehicles – it was their choice.

Add-on sales continued to increase with each month. Sales of additional services included seasonal flower rotations, extra mulching, tree and shrub care, plant replacements, tree removals and stump grinding, parking block replacements, designed landscape enhance-

ments, patio and sidewalk repairs, improvement on problem areas, holiday décor, 24-hour emergency service and anything else the company had the knowledge and capability to handle.

In August, normally a slow month for add-on sales, our supervisors amazed me again with a record sales month. On their own, the group created a program where they sold tree-watering bags to our clients. The program required a charge to fill the bags and incorporated off-season storage fees for the bags into the initial sale. Watching the supervisors take the initiative to further sales even more showed me that not only could our team make more money for the company, but they had more energy and more confidence in their sales abilities than in the past.

The results of the new game were astounding. Our supervisors became more motivated to perform better customer service. Even now, one year since the program began, the relationships between our clients and supervisors are at their best. We have noticed an increase in contracted improvements requested by clients who wouldn't have wanted extra services in the past. We also started selling add-ons to new clients from day one, while existing clients have started to include more money in their annual budgets to afford these extra services.

At Akehurst, we learned that add-on services are not difficult to sell. Sending recommendations and quotes for additional work on a weekly basis makes the client aware that you care about their properties. Also, team members who enjoy their work make a good impression on clients.

Though spending money on brochures, creating seasonal fliers or developing a seasonal promotional calendar may be helpful, they are not necessary. We promote seasonal add-on services one month prior to when crews will perform the work by having crews make clients aware of these services while they are on-site. For example, we promote watering services one month before it gets dry, lawn renovation in August, and have our design and sales team work on enhancement recommendations for winter jobs when they have slower sales months. We have the design staff visit the maintenance properties to get and give ideas – a fresh set of eyes can always bring new inspiration to a project. We also use add-on sales to make our company more efficient. For example, we propose creating planting beds in hard-to-mow areas.

We train all employees on selling add-on services to clients. Crew members are the eyes and ears that bring potential problems and solutions to the supervisor's attention. Not to mention that since crews already assigned to a property will most likely perform the added work, they have a personal investment in the selling process.

Over some slow winter months, our supervisors brought us new business and a more enthusiastic work environment, by increasing sales of add-on services – and it was all because of a simple game. – Brian Akehurst

The author is vice president, Akehurst Landscape Service, Joppa, Md., and can be reached at 410/538-4018.

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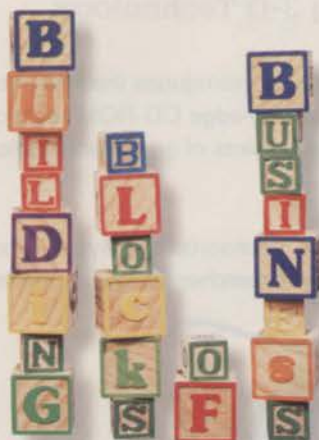
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For us, managing receivables begins with the initial contract sale. We make payment terms clear and require our clients to sign a contract to prevent payment problems.

Next, we make sure all invoices include correct addresses, phone numbers and contact names. We bill only for elements included on an invoice and are careful not to perform unapproved work. This leaves less room for questions and makes collecting payments easier.

Being nice goes a *long way*. If they **like us** as *people*, then they are **more responsive** when we have to *make the call* to **collect money**. – **Ruth Koster**



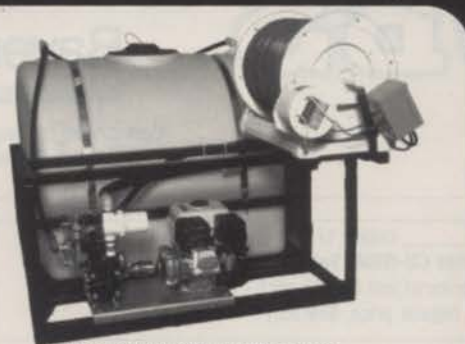
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USE READER SERVICE #54

USE READER SERVICE #55

Communication with clients and internally with employees is important when managing receivables. We build relationships, for example, with property managers and accounting staff members at each company with which we do business and talk to our customers early in the service process. We pay attention, listen carefully and take notes. We work together to ensure clients have what they need to pay promptly and always thank those helping us. Being nice goes a long way. If they like us as people, then they are more responsive when we have to make the call to collect money.

When collection time arrives, we send invoice reports and copies of any older invoices to clients who have multiple properties on the fifth and 20th of each month. We always follow up with a phone call and find this approach to be a great tool, with clients usually cutting checks the 10th and the 25th of each month.

Internally, we've set up monthly goals. We have an accounts receivable scoreboard posted in the hall that shows our totals and account ages and we update it weekly.

We provide branch managers with weekly accounts receivable reports that

5 KEYS TO *Managing Receivables*

1. Start with a clear, thorough written contract.
2. Make sure all invoice/contact information is current and accurate.
3. Provide quality work and services.
4. Keep communication with clients and employees open and timely.
5. Ensure all departments work as a team throughout the service process.

show invoice status. Additional notes detail the nature of any problems and when a check was or will be sent, for example. By notifying our managers if a customer is unhappy with our service, they are able to make corrections so the client is satisfied and willing to pay. Area managers also are asked to help with hard-to-collect or problem accounts on occasion, while uncollectable accounts are sent to an external collection agency.

External collections generally cost us

about 45 percent of the amount collected per account. Luckily, we've only had to send two accounts to an external collection agency in the past 3½ years.

Overall, to manage receivables efficiently we plan a course of action, stick to that plan, remain positive and expect good results. — Ruth Koster

The author is accounts receivable clerk, Bozzuto Landscaping Co., Laurel, Md., and can be reached at 301/497-3900.

Lil' BUBBA

CURE MACHINES



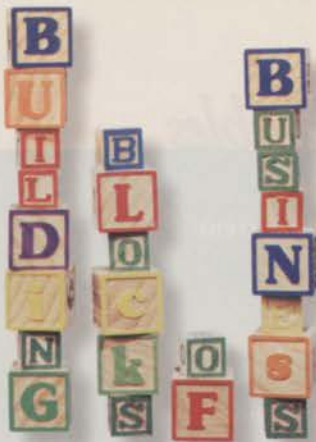
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TECZA ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

ACCOUNT MANAGER Makeover

Have you ever been in the situation where you were losing touch with your clients, your day-to-day procedures weren't running smoothly and your business lacked structure because you were constantly putting out fires instead of performing the work? Or, worse yet, did you lose clients because of a lack of clear communication regarding their services and schedules?

Many of us have been in one or all of these positions. At Tecza Environmental Group, our maintenance division struggled each time our sales neared \$1 million. We lost four to five key clients – twice – as we reached that pivotal level. Getting the sales and the contracts wasn't the problem. Instead, we found that clients thought we weren't taking care of them due to a lack of regular communication.

Since we instituted our account manager approach four years ago, we feel we've resolved the problem, jumping over the \$1-million wall and increasing our maintenance division revenue to nearly \$1.9 million.

Prior to using account managers, we worked with customer service representatives who were often more involved with the sales side of the business and less involved in the daily interaction with crews. From the customer

service representative to the maintenance supervisor through the foreman to the crew, there were too many levels of management for effective client-to-supervisor communications. Like in a child's game of "telephone," we lost a lot of information, jumbled messages and made decisions that may not have been in clients' best interests.

By eliminating a layer of the structure and redirecting certain individuals to different positions within the company, we were able to improve communication. Now, the account manager position encompasses the customer service and maintenance supervisor layers, providing more daily interaction with crews. We also shifted sales responsibilities to allow account managers to focus solely on their existing portfolio.

Dedicated account managers drive the success of all landscape projects. Their mission is to communicate with clients, supervise the day-to-day landscape maintenance work and be the company's eyes and ears by reporting clients' concerns to management.

By aiding in scheduling and training and communicating with foremen on a regular basis, account managers are able to maintain a working knowledge of which clients request certain services and when crews should be performing these services. More importantly, account managers have full customer service responsibility, meaning they focus on building client relationships, selling add-on services, solving problems and handling contract renewals.

Of course, budgeting for the additional expenses to put toward hiring new account managers is necessary. Though we did not eliminate any positions when we compressed the previous structure, our restructuring actually left us with some additional funds to put toward account manager positions. In other situations, a budget that allows for at least one new employee's salary may be necessary. Our account managers' salaries are commensurate with the size and prominence of their portfolio. A less-experienced account manager may not be paid as much as an individual with 10 years of experience, but this gives both incentive and room for that person to grow within the company and our budget. Account managers' salaries typically fall in the pay scale above crewmen and working foremen. Also, so account managers



*Ed Reier, vice president
of maintenance operations,
Tecza Environmental Group.*

Photo: Dan DalSanto

could work efficiently, we purchased additional office supplies and provided them with insurance and a vehicle.

Since our account managers are the front-line of communication with our clients, we look for individuals with experience and knowledge in the green industry as well as people skills when filling this position. Our account managers' job descriptions say they will be the primary contact between the client and the company, so being able to work with our maintenance crews is important in building a positive team. Additionally, individuals with sales or customer service backgrounds work well. We also have groomed interns and junior account managers into competent employees.

In terms of recruiting account managers, we try to look within the organization first before advertising for the position. Beyond placing ads, we use what we call "sphere of influence" marketing. For this approach, we contact our property managers or other people who may know individuals looking to change positions or join Tecza. In this effort, we create a larger network of contacts and build our reputation as a company ac-


tively interested in finding the best people for the job.

Ensuring that account managers are on top of all of the work being performed for each client is essential. Our maintenance clientele is divided into three regions with careful consideration given to geographics, job size and account manager relationships. Each of our three account managers is responsible for the existing portfolio of clients as well as any new maintenance, construction or horticultural service work in their region. Furthermore, a schedule board is maintained for each division. Not only do we want each account manager to know what work is being done for their clients, but to look at the schedule everyday and communicate with the other two account managers on their work as well. This way, we can be as effective and efficient as possible.

Together, our account managers are the clients' total resources for information on the status of current projects and on the determination of future needs. As per their job description, an account manager is essentially responsible for visiting properties, preferably when crews are there, a mini-

mum of two times per month. Additionally, they must meet with each of their clients either in person or over the phone at least once every month.

A productive account manager can handle \$800,000 to \$1 million worth of work and still have the time to hold clients' hands, address service needs and sell add-on services. The more effective our account managers are, the more business and revenue our company will be able to bring in.

Essentially, a good account manager can drive the growth of any landscape contracting business with the desire to expand because they have an opportunity to learn clients' likes, dislikes and personal preferences. Clients are far more likely to buy services from someone they know and trust, rather than from an unfamiliar voice on the other end of the phone line. Without a doubt, account managers have made a difference in our bottom line and helped our company build manageable growth. —Ed Reier 

The author is vice president of maintenance operations, Tecza Environmental Group, Elgin, Ill., and can be reached at 847/742-3320.

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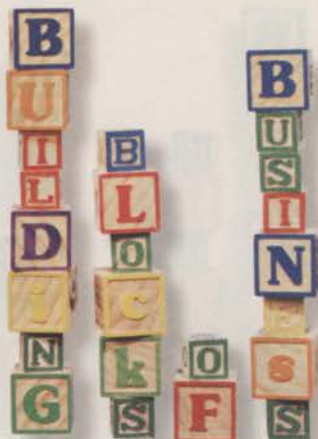
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BARRINGER & BARRINGER

DEVELOPING Employees



Policy manuals, operating standards and customer service were essentially nonexistent in the landscaping profession when I joined the industry 18 years ago. Employee development amounted to on-the-job training on the use of tractors, tillers and trucks.

That was then; this is now. Our industry is changing rapidly to reflect the proliferation of business models and technologies available to us. Just as equipment requires preventive maintenance, human resources requires upkeep and development.

The first step in employee development centers on the fact that people are unique and valuable. But while all people are important, they are not necessarily valuable to a company. When someone goes through the hiring process, the employer must assess the person's competencies, values and attitudes. "Hire attitude. Teach skills," – this old adage is relevant here.

If people are valuable to the company, then the development process will exhibit this. We show employees the path of natural progression and encourage them to scale it. The development program at Barringer & Barringer includes an appraisal process, in which employees discuss their strengths, weaknesses and goals. We also encourage involvement in industry associations and stress education through in-house training programs. Finally, we offer development through casual mentoring, whether in the field or in the office.

5 KEYS TO *Employee Development*

1. Acknowledge the value of each employee and select people with similar values and attitudes.
2. Use appraisals to challenge employees toward further development.
3. Encourage employees to pursue professional status in trade organizations. Schedule participation and give public acknowledgement.
4. Give employees additional responsibilities as they show proficiency and reward them monetarily.
5. Train employees through purchased programs or with in-house training to teach methodology, equipment use, financial understanding, etc.

The appraisal process, is one of our best development tools because, during this time, employees have our undivided attention and can simply talk about themselves. Employees fill out a three- or four-page questionnaire that helps the company understand their perceptions about their learning curves, productivity and areas they need to improve. This goal-setting assessment invigorates employees and springboards them to greater achievement. This exercise also serves as part of the review process and helps management determine annual, performance-based pay raises.

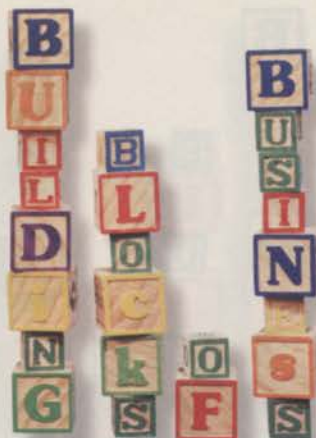
Another initiative we challenge our employees with is professional designation in the various trade organizations. We make a big deal out of people trying and attaining professional status, which encourages them to continue their involvement. Besides the high-fives at work and prominently displaying the certificates, we also send out a picture and write-up to the newspaper. We are also considering offering pay raises based on these achievements.

In-house training programs also play a big part in employee development. Regular weekly meetings, spanning about 10 minutes and covering an array of topics – safety, materials and equipment use, for example – develop an employees' skills and how to maximize them on job sites. Whenever possible, we use bilingual employees and literature already included in the price of several green industry association memberships to reach our Spanish-speaking workers. As a result, Hispanic employees are better trained, more highly skilled, have a broader perspective of their jobs and feel better about themselves.

Casual mentoring also contributes to employees' personal development. We spend time with new employees, get to know them as people, find out their thoughts and share our own development experiences. This insight exposes employees to growth opportunities within the company.

All of these tools help employees realize and reach their potentials. – John Barringer

The author is president, Barringer & Barringer, Charlotte, N.C., and can be reached at 704/335-3775 or at jbarringer@barringerlandscape.com.



COCAL LANDSCAPE SERVICES **Branching OUT**

Expanding an operation into a new geographic market is both exciting and risky. The excitement comes from growing a company outside of an existing locale, which often translates into increased sales, profits and new opportunities for employees. The risks include possibly spreading a company too thin, taking on additional overhead, hiring or transferring people, investing capital in equipment and setting up the new office.

CoCal Landscape Services, Denver, Colo., has offices in three other cities. Our third and most recent location came with the October 2001 acquisition of Pratt Landscape, Longmont, Colo.

The process of setting up a branch is challenging, but we follow certain guidelines to ease the undertaking.

Before beginning, visually evaluating new markets to determine if there is enough work is relatively easy, but to fully understand the new market and the challenges presented by the number and vitality of rivals we would encounter selling there, we performed a competitor analysis. Learning what competitors were in the area was as easy as referring to the regional phone book. Other methods include contacting state associations, asking prospective clients what companies they've worked with in the past or simply networking at seminars and conferences to know which competitors enjoy a healthy presence in a given market.

While we started from the ground up with our two previous branches, the fortunate timing of Pratt's divestiture and our ability to readily absorb their overhead, facility and equipment made acquisition a practical choice. We also saw advantages in tapping Pratt's already established customer base and capital assets. When we built our own branches, we were able to control our own costs based on needs and preference. Despite the various ways we started branches, we always first made sure we had sufficient financial resources to expand, which we determined by looking at the estimated costs for a startup vs. our sustained profitability, cash reserves and borrowing capabilities.

After starting a branch from scratch or purchasing another company to expand, we evaluate employee needs. We

developed branch offices to \$1.5- to \$2-million before adding a dedicated branch manager.

Capable branch managers are difficult to find. We always look for an existing middle manager who has the ability to sell our services and manage branch operations. A well-rounded employee with some field knowledge and a customer-service background is ideal. We review the track record of these managers and approach them, often finding they welcome the change and challenge of a new market size

and location. Other times, we ask those managers to suggest viable candidates among their personnel.

Once the chief officer is identified and on-board, we undertake the following steps in getting our new operation off the ground:

Securing a facility: We executed short-term leases (up to three years) on "C" grade facilities with an emphasis on security. Our customers rarely come to us, so image has not been a priority. Obviously we consider telephone, fax and e-mail capabilities, information systems management needs, etc., when setting up a satellite/branch office.

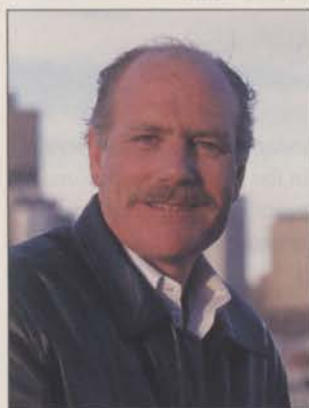
Setting up vendor accounts: Several of our Denver suppliers have branch offices in our other markets, so some of the vendor accounts have been easy to establish. We

produce cover letters stating our expansion intentions and attach bonding, insurance and banking information and three business references. Our manager carries them in his briefcase for quick drop-off purposes, and we also have them available to mail at a cost of mere postage and a few sheets of already-stocked stationery.

Purchasing: Getting our new vendor partners paid promptly and accounting for all purchasing activity is vital. To facilitate the process, we employ a purchase order system and a chart of accounts tracking payment time lines that we adhere to without exception. Regional offices are in touch with our central payables department several times weekly to give mutual updates on purchases, shipments, payment due dates and cut checks.

Addressing personnel needs: One of the benefits of expanding is offering new career opportunities to our employees. Besides the sales and operations manager position, we also usually appoint one or two key foremen who can run crews and provide irrigation support. The manager usually wears the hat of "renovations" or "enhancements" foreman for at least the first year. We are always supportive and will dispatch additional personnel from Denver on an as-needed basis if the branch falls behind or sells a large project it cannot handle alone. Once revenue levels are adequate at a new site - about \$15,000 to \$20,000 annually for enhancement work, for example - we add a dedicated enhancement supervisor, area supervisor, etc.

Maintaining equipment: Our branch offices are generally within a 90-minute drive from our main office, so we are able to provide some preventive maintenance support in the



Tom Fochtman, president, CoCal Landscape Services, Denver, Colo. Photo: Robb Williamson

form of regularly scheduled weekly visits. We also seek out the right local small engine shop that agrees to give us preferential treatment on breakdowns. This method has generally worked well and has freed us from having to carry backup equipment. Also, we limited hiring in-house mechanics to branches that have higher maintenance needs.

Executing marketing and sales: The branch sales and operations manager closes the work, but the main office provides all the collateral materials and direct mail efforts, assists in preparing proposals and participates in the sales process when needed. The branch manager calls for help when he or she needs owner involvement in an interview or support in putting together a large proposal package. At the branch level, we join building and facility associations, network with local landscape architects and general contractors and build relationships with key commercial property managers.

Maintaining accountability: General accountability throughout the entire company is crucial – and especially critical when expanding into branch offices. Employees can feel isolated at a new branch so the main office

supports the branch through development by scheduling regular visits. Likewise, our branch sales and operations managers attend operation meetings at the main office and update everyone on their activities. Designated branch officers also attend monthly safety committee meetings, issue parts and labor statements monthly, etc.

Setting up and maintaining a thriving branch operation is not easy. There is an up-

side to developing successful branch operations if you are diligent in the undertaking. Our branch revenue accounted for 22 percent of our overall 2002 revenue, and observing our branch employees' growth has been rewarding. – Tom Fochtman **LL**

The author is president, CoCal Landscape Services, Denver, Colo., and can be reached at 303/399-7877 or at cocal@rmi.net.

5 KEYS TO *Opening a Branch Office*

1. Start by assessing if the prospective market can muster enough work to sustain a location.
2. Research area competitors and market climate.
3. Look inside the company for a qualified middle manager to lead the new office.
4. When looking for a facility, remember security and technological capacity outweigh image. For most maintenance contractors, customer site visits are infrequent at best.
5. To prevent feelings of isolation, be sure to provide branches with strong personnel and administrative support, fluid correspondence and frequent site visits.

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We hired a marketing specialist, whose focus was relationship marketing, and this cost between \$4,000 and \$6,000, but was well worth the expense. Together, we determined that we needed to know two primary things before we moved forward with our expansion plans – how customers found us and why they selected our company. The secondary things we needed to know, though equally important, were how clients rated us, if they were aware of the menu of services we offered, and what we could do to serve them better.

To answer these questions, we put together a survey with the following response options:

- In asking how clients found us, we mentioned referral, direct mail, *Yellow Pages*, our trucks/equipment, charity participation or staff contact.
- To determine why clients chose us, we offered reputation, expertise, quality, price/value, responsiveness or "other."
- In rating the company, we used excellent, good, fair and poor, and clients were asked to grade our responsiveness, staff members' courtesy, service value and quality, how we left their property and their overall satisfaction.

The latter part of this survey addressed the important issue of how clients perceive our company.

This survey helped us determine clients' needs and market our new services at the same time.

Bob Kinnucan,
president,
Kinnucan Co.

Photo:
Kinnucan Co.




We realized this information was invaluable at helping us plan. As a result, we continue to use this survey periodically throughout the year and include it with invoices, so sending it costs us nothing except for the postal reply prepaid stamp we attach that costs us less than \$1 apiece and facilitates the survey return. As the surveys are returned, the original is kept in the front office and a copy is sent to the respective account manager so we receive real-time client feedback. Then, each month we draw a returned survey and give the winner \$100 worth of our services to thank them for their help and encourage them to answer future surveys.

We have also used client surveys as a way to expand our presence in certain markets. We wanted to know if they used professional services, what types and if they would prefer to switch to a single-source contractor if that was an option. To entice people to respond we had a drawing offering a free weekend at a downtown Chicago hotel. The hotel agreed to partner with us on this survey giveaway in exchange for promotion on the actual survey. By adding a simple hotel advertisement on the 6,000 surveys, we saved ourselves \$800 – the price of the weekend getaway.

The client surveys we use also help us sell add-on services. We utilize a simple postcard survey that is piggybacked with our invoices and statements. On the top of the postcard we use a simple, catchy phrase – "I need help." From the service listing, clients check off work they need done and return the card. Upon return, we file the postcard in the office and send a copy to the proper sales manager for follow-up.

We also have used telemarketing to collect client feedback. Staff members phone clients the day after services are performed, asking how well services were performed, if properties were left neat and clean, if crews were polite and considerate, etc. We use our own employees rather than hiring telemarketers, which keeps the cost to a minimum.

An effective client survey serves as a scorecard, a marketing tool and a planning device for any company that has client satisfaction and profit on its mind. – Bob Kinnucan 

The author is president, Kinnucan Co., Lake Bluff, Ill., and can be reached at 847/234-5327.

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(continued on page 112)



The BedShaper's self-propelled design increased the speed of Jim Grubb's work. Photo: BedShaper

V-200



V-300



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Product Profile

(continued from page 110)

"Especially in hilly southern Indiana, [the machine] is really just quicker and easier to use," Grubb said.

Grubbworm maintains mostly residential landscapes, with some commercial and recreational clients on its roster. One of only a handful of Bedford-area landscapers, "I know I've gotten a (few) jobs because I have the new edger," Grubb said. Most competitors, he mentioned, still employ manual edgers – some even shovels – for cutting beds. "I think the unit gives us some advantage [over competitors]," he enthused.

Available in a 900 Series walk-behind version and 950 Series tractor-mounted attachment configuration, the BedShaper has a notched, spring-steel blade allowing adjustable cutting depths between ½ and 4½ inches.

What the unit may miss in aggressive cutting ("I sometimes wish it could cut a little deeper," Grubb pointed out), it makes up for in "user-friendliness," Grubb said. While he hasn't quantified it, Grubb agreed

'The self-propulsion makes this edger really easy to handle after getting the hang of it, and it gets the job done fast and well. I think the unit gives us some advantage over competitors.'


– Jim Grubb

his 900 Series has increased his productivity, returning to its self-propulsion as the feature that most satisfies him.

"The self-propulsion makes this edger really easy to handle after getting the hang

of it, and it gets the job done fast and well," Grubb explained.

Versatility has been the other major frill of the product, Grubb said, pointing out he has not only reshaped and cut many new beds with it, but has taken advantage of its trenching ability in installing everything from lights to drip irrigation units.

"I had one large job [at Bedford's Stone Crest Golf Community], where a client was putting in his own concrete bed liners," Grubb recounted. Where the digging phase for the labyrinth of concrete would have taken many more hours, "I cut the width of the areas – each about 2-inches-deep-by-1-foot-wide – for him, saving time and effort." – Enloe Wilson 

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at ewilson@lawnandlandscape.com.

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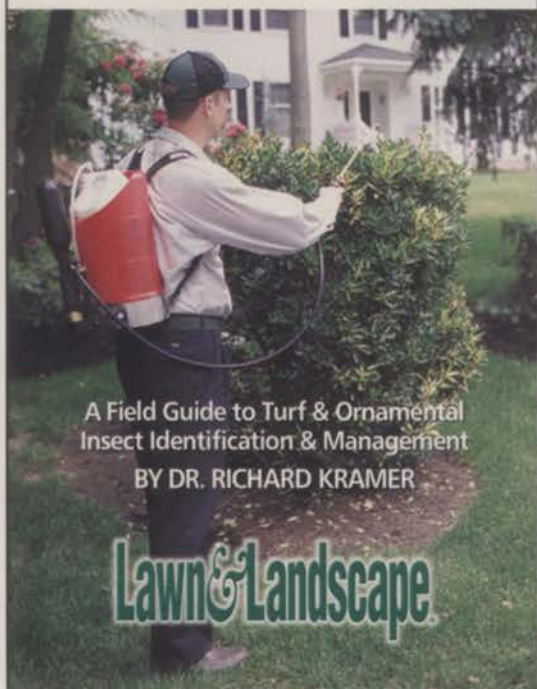


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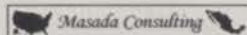
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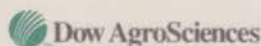
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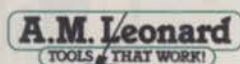
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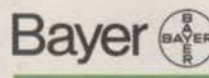
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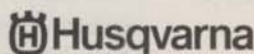
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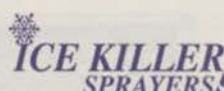
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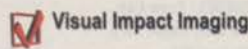
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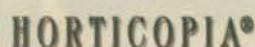
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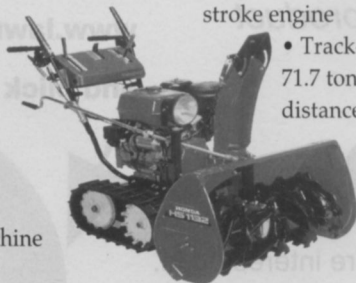
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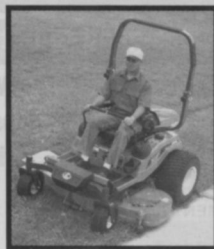
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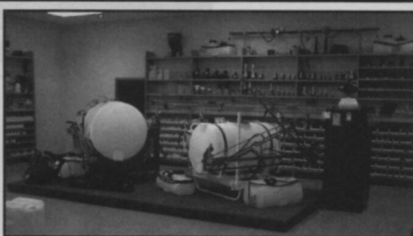


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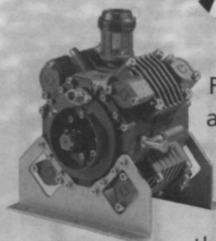


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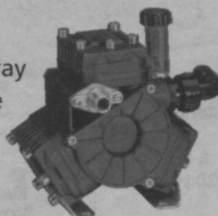
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With Power Boost Tornado™ Technology, our 2-stroke engine I.Q. is off the charts. Besides giving you more power throughout the R.P.M. range, Power Boost Tornado™ Engines burn fuel more efficiently — keeping emissions well below all EPA and California requirements. That makes them an intelligent choice for landscaping professionals. And the superior crankcase design delivers better lubrication for longer engine life! To harness the Tornado and enhance your bottom line, visit your Echo dealer or call 1-800-432-ECHO (3246). On the Web, www.echo-usa.com.



HALF A PIECE OF MESA IS STILL MESA.

HALF AN SCU IS A WASTE.



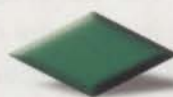
No matter how you break it down, MESA is superior to SCUs. When you cut a sulfur-coated urea granule in half, the nitrogen is catastrophically released. This causes flush growth and loss of nitrogen due to leaching and volatilization. MESA is methylene urea and sulfate ammonia combined in a single granule. The result? Astounding rich green color and response which

outlasts the coatings. And **Lebanon Pro 15-2-5 40% MESA with Merit*** is an excellent way to protect your turf. MESA with Merit provides the ultimate in turf quality and protection against damaging grub infestations. Don't risk your turf. Use MESA. For more information, see your Lebanon Distributor or call 1-800-233-0628. Or visit our website at www.lebturf.com.



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nitrogen and fertilization, simply go to
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