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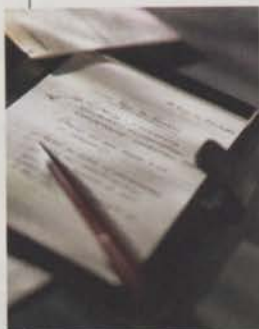
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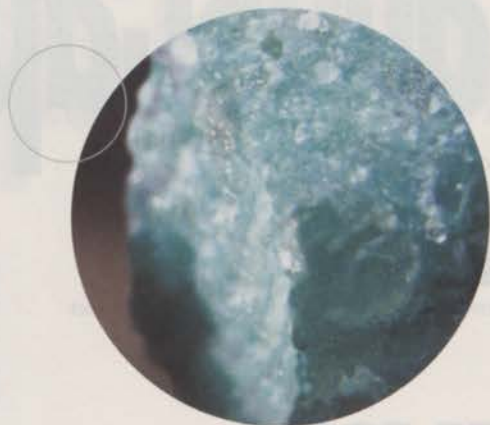
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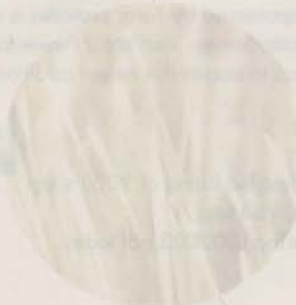
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Visit our Online Product Directory for detailed information about industry products, plus contact information for suppliers and manufacturers.
<http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/product/>

EXCITING NEW WEB TOOLS



Lawn & Landscape Online now boasts two new Internet resources. The magazine's recently released "Wage & Compensation Report" and "State of the Industry Report" now are available online – and accessible via specialized toolbars on the Web site's diverse menu.

Based on a Research USA Wage & Compensation survey sponsored by John Deere, the "Wage & Compensation Report" features in-depth information and telling statistics about the green industry's workforce. Visit <http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/pages/wageandcompensationreport2003.asp> to access this new resource.

The "State of the Industry Report," sponsored by Toro, provides a wealth of detailed articles about the current shape of various industry issues. Visit <http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/pages/stateoftheindustryreport2003.asp> to access this recent addition.

TOP 100 LIST

Lawn & Landscape Online features a detailed listing of 2003's top 100 landscape companies nationwide. Visit <http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/files/soiTop1002003.pdf> today.



BEST OF WEB

Beginning with this issue, *Lawn & Landscape* will highlight an online forum topic each month in the "Best of Web" section. These Web-related articles will tackle topics discussed on our online Message Board. Check out page 46 for the first in this series of features – a look at teaching clients how to water properly.

Lawn & Landscape ONLINE Extras

ONLINE EXTRAS

Browse *Lawn & Landscape* Online for a collection of exclusive Web stories relative to this month's issue:

- This month, visit *Lawn & Landscape* Online for information on how Joshua Eike uses networking opportunities with the Young Entrepreneurs Organization to his advantage.
- Look for an extra Web article about future innovations in green industry software.
- Check our January Online Extras section for a list of online grower resources, so you can access information that will help you nurture your nursery relationships.
- Visit *Lawn & Landscape* Online to find out how legislative changes are impacting IPM practices.

WEB TOOLS

DAILY NEWS

Green industry news updates every day. www.lawnandlandscape.com

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A comprehensive list of conferences, trade shows and seminars for the landscape professional. www.lawnandlandscape.com/events

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MESSAGE BOARD

The industry's most interactive message board. www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard

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Lawn & Landscape

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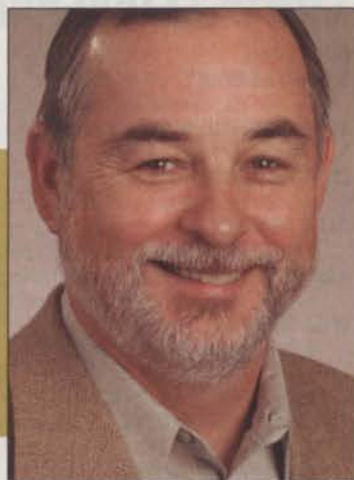
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USE READER SERVICE #12

Web Improvements

Roger Stanley is editor-in-chief and associate publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*. He can be reached at 800/456-0707 or rstanley@lawnandlandscape.com.



Each month, more than 54,000 individuals log on to the *Lawn & Landscape* Web site (www.lawnandlandscape.com). In the online world, that's a very impressive number of visitors, as is the fact that the site registers a total of more than seven million page views per year. This much participation by *Lawn & Landscape* subscribers is hardly by accident. The magazine was the first in the industry to launch a Web site, and the commitment since has been unmatched. *Lawn & Landscape* has a dedicated Web editor, Ali Anderson; two weekly e-newsletters; daily news postings and more business content than any other online industry source. We believe in the Web because it can provide more business information to you faster, it allows you to search for the information you need, and it's interactive.

To remain the online leader, we're announcing two further improvements to our Web site in 2004.

The first is an investment in new software for our Message Board to allow segmentation of discussions by individual topics. The new software will allow us to create an "off-topic" area, which a number of subscribers have requested. The off-topic area helps separate general discussions from business. Finally, we'll have a number of site monitors to keep all discussions professional. The result is that you'll be able to join a specific discussion that interests you and there will be less tolerance of individuals who want to disrupt the information-sharing process.

FYI to any who have not checked out our Message Board – we've had a few subscribers tell us that the contractor-to-contractor advice has saved their businesses.

The second enhancement is that the Web site will become truly dedicated to industry professionals in 2004. This is possible by an investment that creates a unique password for each subscriber to get on the site. The password is tied to your subscription because that is how

we determine who qualifies to receive *Lawn & Landscape* in the first place. So, homeowners, reporters and others will no longer be allowed on the Web site.

You probably don't really need yet another password in addition to those you use for ATM machines, work and home computers, building entrances and perhaps even for car and garage door keypads, so we've tried to make the password as easy to find as possible. You don't have to do a thing – it's already printed right on your mailing label (in the sample label, left, an arrow points to the location of the password on the mailing label, but to get your own actual password please refer to your own mailing label).

So, the next time you visit the site, you will be greeted with the following message:

"To view the site we need to verify that you have a subscription to our magazine. In order to do this, you must enter your Name ID and ZIP Code into these two fields."

As soon as this match is found, the next screen will show your contact information – your name, mailing address and email address – which is necessary to email you your login information.

Next, click "continue." The next page will cross-reference between your "Name ID" and "My Account," if you already had one. Click "Continue" to have your new login information emailed to you. A link in the email will direct you back to the Web site's login page, where you can click on "Login" to enter it. If you check the box that asks you if you want your login information remembered, you will never have to login again.

We'd love to hear back from you on the changes and any other online improvements you would like to have us look into. The Web is increasing as a resource for business and we are committed to providing you with the best site in the business. ■

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USE READER SERVICE #13

Keep Busy this Winter

Marty Grunder is a speaker, consultant, author and landscape contractor with Grunder Landscaping Co. He can be reached at 937/847-9944 and via www.martygrunder.com.



What are you doing this winter?

If you're like me, you are frequently asked, "So, you're a landscaper, eh? Now, what do you do in the winter – go to Florida for three months?"

For years I would reply, "Well, we plow snow and wait for spring." Then one winter, about 10 years ago, I realized what the smartest landscapers do in the winter – they plan and strategize and try to find ways to improve their businesses. And that is exactly what

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO WHAT THE OTHER SUCCESSFUL CONTRACTORS ARE DOING IN YOUR AREA. SUCCESS LEAVES CLUES, AND CHANCES ARE THERE IS A FIRM IN YOUR AREA THAT MAY HAVE SOME GOOD IDEAS YOU CAN USE. — MARTY GRUNDER

you should be doing this winter – looking for ways to improve your businesses. And few items can have greater impact on your business's success than a well-thought-out marketing plan.

I want you to take 10 minutes right now – not tomorrow, right now – to write down the ways you are attracting people to do business with your company. Think about all of them. Do not read on until you have written them all down.

Now I want you to note next to each of those items the amount of business you gained from each endeavor. I'm going to guess that many of you cannot do that. And that's my message for you this month – you need to know what works and what does not work. You should know where every new client you obtain comes from. This information is invaluable in deciding what to do in the future.

While you cannot always tell what does not work in marketing, you can always tell what does work. Let me explain. We have stuffed our newsletter in a

local suburban newspaper for years and we are certain that it generates business for us. The proof is in the many jobs that we have sold to folks who called us and said, "I saw your newsletter in my newspaper." Conversely, we also know for certain that advertising in the *Yellow Pages* does not work for us. The majority of the people who called us from the *Yellow Pages* ad were looking for the best price and we were unable to convert those leads into sales. We quit advertising there many years ago; we knew it was not working.

Sure, it's not always that easy to determine what marketing methods are working and which ones are not working. And, as a rule, marketing that is expensive must be measurable and marketing that is not easy to measure needs to be inexpensive.

Some marketing methods that every company should use that are very affordable include job site signs, signage on all four sides of your trucks and company vehicles, uniformed employees and newsletters. If you are not doing these four things, start doing them today.

Finally, take some time right now and put your company's marketing plan together.

A couple of points to note: I suggest that you spend no more than 2 percent of your gross sales on marketing. And I strongly recommend you pay close attention to what the other successful landscape contractors are doing in your area. Success leaves clues, and chances are there is a firm in your area that may have some good ideas you can use.

Take a shot at a marketing plan. Your first attempt won't be nearly as effective as the future ones, and that's OK. One thing I know for sure – what matters most is that you do some type of a marketing plan, no matter what kind. The sooner you put a plan together, the sooner you will hear your phone ring.

Now, when somebody asks you what you're going to do this winter, tell them, "I'm going to be working on my marketing plan!"

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USE READER SERVICE #14

The Operating Room

Develop a Budget

Jack Mattingly is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting. He can be reached via email at jkmattngly@comcast.net, through his Web site www.mattinglyconsulting.com or at 770/517-9476.



"Let's develop a budget." Those are sometimes ugly, scary words that business owners dread. But to the astute businessperson, this is an absolute necessity. Regardless of business size, every company needs to develop a financial budget for the upcoming year. This is not an easy task, but once an initial budget is completed, the process becomes clearer.

There are five good reasons to develop a budget:

1. A budget puts the business owner in better control of the business because he or she has a clear plan.
2. A budget serves as a monthly scorecard to evaluate business expenditures.
3. Having a budget identifies the break-even costs, which helps determine necessary mark-ups on labor and materials to recover overhead and make a profit.
4. Budgeting becomes a discipline and a motivator by helping to increase profitability.
5. A budget becomes a business's friend throughout the year, allowing management to track the company's progress and adjust accordingly.

The initial chore in setting up a budget is to clearly identify and understand each line item in the chart of accounts. Having a chart of accounts conducive to the green industry, rather than a generic contractor's chart, is important for clarity. Often, an industry consultant can help outline an industry-specific chart. To make the chart easily understood, write a short paragraph to describe the expenses that will be charged to each particular line. For example:

Account – Direct Labor

Description – Total amount of labor used to perform the work, which does not include indirect labor, such as equipment maintenance, yard, etc.

Account – Equipment Rental

Description – Cost of equipment rented for a specific job.

With these descriptions, everyone with access to your financials understands the allocation process.

With an established chart of accounts, budgeting can begin. Have all of the previous year's financial information available to use as a reference, though not as a strict formula. A company will never have two years exactly alike and budgeting often involves some educated guesswork as to what will happen in the coming year. Understand also that the resulting numbers will not be entirely accurate. In fact, a company's first budget may not even be close. However, it is good practice to adjust the budget periodically during the year as things fall into place.

Developing a clear and organized form will make filling in the financial blanks easier. In a spreadsheet, have spaces for the division, account name, description and a line to budget the dollars for each of the 12 months. Next to each month's total, leave space to write any notes.

Keep these preliminary forms in a notebook for future reference. Managers should feel free to make any applicable notes regarding how the dollar amounts were determined. These notes can be very valuable later in the year as the numbers require adjustment.

Involve as many people in the budgeting process as possible. Give everyone copies of the forms and accounts that are appropriate to their accountability and ask for their ideas. The ultimate objective should be to have individual departments develop budgets that work for them and that the owner agrees with. Each department is accountable to their respective budgets.

With approved numbers in hand, add this information to the company's financial software or an easily developed spreadsheet. The result is the final budget from which an owner can manage his or her business.

Each month, compare the final budget to the actual expenditures in all categories. If the numbers are off, there will be obvious discrepancies. A monthly review will give owners and managers more control of the business by knowing where every dollar was spent compared to what was budgeted. However, don't be afraid to adjust the budget, perhaps on a quarterly basis, to provide a better picture of where the company will be at year's end. ■

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What Exactly Is My Job?

Jean L. Seawright is president of Seawright & Associates in Winter Park, Fla. She can be contacted at 407/645-2433 or jpileggi@seawright.com.



I'm not a big follower of the Dilbert cartoon strip, but one of my favorite workplace cartoons pictures Wally asking the boss, "When will my raise be effective?" The boss answers, "The same time you are." Poor Wally. Maybe he just doesn't understand his job duties.

Detailed job descriptions are a vital part of an organization's infrastructure. As a business grows, roles become refined, duties are more defined and the organization obtains a better idea of the background, skills and experiences necessary for success in a position. This all should be captured in the job description.

WHY A JOB DESCRIPTION? In today's litigious environment, job descriptions are vital in positioning a company's response to a variety of legal claims, including work-related injuries, discrimination allegations and exemption classification challenges. Comprehensive and well-worded job descriptions can impact revenues and decision-making in a number of areas, such as:

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance. The ADA (enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC] and covering businesses with 15 or more employees) protects qualified individuals with disabilities who can perform the essential job functions with or without a reasonable accommodation. Job descriptions that accurately outline the essential job functions, specific qualifications, and physical and mental requirements for the position help management make proper and legally defensible decisions related to a candidate's qualification for a position, his or her ability to perform essential job functions, and the potential for making reasonable accommodations.

Department of Labor (DOL) and EEOC Compliance. Job descriptions that accurately reflect and define the exempt nature of a position can help a company meet DOL's burden of proof pertaining to overtime provisions. Additionally, job descriptions can help defend the company's position related to hiring the most qualified candidates, equal pay or other discrimination allegations related to

promotions, transfers and terminations.

Medical Leaves, FMLA and Workers' Compensation. If an employee is injured on the job, requests a medical leave, has a medical condition that could impact job duties, a physician can use the job description to help determine work-related limitations and restrictions. Often, these decisions are made based on a conversation between the employee and the physician. An employee might understate or overstate physical and mental demands, leading to inaccurate work releases that either prolong a claim or condition, or result in re-injury. If the job description correctly identifies the physical and mental demands, it could eliminate erroneous work limitation assessments.

Recruiting. Job descriptions can be used to develop classified advertisements, flyers or bulletins by identifying the profile of a qualified candidate for a given position.

Hiring Talent. Detailed job descriptions help managers focus efforts and questions during the interview process and can affect the quality of a hiring decision and the candidate selected.

Training and Development. Detailed job descriptions are excellent training tools that outline essential job functions and a position's purpose. They also can be used to evaluate performance, identify opportunities for improvement, refocus employees and enhance safety.

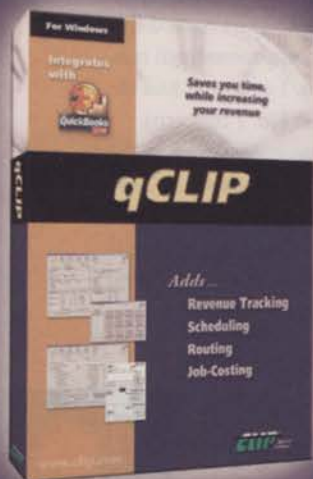
Organizational Development. As a company grows, detailed job descriptions provide direction to hiring managers and are valuable guides to assess productivity, efficiency, staffing and alternatives for reporting relationships.

THE ESSENTIALS. Job descriptions should be accurate, legal and detailed. They should include the following: position summary; background skills, abilities and qualifications; essential job duties; physical and mental demands (very specific); typical work environment; equipment used; reporting relationships; and a legal disclaimer pertaining to "employment at will" and stating that the job description is not all inclusive. All of these components are very important, or you could very well end up with a bunch of "Wallys." LL

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BUSINESS TODAY

Back to the Basics

Business growth was easier in the 1990s. With few exceptions, markets in all sectors of the economy were expanding, and optimism was in the air. In those days, business owners were more concerned about managing growth than sustaining it. Today's world is different, notes Paul Ratoff, a small-business consultant with Strategy Development Group. Now, growth is likely to come at the expense of a rival outfit, and there are more pitfalls to trap entrepreneurs, who have frantic needs to produce faster, cheaper and better products.

Rather than doing more – or less – with their businesses, landscape contractors should try something different, suggests Ratoff, suggesting solutions below:

Q: How is today's business climate different?

A: Today's concerns tend to be more focused on sustaining market share and gaining a competitive advantage. What worked for growth in the 1990s is becoming less effective in today's markets.

Q: How do businesses meet these challenges, and where do they go wrong?

A: A lot try to achieve growth and stem falling sales by adding more products and features, expanding their customer base and trying out new markets.

(continued on page 21)



FORECAST FOCUS

2004 Economic Outlook

In 2003, landscape contractors saw the slow growth and uncertainty of 2001 and 2002

dissipating. Though some excess rainfall pushed sales back, many landscape contractors finished 2003 ahead – the average industry growth being approximately 12.73 percent.

Consequently, most contractors feel the recession is vanishing and have a more positive outlook for 2004, many striving for 17 to 20 percent growth.

This year, the three most challenging issues landscape contractors expect to face include lack of quality laborers (53 percent of contractors named this as their No. 1 concern), competition against low-priced/unprofessional contractors (46 percent of contractors named this as their No. 1 concern), and the economy (43.3 percent of contractors named this as their No. 1 concern).

Concerning the economy, the majority of landscape contractors – 32.3 percent – feel that it will significantly improve by the second quarter of 2004, 29.4 percent feel that economic improvements won't come until the third quarter of 2004, 23.5 percent think they will see immediate improvements during the first quarter of 2004 and only 14.7 percent feel they have to wait until the fourth quarter of 2004 to see a boost in the economy.

When do you think the U.S. economy will significantly improve?

RESPONSE	% OF CONTRACTORS
First quarter 2004	23.5%
Second quarter 2004	32.3%
Third quarter 2004	29.4%
Fourth quarter 2004	14.7%

Source: Lawn & Landscape Online

BREAKING NEWS

Industry Veterans Reunite to Form Commercial Company

DALLAS – Three former Minor's Landscape Services' executives teamed up with their former chief executive officer, David Minor, to create a new commercial landscape management company – The Landscape Partners.

Comprised of executives from Minor's Landscape Services, the new company will offer commercial landscaping services for the Dallas/Fort Worth area, similar to the framework followed at Minor's Landscape Services years ago, points out Randy Ferrari, who will serve as president of The Landscape Partners. The company will also be led by industry veterans Rick Onstott and Tim Viehmann. Minor, who now serves as director of the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at Texas Christian University's M.J. Neeley School of Business and is president of Minor & Associates, which invests in start-ups, established entrepreneurial ventures and limited partnerships, will serve as chairman and supply capital funding for the new venture.

The formation of The Landscape Partners comes exactly five years after Minor's original landscape services firm was acquired by ServiceMaster's TruGreen landscape division in 1998. At that time, Minor's was one of Dallas/Fort Worth's largest providers of commercial

(continued on page 21)



David Minor

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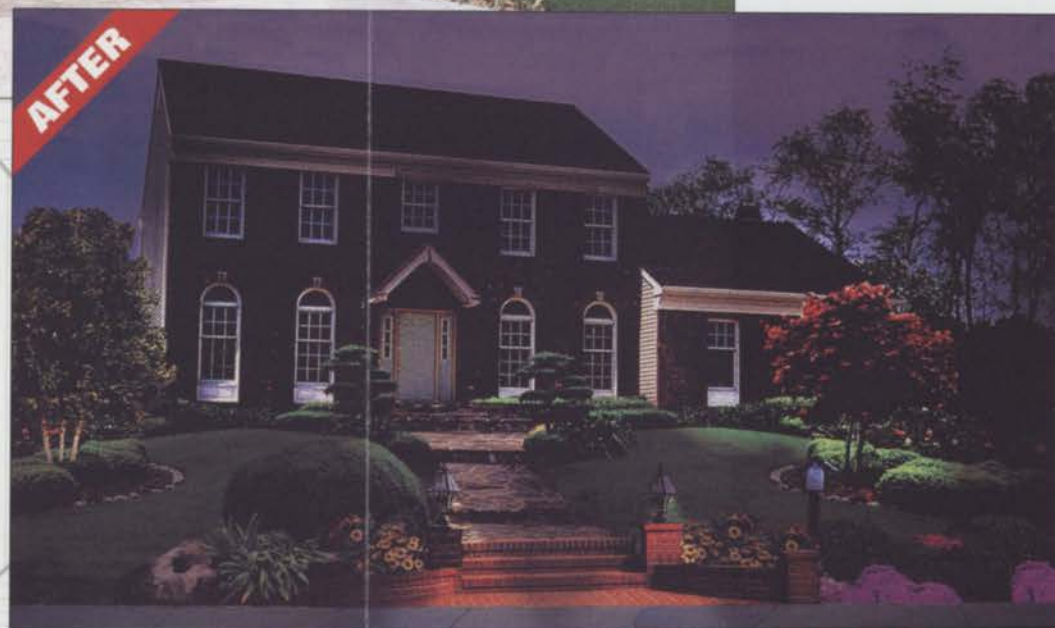
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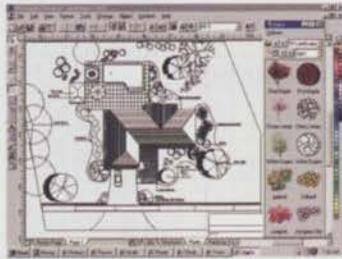
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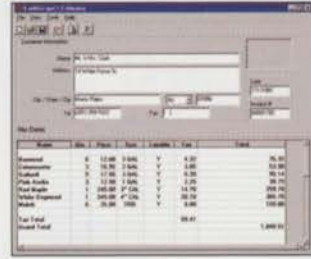
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"With this software, I can do it all. I can provide clients with before and after photos before the job is started. I can do one plan to show

measurements of proposed gardens and then in another plan, show all the color-coded plants. Then I can bring in the estimating tool and price the job. It gives clients a complete garden recipe to follow to create a beautiful landscape."

— Marilyn Dorota, owner/operator
Flower Bed Designs,
Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada



"Earthscapes helps my installation crews get the job done right the first time. Instead of deciphering a cryptic drawing, they see a

picture of how it's supposed to look and where plants are supposed to be placed. Their installation time and efficiency increases and, as a result, my profits increase. I owe half of my success to hard work and the other half to Earthscapes software."

— Kevin Corcoran, landscape designer
Wells Nursery, Schenectady, N.Y.



"When we bought the Earthscapes software in August 2002, we were able to learn it in one day. The owner's manual tells you

all you need to know and the program also includes a tutorial on CD that walks you through the design process.

And the cloning tool is worth its weight in gold. It really helps clients visualize the finished product."

— Carrie Borgini, landscape designer
Mayfield Brothers Landscape,
Stanton, Ill.

(continued from page 18)

landscaping services – boasting \$12 million in annual revenue.

“During our years with Minor’s Landscape Services, we achieved a formula for success in this industry, and now we’re excited to have the opportunity to join forces and do it again,” Ferrari says. “The four of us have followed different paths over the past five years, but all of us believed in the systems that we implemented years ago. All of us gained valuable experience with other organizations or within other industries and believe we were all challenged by our experiences. Combining our past knowledge with what we have gained since the period of consolidation makes the timing of this startup very appealing. Success will not come easy as we still have competition in our market. However, our confidence comes from our past successes and that alone is an edge we plan to exploit.”

SUPPLIER INSIGHTS

Bayer To Spin Off Chemical Business

FRANKFURT, Germany – In an effort to concentrate on its pharmaceutical, consumer health-care and agriculture brands and some remaining specialty chemicals, Bayer announced on Friday that it would spin off most of its chemical businesses.

Bayer Chemicals is to be combined with certain parts of the polymers business in a new company with the provisional name “NewCo” The aim for the company is to be listed on the stock market under a new name by early 2005. NewCo will have sales of about \$6.4 billion per year and employ 20,000 people in 20 countries, according to Bayer.

Following the reorganization, Bayer will have three operating subgroups — Bayer HealthCare, Bayer CropScience and Bayer

Back to the Basics (continued from page 18)

Q: Does it work?

A: It can for some, if they’re expanding along logical lines and they put the infrastructure and financing in place to handle that. If they don’t do the proper planning, they quickly get stretched too thin. As a result, each part of their business begins receiving less attention and there’s a constant outcry for more resources as new skill sets and infrastructures are added to the mix. You wind up with an organization that is overcomplex, inefficient and undercapitalized. Even if you do gain additional sales, they are often at the expense of lower profit margins.

Q: What other strategies do companies use?

A: Some of them do less, meaning they drop peripheral service lines, cut a portion of their customer base, and try to go back to basics and focus on their core businesses.

Q: What’s wrong with this?

A: Nothing, except that it is not enough to “go back to what you know” if you’re still not growing.

Q: So what alternatives do you suggest?

A: Examine a lot of variables, decide where you can best invest your time and effort toward expansion and then shift your focus into that area – making sure you have done the planning necessary and have the

financing and company culture in place to make the change.

For instance, companies that want to grow should be looking out for emerging markets or market niches that they can respond to. They should be thinking ahead about special services, technologies or skills that they believe will be in greater demand in the future. They should constantly be figuring out ways to become the lowest-cost provider of services that they can. They should be forecasting the market to determine whether there are resources that they can obtain now that might become important down the road.

Q: Some of this sounds like what business owners should be doing constantly, just as a matter of course. Is it?

A: Theoretically, yes. But, many times, small business owners are running all the aspects of their companies themselves and they just don’t have the time or perspective to do this sort of “big picture” thinking on a routine basis. Also, going in a new direction may mean giving up something they are currently doing, because they don’t want to become overloaded by just doing more. And shifting resources away from the familiar is not an easy thing to do – unless you really have the confidence that you are making the right choice.

MaterialScience. Bayer CropScience business units include Bayer Environmental Science, which manufactures insecticides for the turf and ornamentals field, as well as the structural pest control market. Bayer will be left with 96,000 workers, and the company says no jobs will be lost in the restructuring. It is already halfway through a three-year program to drop 15,000 jobs.

“Both Bayer and NewCo will benefit from the split, because a stock market listing will be highly attractive for both shareholders and employees,” explained Bayer CEO Werner Wenning.

IN THE NEWS

Despite Losses, FMC Sees Progress

PHILADELPHIA – FMC Corp. has reported a net loss of \$3.4 million for the third quarter of 2003 versus a net income of \$28.2 million in 2002’s equivalent period. But despite seemingly grim financial figures, the diversified chemical company sees improvement.

“We made steady progress on all our objectives,” observes William Walter, FMC chairman, president and chief executive of-

(continued on page 24)

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 Bayer Environmental Science

it's not about
EMPTY PROMISES



Market Trends

(continued from page 21)

ficer, explaining that though the external business environment is challenging, specifically in industrial chemicals, FMC will continue to meet or exceed its commitments now and in the future.

NEWS TO NOTE

Scotts Reports Record Fiscal Year

MARYSVILLE, Ohio – The Scotts Co. announced record sales and net income for fiscal 2003. Sales in the fourth quarter also set a record for the period, and the green industry company recorded its first profitable fourth quarter since 1994 on an adjusted basis.

"Our success in 2003 went beyond our financial statements," notes Jim Hagedorn, chairman and chief executive officer. "We made significant strides to expand our brands in new categories and improve our overall presence with the independent nursery and hardware trade."

(continued on page 26)

People

Shindaiwa President **Tom Bunch** is the newest member of the company's board of directors.

A. Charles Fischer announced his plans to retire from his president and chief executive officer position at Dow AgroSciences, effective Feb. 1. **Jerome Peribere**, current vice president of agricultural chemicals, has been named Fischer's successor.

Environmental Designs recently added three new staff members. **Myles Tangalin** joined the firm as a senior landscape architect, **Devon Hukill** is manager of the landscape enhancement division and **Leigh Anderson** came on as manager of marketing and business development.

David Champagne was named hooklift product manager at Stellar Industries.

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting appointed **Victor Samano** as regional sales manager for Orange and San Diego counties in California.

Doug Fender, executive director of Turfgrass Producers International, was named to the board of directors of The Evergreen Foundation.

Michael Ferraro, co-founder of PlantFind.com received Northwood University's 2003 Arthur E. Turner Award for Entrepreneurial Innovation.

Valley Crest Tree Co. promoted **Doug Henderson** to senior business developer for the specimen tree division.



Devon Hukill,
Myles Tangalin,
Doug Fender

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Market Trends

(continued from page 24)

Scotts also announced that it expects to improve adjusted net income in fiscal 2004 by at least another 10 percent.

For fiscal 2003, ending Sept. 30, 2003, Scotts reported net sales of \$1.91 billion, up 9 percent from \$1.75 billion a year earlier. Excluding the impact of foreign exchange rates, sales for the year increased by 6 percent over the prior year. Adjusted net income for the year increased to \$114.7 million, up 10 percent from \$104.3 million for the same period last year.

Scotts LawnService, the company's fastest growing business, had revenues of \$110 million, a 46 percent increase from 2002.

"The return to profitability in the fourth quarter stems from an ongoing shift in the timing of shipments as well as the continued growth in Scotts LawnService and overall expense control," Hagedorn asserts. "While the profit this quarter was small, it was a major improvement from last year and it gives us great confidence in our ability to report three profitable quarters each year going forward." ■

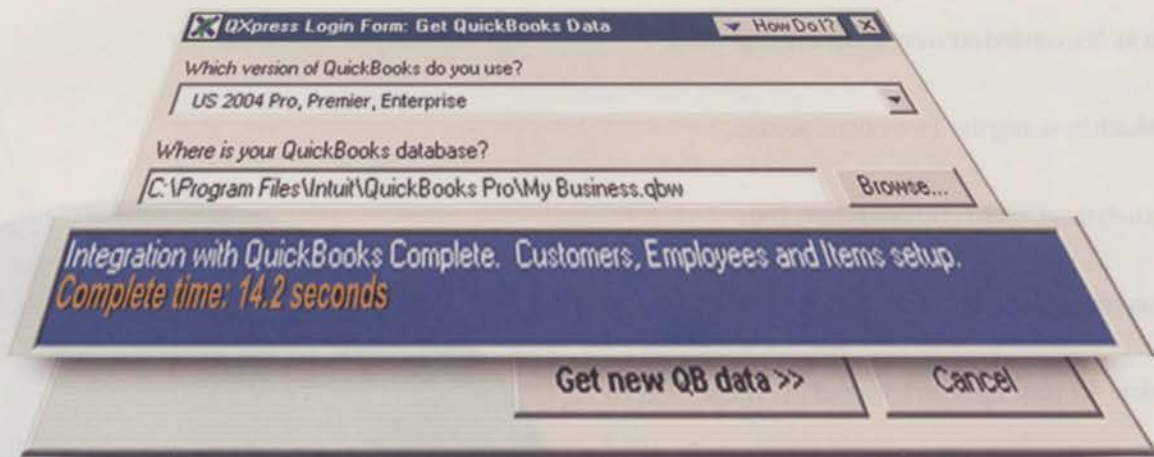
Association NEWS

Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment elected their 2004 governing board. Officers are: Elin Miler, chairman; Dan Unteidt, vice chairman; William Burke, treasurer; and Laurie Treu, past chairman. Additionally, Jeffrey Dobslaw and Andy Symons were elected to three-year terms on the board.

The **Southern Nursery Association** honored Austin Hagan, a faculty member at Auburn University, with the Porter Henegar Memorial Award recognizing his outstanding contributions to ornamental horticulture research.

The **British Columbia Landscape & Nursery Association** is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Since its founding in 1953, the group has grown to 600 members representing growers, landscapers and garden centers throughout the province.

The **Independent Turf and Ornamental Distributors Association** (ITODA) announced plans for a brand revitalization effort that will identify strengths and include promotional efforts, such as Web site enhancements, new member support materials and group advertising.



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Book Report

CHUCK TWIST RECOMMENDS...

The Other Face of America: Chronicles of the Immigrants Shaping our Future

by Jorge Ramos

Employing Hispanic workers remains a visible industry trend, but in an uneasy, post-9/11 social climate, some contractors find themselves in the precarious position of justifying their immigrant workforce to those whose perceptions have been jaded by terrorist attacks.

In *The Other Face of America: Chronicles of the Immigrants Shaping our Future*, Author Jorge Ramos dissects the immigrant experience as it relates to employment, culture and integration into American life by featuring several immigrants' case studies.

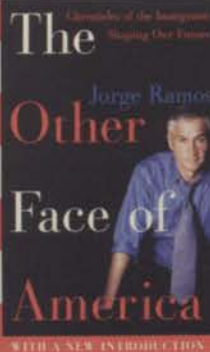
"It discusses the positive contributions immigrants make to the United States, explaining that legal and undocumented immigrants contribute nearly \$10 billion per year to the U.S. economy," explains Chuck Twist, president, TNT Lawn & Landscape Management, Stillwater, Okla.

Twist, who recommends the book, says "it goes into detail about employers of immigrant workers, reasons why they employ them instead of U.S. workers, and what would happen to the U.S. economy if all the immigrants left," Twist says.

Twist points to chapters on topics ranging from INS raids of businesses employing undocumented workers to chapters analyzing the AFL-CIO's 2000 decision to grant amnesty to the six million undocumented U.S. immigrants.

Ramos' book is especially important for any landscape company that employs Hispanic workers, Twist says. "After all, we should try to understand where are workers are from, why they are here and what they want out of their lives and jobs," he notes. "Most importantly, we should try to understand who they are. They leave family, friends and home for an opportunity that does not exist in their country—one that Americans take so much for granted." —Will Nepper

The author is staff writer with *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at wnepper@lawnandlandscape.com. Purchase this book by calling Megan Erickson at 800/456-0707 or visiting www.lawnandlandscape.com/store.



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Calendar

TO ENSURE that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 10 to 12 weeks in advance to Lawn & Landscape, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113.

JAN. 12-15 Turfgrass IPM Short Course, College Park, Md. Contact: 301/405-3913 or www.pest.umd.edu/events/events.html

JAN. 13-15 Virginia Certified Crew Chief Training Program, Richmond, Va. Contact: 540/942-8873

JAN. 14 Ohio Commercial Pesticide Applicator Recertification Conference, Perrysburg, Ohio. Contact: 614/292-4070 or www.pested.osu.edu

JAN. 14-16 Mid-Am Horticultural Trade Show, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 847/526-2010 or www.midam.org

JAN. 18-20 Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association Winter Conference & Trade Show, Omaha, Neb. Contact: 816/233-1481 or www.nnla.org

JAN. 19-22 Annual Michigan Turfgrass Conference, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660 or www.michiganturfgrass.org

JAN. 21-23 Iowa Nursery & Landscape Association Winter Convention & Trade Show, Des Moines, Iowa. Contact: 816/233-1481 or <http://www.iowaanla.org>

JAN. 26-28 Central Environmental Nursery and Trade Show ("CENTS") 2004 and OSU Nursery Short Course, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/825-5062

JAN. 27-29 Midwest Turf Expo, Indianapolis, Ind. Contact: 765/494-8039 or www.mrtf.org

JAN. 30-31 Associated Landscape Contractors of America 2004 Masters in Management, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 800/395-2522 or www.alca.org

FEB. 4 Ohio Commercial Pesticide Applicator Recertification Conference, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 614/292-4070 or www.pested.osu.edu

FEB. 5-7 New England Grows, Boston, Mass. Contact: 508/653-3009 or www.NEGrows.org

FEB. 5-8 Associated Landscape Contractors of America 2004 Executive Forum, San Diego, Calif. Contact: 800/395-2522 or www.alca.org

FEB. 16-19 Virginia Turfgrass Council Turfgrass Short Course, Charlottesville, Va. Contact: 540/942-8873

FEB. 17-21 Turfgrass Producers International Midwinter Conference, Santa Barbara, Calif. Contact: 800/405-8873 or www.TurfGrassSod.org/events.html

FEB. 25-26 "Designing an Efficient Landscape Irrigation System" Course, Davis, Calif. Contact: 800/752-0881 or www.extension.ucdavis.edu/agriculture

MARCH 1-4 New England Regional Turfgrass Conference & Show, Providence, R.I. Contact: 401/848-0004 or www.NERTF.com

MARCH 2-5 National Truck Equipment Association's 40th Annual Convention & Work Truck Show, Baltimore, Md. Contact: 330/666-3450 or www.ntea.com

MARCH 4-7 Nashville Lawn & Garden Show, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: 615/876-7680 or www.nashvillelawnandgardenshow.com

MARCH 19-20 Associated Landscape Contractors of America 2004 Masters in Management, Burlingame, Calif. Contact: 800/395-2922 or www.alca.org

MARCH 25-28 Associated Landscape Contractors of America Student Career Days, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/395-2922 or www.alca.org

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On

Paper

Insightful Invoice

Lawn care operators (LCOs) often find themselves handling fertilization jobs while the homeowners are away. For this reason, Shannon Roland, office manager, Roland Lawn Service, New London, Mo., says her company created an invoicing form that a technician can leave at a property after completing an application.

The form was created six years ago during a brainstorming session with company fertilizer technicians to determine what information each customer needs to know about an application, including the cost. The invoice provides a customer with any comments the LCO had about the job and an easy-to-understand checklist of information, such as the type and amount of fertilizer used.

"The technician fills out each invoice with his or her name, phone and license number so the customer knows exactly who sprayed their lawn," Roland says. "The form also allows customers to contact the applicator if they have any questions about the job or the materials used."

Because the form informs clients of the work LCOs complete during their absence, Roland says the invoice is a requirement for establishing good customer relations. "We leave it at the door for every customer so they know that we've been there and what we have done," he says.

Once the invoice is filled out, the LCO tears off a carbon copy and leaves it on the customer's front door. The LCO takes the original copy back to the office and enters the information into Roland Lawn Service's computer system.

All completed forms get filed away because the Department of Agriculture also regularly examines the basic information of each application, Roland says. The department checks the documents for each LCO's license and to see if they are abiding by all of the state's regulations, which is why each LCO records the time of the application and the wind speed and direction on the invoice. "Having copies of the forms in a separate place really helps us out because all of the information that we are required to have by law is down on one piece of paper," Roland says. "If we are ever checked, the Department of Agriculture can just come by and flip to the right file and find out all of the information they need to know about the job."

Although the invoice system allows Roland to easily find and provide the department with the required information, the form is mostly used as a service to the customers, which is why the invoice format has undergone very few changes since it was developed. "We try to stay with the same format because it has really worked for us," Roland says. "And the form is really easy for the customers to read." — Kevin McConville

The author is a Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached via nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

ROLAND
LAWN SERVICE
12223 Stable Drive
New London, MO 63459
573-221-2717

Customer _____
Address _____
Date ___/___/200__ Time: _____ a.m. p.m. Wind: N S E W at ___ mph

Temp: _____
Target Pest: White Clover Dandelion Broadleaf Crabgrass Grassy Weeds Non Selective Weed Control
 Surface Insects Bagworms White Grubs Other Insects Disease - Type _____

____ Preemergence weed control with slow release fertilizer
____ Preemergence weed control
____ Broadleaf weed control with slow release fertilizer
____ Broadleaf weed control
____ Insect control
____ Spot treat weeds
____ Winter fertilizer
____ Insect control on ornamentals (bagworms etc.)
____ non selective weed control (total kill of all weeds), parking lots, curbs and landscape beds

amount

used Materials
____ Trimec 992 EPA Reg # 2217-656
____ Trimec plus EPA Reg # 2217-709
____ 7-3-22 slow release granular fertilizer with Barricade
____ 18-3-18 slow release granular fertilizer with Dimention EPA Reg # 32802-71
____ 19-5-10 slow release granular fertilizer with Barricade EPA Reg # 9198-140
____ Dimention, liquid EPA Reg # 707-245
____ Barricade 65 wg, liquid EPA Reg # 100-834
____ Merit Insecticide, granular EPA Reg # 3125-451
____ Merit Insecticide, liquid EPA Reg # 3125-421
____ Daconil Ultrex EPA Reg # 50534-202-3266-1052-8053-9411
____ Round Up Pro EPA Reg # 524-475
____ Vegemec EPA Reg # 33955-454-2217
____ Delta Guard T & O EPA Reg # 432-834-45639
____ granular slow release fertilizer
____ granular fertilizer
____ Mach 2, Insecticide, Granular EPA Reg # 69075-00004-00000
____ Other _____
____ Other _____

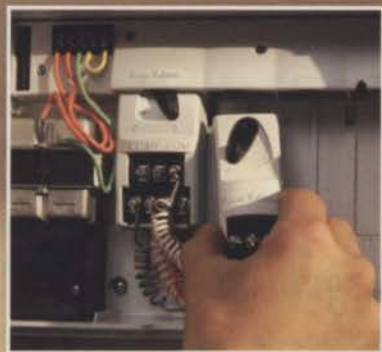
Total Due \$ _____

Applicators Name _____

Comment _____

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RAIN BIRD®

by Lauren Spiers

Regularly
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& Landscape
never stagnates.

Where does the camera zoom in on a snapshot of your business? Is training in full focus? Are your customers front and center? What aspects stay in the background, blurry and in need of attention?

For Joshua Eike, no two photos are alike.

"One of the things I tell my employees is that the only constant is change," Eike says. As the president of Bluejay Lawn & Landscape, Omaha, Neb., Eike's business more closely resembles a movie with each scene highlighting new characters, plot twists and a directorial style that embraces opportunity.

"To keep growing, you have to refocus a lot," Eike notes. "We've shifted from maintenance to design/build, then from employees to subcontractors, from working in the business to working on the business and taking a broader perspective by looking at other businesses and how they handle their challenges."

By tackling these changes with Academy Award-winning enthusiasm, Eike has grown Bluejay Lawn & Landscape to a \$2-million business. And with plans to reach \$5 million by 2007, he is already rewriting the script for the company's future.

OPPORTUNITY - TAKE ONE. Like other industry professionals, Eike began mowing lawns at age 13 and stayed focused on maintenance through college. With an accounting degree, several corporate firms offered Eike jobs after college, but he saw more potential in a business buyout.

"During my senior year, I met a gentleman who wanted to retire from his landscaping business and I had the opportunity to buy his company," Eike remembers. "I took out a small-business loan and the rest is history."

In 1996, with a \$170,000 loan, Eike purchased Van Wyk Landscaping and added seven employees, \$350,000 in revenue and 75 clients to Bluejay Lawn & Landscape's three employees and \$100,000 in revenue. While the buyout ultimately was a profitable move, Eike dealt with several challenges during the early years. Working toward a smooth fade from one scene to the next, the young owner had service mix issues to deal with first.

"In 1995, we were about 75-percent maintenance and I had some installation experience, but that switched when we bought the other company," Eike says. "The other owner was providing enhancements, lawn care and other full-service work, and I could see where having these services made a lot of strategic sense for growing the business."

(continued on page 38)

Bluejay Lawn & Landscape

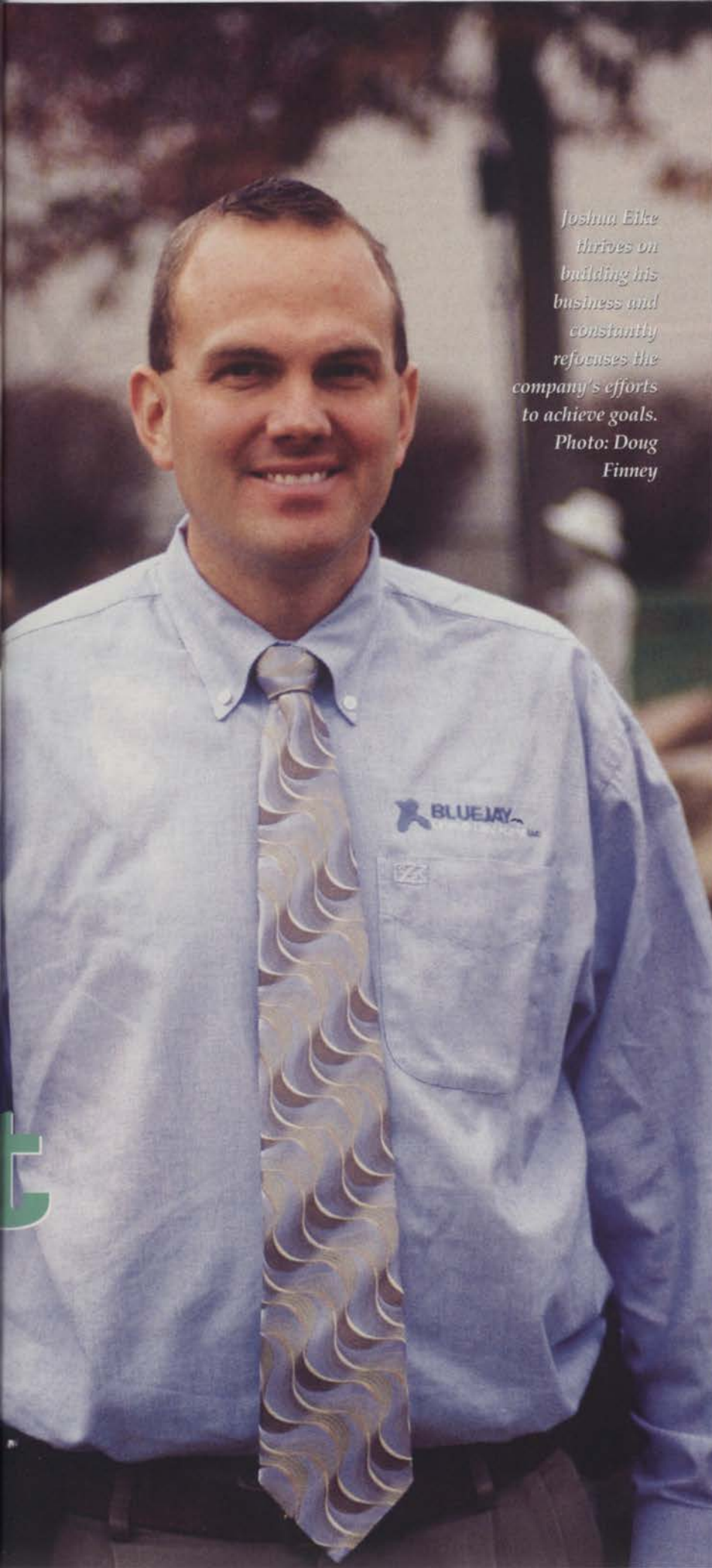
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Omaha, Neb. 68117

PH: 402/537-0374

www.bluejaylawnandlandscape.com

A Constant STATE OF CHANGE



Joshua Eike thrives on building his business and constantly refocuses the company's efforts to achieve goals.

Photo: Doug Finney

BLUEJAY LAWN & LANDSCAPE

OWNER: Joshua Eike

HEADQUARTERS: Omaha, Neb.

FOUNDED: 1996

2004 PROJECTED REVENUE:

2.4 million

CLIENT MIX: 100 percent commercial in maintenance, 75 percent commercial/25 percent residential in design/build

SERVICE MIX: 60 percent design/build, 40 percent maintenance

SUBCONTRACTED WORK: All maintenance is subcontracted, as well as some projects like waterfalls or sod installations where the company may not have expertise

EQUIPMENT LINEUP: Two dump trucks, six pick-up trucks, six tandem-axle trailers, three skid-steer loaders, three mowers, seven snowplows, four V-box sanders, one sod cutter, two edgers, two tractors, two trenchers, one aerator, one top dresser, and two drill seeders

FIVE YEARS OF GROWTH:

1999 - \$1.5 million

2000 - \$1.6 million

2001 - \$1.75 million

2002 - \$1.85 million

2003 - \$2 million

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USE READER SERVICE #28

(continued from page 35)

During the transition phase, Eike managed his clientele through two sets of books and invoices until Jan. 1, 1997. "At that time, we officially noted that the companies had merged and we were going to use the name Bluejay Lawn & Landscape for the whole operation," Eike says. "From there it was a seamless transition."

Seamless, that is, until a business analysis showed that Bluejay Lawn & Landscape was losing money on its residential maintenance accounts.

"After the merger, I took a couple of days to look at the books and I calculated our overhead related to mowing," Eike says. From there, he looked specifically at resi-

dential mowing costs divided by the number of residential stops that summer.

"It showed us that it cost \$28 for a three-person mowing crew to show up on a property, but we were only charging \$25 to \$30 for those accounts and we weren't making any money there," Eike comments.

The fact that competition in his region still holds residential maintenance charges around \$25 shows that the company's choice to sell most of the residential jobs in 1997 was the right solution. "We ended up selling a lot of the residential accounts to another company after only one year in order to focus on commercial work," Eike says. "We recognized that commercial clients are going to have more recurring revenue on the enhancement side. Commercial properties have annual flower installation and mulching every year. They budget it, schedule it and get it done, whereas homeowners will do a lot of that themselves. Moving away from residential work gave us a more stable client base and helped us be more profitable."

PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE. Over the next few years, as Bluejay Lawn & Landscape took on more profitable commercial maintenance clients and delved deeper into both residential and commercial design/build, the company grew quickly from \$450,000 in 1996 to \$750,000 in 1997 and \$950,000 in 1998. Eike attributes the growth to having all company services under one roof.

"Unlike niche irrigation, mowing or fertilizing companies, we have all that in one place," Eike says. "That's another reason we have more commercial clients - it's of value to them to have all those services coming from one vendor."

To handle the large growth, Eike hired seven landscaping crewmembers, but re-focused labor in the maintenance department from in-house crews to subcontractors.

"Any subcontractor can easily employ two or three people, but if we kept our maintenance in-house, we would have upwards of 50 employees - I'd be an employment agency," Eike comments. "With the amount of work we had and the fact that we had a large turnover problem in maintenance, we subcontracted all of our mowing in 1998."

Eike chooses subcontractors with strong work ethics like his own, often hiring former

(continued on page 40)



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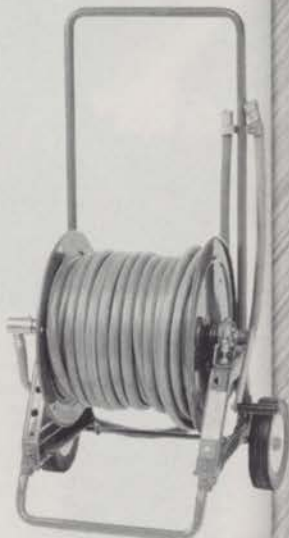
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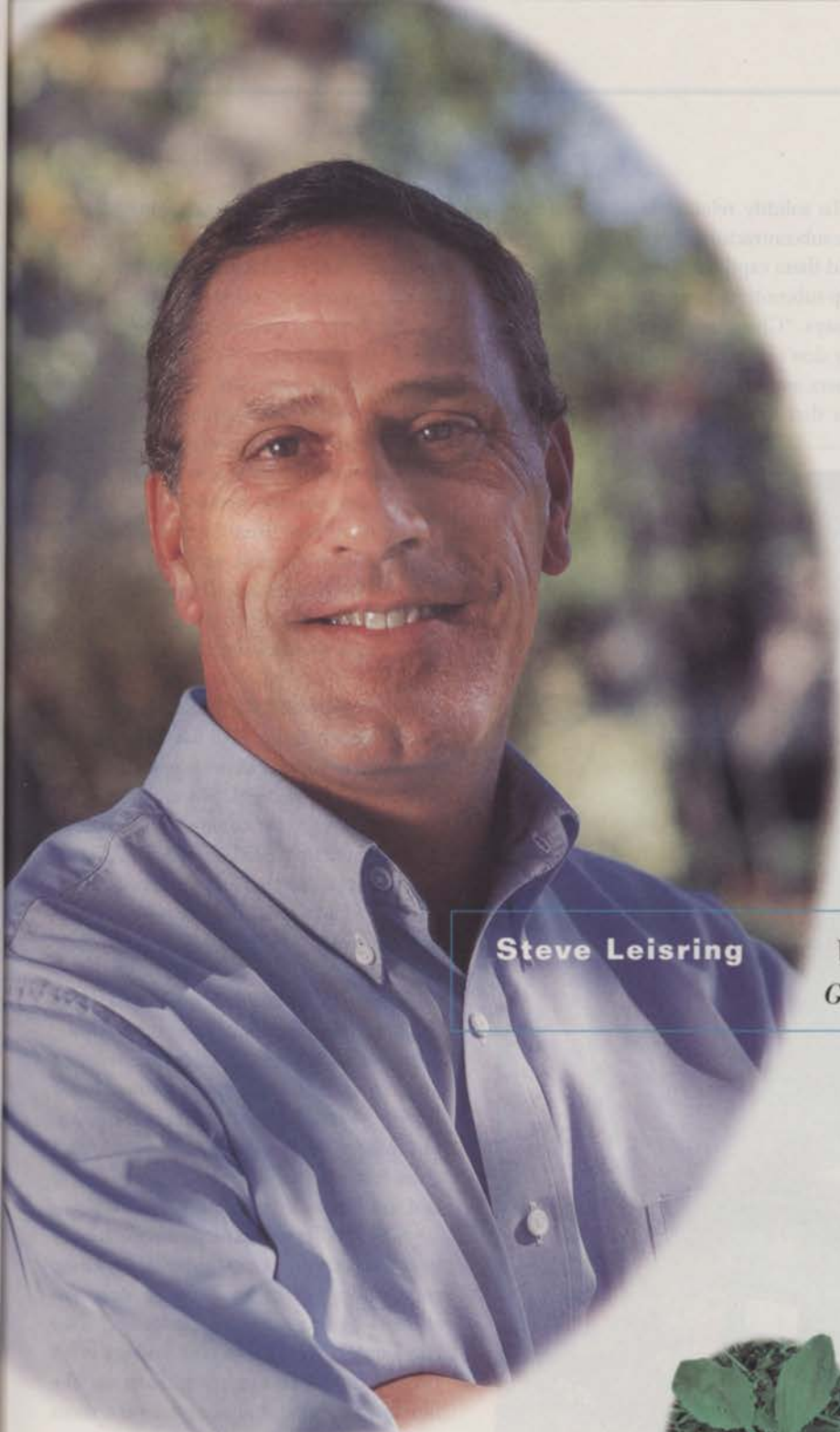
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USE READER SERVICE #29



Steve Leisring

*Vice President of Operations
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Cover Story

(continued from page 38)

employees who have started their own businesses. "A lot of crewmembers don't like to do mowing, which is why we had such high turnover," he says. "When we hire subcontractors who have gone into that end of the business purposefully, we know they'll be professional, so their reliability and predictability will be greater."

To solidify relationships with dependable subcontractors, Eike abides by one rule: Hold them captive. "The absolute key is to keep subcontractors as captive as possible," he says. "Give them so much revenue that they don't have time to focus on other customers and they're so tied into your business that they have to do what you say."

Eighty to 90 percent of our mowing subcontractors' revenue comes from our company."

Bluejay Lawn & Landscape currently has seven maintenance subcontractors, but refers to them as account managers during client introductions. "We always do a preliminary route and visit clients before we start any maintenance in the spring," Eike says. "When we introduce them to the property managers, we try to stay away from the word 'subcontractor' because there's a bad connotation there from the construction industry and we've lost accounts over that before. We also provide shirts and hats for our subcontractors at no charge and they're free to wear them on the job."

WINTER BLOCKBUSTER. With company operations on track, Eike was prepared to take Bluejay Lawn & Landscape over the \$1-million hurdle in 1999. But an unforeseen plot twist caught the company off guard.

"We went from \$950,000 to \$1.5 million in a year, but part of that was sheer luck," Eike says. "We had a great snow season that winter with 26 events, which is huge — our average is 10."

Because many of Eike's snow subcontractors come from mowing or construction crews, heavy snowfall precludes them from working in those areas, leaving snow as their No. 1 priority. "With that set-up, we beat our goal of \$1.1 million, which gave us the capital to purchase our own facility, ramp-up equipment and spend more on marketing," Eike adds.

A \$70,000 investment in a new facility gave the company a new home and a strong competitive advantage. "Having our own site lets us inventory bulk material," Eike comments. "We have a cost savings of 50 percent compared to buying materials like mulch wholesale. It also gave us the room and security to have all of our equipment, operations and people in one place, so you don't have the inefficiencies you'd have with multiple locations."

"From a business standpoint, it makes a lot of sense to create equity in your own facility," Eike adds. "It didn't generate any new revenue for us per se, but it does give us permanence in our area."

The extra capital also gave the company an opportunity to spend more money on marketing their services. "I knew we

(continued on page 42)



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USE READER SERVICE #31

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USE READER SERVICE #32

TORO.

Count on it.

Cover Story

(continued from page 40)

couldn't go backwards, so we plugged more into our marketing budget in order to get more design/build revenue and keep our income up," Eike explains. "That was the first year that we started using the *Yellow Pages* and we now have an advertising agency on retainer for all of our marketing."

With a 2002 marketing budget of \$50,000 (about 2.5 percent of revenue), Bluejay Lawn & Landscape was able to advertise through direct mail, home and garden trade shows, and television commercials, which Eike plans to use again this year.

"Timing is everything with TV ads and we found that spring was much more effective than any other time of the year," Eike says.

Quick TIP

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

One of the biggest challenges Joshua Eike faced during his company's initial years of growth was moving from being an in-the-field owner/operator to a more behind-the-scenes businessman.

"I would find myself wishing I could have my hands in everything when I visited job sites," says the president of Bluejay Lawn & Landscape, Omaha, Neb. "Maybe things weren't moving fast enough or someone was doing something differently than I would."

To fully change his mindset, Eike simply changed his clothes. "I went out and bought a really nice business-casual wardrobe - shirts, ties, slacks, shoes, everything," he says, explaining that this forced him to delegate field work to his employees - who wear blue jeans and company shirts - instead of jumping in to help. "You just have to have a mental and physical reminder and barrier to change your frame of mind. It's a hard transition to make, but it's one of the best things I've ever done." - Lauren Spiers

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Television marketing cost the company about \$7,500 for a 30-second spot, but targeting the right audience made the investment worthwhile. "We looked at the demographics of our target market and knew that we were going after homeowners with higher incomes," Eike says. "Then we matched the data we got from different television stations about the demographics of their programs to our target market and played on those shows. We went with a lot of morning news channels like CNN and CNBC, and another big station was Home & Garden Television."

Eike also notes that the commercials drive potential clients to the company's Web site. "To keep the growth, you have to keep marketing and branding," Eike says. "We spent a lot of money on our Web site, but it's been phenomenal. You really need that permanence so when people see your logo on a truck or a job site sign, that's backed up with

(continued on page 44)

USE READER SERVICE #33



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USE READER SERVICE #34

Cover Story

(continued from page 42)

the Web where they can find more information. Driving people there is our strategy."

CAST & CREW. When he isn't marketing the company through advertisements, Eike spends the majority of his day meeting face-to-face with new and potential clients or catching up with existing clients via phone

or email. He admits though, that working *on* the business rather than *in* it has been one of his biggest challenges since transitioning from hands-on owner to administrator. To alleviate this problem, Eike hired a new salesperson in 2003 through a local horticulture program in order to take off his sales hat and focus on other responsibilities.

"Every business owner's goal is to create a machine that generates its own revenue, rather than one that requires them to be there all the time," Eike comments. "I hired a sales representative to work on the volume of leads, and I'm bringing on a controller and a chief financial officer next to get us closer to having a full management team. This will free me up to manage strategic business decisions."

In another refocusing effort this January, Eike separated maintenance and design/build into distinct profit centers and began full analyses of each division's profitability.

"Maintenance and installation are not independent of each other, but they need to be," Eike says. "A lot of times our maintenance cash flow is better, so we rob Peter to pay Paul, but when we have maintenance bills we're missing the money. There's not a clear understanding of either division's profitability or a way of measuring which is doing better and why."

"What we're doing is creating another set of books for the design/build segment and run it separately," Eike continues. "We'll establish separate cash accounts and allocate overhead to each division, and each side of the business will have its own profit-and-loss statement, so we'll be able to see how they function independently."

Eike is excited to see how cast additions and plot twists play out in Bluejay Lawn & Landscape's future. "We're at a sweet spot right now and I think within the next six to 12 months we'll add that next member to our management team," he notes. "What I've found in our marketplace is that you get to \$1 million by working hard, and you get to \$2 million by working harder and adding more people. Now we're working on getting to \$3 million – and our goal of \$5 million by 2007 – so, we're really refocusing again and getting ready to make a change." **LL**

The author is assistant editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at lspiers@lawnandlandscape.com.



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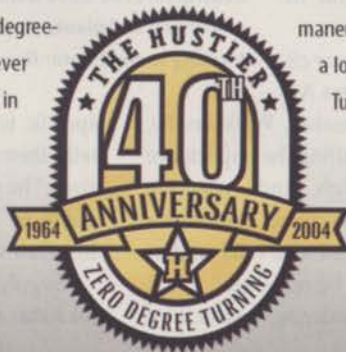
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USE READER SERVICE #36

by Ali Anderson

IRRIGATION EDUCATION

Before you harp on clients for their lack of irrigation intelligence, ask yourself if you've properly educated them. Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users discuss the basics of teaching property owners how to water effectively.

Watering WISDOM

One recent thread on the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board delved into irrigation issues – specifically, the customer's role in maintaining a successful watering schedule. And while the message thread centered on a few specifics, forum participants have more to say about the subject.

"DO YOUR CLIENTS KNOW HOW TO WATER?" That question, posted online, provoked a variety of perspectives and potential solutions for contractors whose clients lack basic watering wisdom. Most of the ensuing discussion centered on providing property owners with detailed literature and specific instructions for intelligent irrigation.

"When we do an installation, our clients get two pieces of paper," writes Andrew Aksar, owner, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md. "One is a warranty sheet detailing the importance of watering on hot days, after high winds, watering under roof overhangs, etc., and the clients must sign a copy acknowledging that they read and fully understand the terms, or no plants will be replaced."

The second sheet provides watering instructions



Contractors can work with clients to create an efficient watering schedule and ensure turf and plants stay vibrant. Educational handouts can be especially helpful training tools. Photo: Rain Bird

specific to the client's property, Aksar continues. "It tells them how much water to give for listed plant sizes," he writes, adding that this paper is a customized guide to help the property owner keep the newly installed vegetation in prime condition.

Supplying the two irrigation handouts has paid off – for Aksar and his clients. "We do very little plant replacement. I feel it is attributed to these two sheets of paper we provide," he writes.

In response to Aksar's query, other *Lawn & Landscape* forum participants also shared their watering worries and offered specifics about the methods they use to communicate the basics to clients.

"My biggest pet peeve is how people water," posts Ken Reis, owner, Turf & Shrub Manage-

(continued on page 48)

BEST OF THE WEB

The *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board is a hotbed of green industry chatter and professional dialogue. Playing host to a diverse collection of opinions and ideas, the online forum often bounces between detailed discussion and dynamic debate.

To better educate readers, *Lawn & Landscape* will expand upon a message board discussion each month and offer forum-related insights from professionals in this "Best of the Web" section.

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RAIN BIRD

USE READER SERVICE #37

Best of the Web

(continued from page 46)

ment Co., Dartmouth, Mass. "When we do an estimate, we leave tons of literature – from safety to mowing to watering and more."

Reis insists every potential customer receives handouts that include information about proper watering and other maintenance necessities. He also informs clients about smart irrigation via three newsletters, sent in the spring, summer and fall. Company invoices include watering basics as well.

And, yet, many properties are struggling.

"Clients do not know how to water," agrees Brian Klimek, president, Greenworld-Irrigation Specialists, Monroe, N.Y. "I send them a letter after the installation of a system for this reason," he shares.

Thus, communication is key, Klimek explains. "We follow up with clients after we install systems," he comments. "Before the sale, during the installation and during post-sale communications, we encourage the client to contact us for whatever reason. And from the day the irrigation system is in-

stalled, we go over how we designed it and offer guidelines of how they should water their turf."

Reis says he feels a responsibility to communicate and educate property owners on

"SOME CLIENTS SET THEIR IRRIGATION TIMERS TO WATER ONE PROGRAM FOR THE WHOLE SEASON, WHICH IS THE WORST THING YOU CAN DO. YOU NEED TO CUSTOMIZE THE WATERING SCHEDULE FOR EACH SEASON TO FIND THE 'FORMULA FOR SUCCESS' FOR EACH CLIENT'S PROPERTY." — BRIAN KLIMEK

proper water usage – but beyond that, "we keep our fingers crossed."

Eric Maedgen, owner, Maedgen's Lawn Care, Rolla, Mo., says contractors also should warn clients of the risks associated with poor watering practices – to help keep plants healthy and people happy. "We tell them that if they don't water properly, their grass will die and we are

not responsible for their mistake," he says.

Maedgen claims most clients lack the know-how necessary to keep a lawn and accompanying plants thriving, so it is up to the contractor to educate them.

ONE WAY TO WATER? Although *Lawn & Landscape Online* Message Board users were eager to swap irrigation handouts on the Web, there may not be a clear consensus when it comes to what works best.

For instance, Maedgen advises his clients to "saturate the lawn with at least 1 inch of water every late afternoon" during the wa-

(continued on page 50)

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USE READER SERVICE #39



It's OK to cry. Who wouldn't? There you were, just humming along, getting the job done so you could get to the baseball game tonight. Then you heard that awful silence. The good-for-nothing engine in your mower quit. Done. You've had relationships that have lasted longer, and that isn't saying much. So now you're stuck with a piece of equipment that won't budge and a half-done job. Your crew isn't thrilled either. If a Kawasaki engine was powering your mower, you'd still be humming along. Thinking about the game. Because Kawasaki engines are seriously durable. Everyone in the industry knows Kawasakis are unstoppable, job after job, season after season. Well, everyone except the poor schmucks who aren't using them. So go ahead, let it out. Maybe they'll hear you all the way over at the baseball field.

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USE READER SERVICE #40

Best of the Web

(continued from page 48)

tering season. In contrast, Klimek prefers early-morning irrigation – right before sunrise. “Your turf and plant material will absorb the water they need,” he notes. “Whatever is left over will evaporate quickly.”

Klimek teaches clients to water for long periods of time more frequently rather than

instigating short watering sessions every day. Specifically, he says, property owners should water twice a week for 45 minutes in each zone instead of watering every day for only 10 minutes per zone.

“Longer watering times mean the water will travel deeper into the soil,” Klimek ex-

plains. “The roots of your turf and plant material will go for the water. This encourages deep root systems. For the clients, this means that their plants and turf will be less susceptible to disease and stress.”

Referring to existing lawns vs. new lawns, Reis suggests applying three sessions of 1 to 1.5 inches of water to the turf each week. “We suggest the customer place a pie pan or something similar on the lawn and water long enough to collect half an inch of water in the pan,” he adds. “Time the watering to find out how long it takes to get the half-inch. Water for that amount of time three days per week.”

Weather conditions should be factored in as well. For example, Klimek says, clients may not be aware that plants (especially flowering perennials) need more water in the summer months than in the early spring.

But regardless of geography or weather, contractors can be sure that unhealthy consequences of uneducated watering will become reality. Burned-out sod, wilting plants and rotted tree roots are just a few of the problems Klimek has seen as a result of clients’ poor watering methods. He says many residential customers adopt the “more is better” philosophy when it comes to soaking their lawns. But, in reality, the property generally needs only 1 inch of water each day. And, Klimek notes, irrigation can be from Mother Nature or an automatic sprinkler system.

“Turf disease is the No. 1 problem,” Reis notes, referring to incorrect irrigation. Frequent, shallow watering is likely to increase weeds and insects. “And, of course, there are those who do not water at all, resulting in thin turf areas that will need overseeding.”

But these troublesome conditions can be remedied, at least in part, by educating clients about the vital role of water in their properties’ well-being. It all comes down to working with clients, Klimek concludes, to “educate them about conserving our most precious resource and teach them how to use it efficiently.” **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor-Internet of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at aanderson@lawnandlandscape.com. Join the ongoing Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board dialogue today by logging on to www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard/.

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I DESIGNED THE BODY, BUT MY ISUZU CREW CAB MAKES IT WORK.



Jay Boyce, owner of Boyce Landscape Inc., knew just what he wanted to make the perfect landscape truck, but he needed a very special truck chassis to complete the picture.

As Jay puts it, "The body I designed had a place for everything, but to make it work, I needed a truck that could handle the load and carry a seven-man crew as well. (Legally, with seat belts.) My clients are very upscale, so the truck had to look good on the job. I also wanted a very tight turning radius, so drivers could maneuver in narrow areas. And finally, it had to be dependable, because down-time is a killer in this business. My Isuzu dealer had just the right truck, the Isuzu crew cab."

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USE READER SERVICE #43

ISUZU
TRUCK

by William Lynott

Don't let money fly out the window. Use these small business banking strategies to improve profits.

Banking SOLUTIONS

In New service charges, confusing account options, and wildly varying interest rates are just a few of the techniques banks use to improve their bottom lines these days – at your expense.

How bad is the impact on your bottom line? Former bank executive Edward Mrkvicka estimates that your business will likely overpay your bank through service charges, mortgages, credit cards, business loans, and checking and savings fees by thousands of dollars in your lifetime ... unless you learn how to beat the banks at their own games.

Follow these tips to build beneficial banking relationships.

Choose a Bank Carefully. Chances are, you've been a victim of merger mania at least once. That's when you learn the bank you've been doing business with merged with an unfamiliar new bank that promptly laid claim to your accounts.

Will this new bank treat you better? Will it exercise economies of scale in order to bring you improved and less expensive services? Forget it. History has shown that the mega banks resulting from mergers increase inefficiency and customer alienation.

Fortunately, solving this frustrating problem is relatively painless. Just search out the smallest

FDIC member bank in your neighborhood and give it your business. They'll be happy to have you as a customer. They need you and will appreciate you. Clients at these establishments will receive more personal attention from a small neighborhood bank than at a financial behemoth.

"When shopping for the right bank, look for one that has similar relationships with other small businesses," advises John Reddish, author/consultant, Chadds Ford, Pa., adding that business owners should find loan officers who understand the issues affecting their businesses.

Grow the Relationship. The notion to split your business between two banks may seem tempting. Some small business owners feel that a relationship with two banks might open up greater lines of credit when the need arises. While this may be true for large companies, it may not help small businesses.

"I used two banks for years, but then decided I would rather be a really good customer of one bank than an OK customer of two banks," says small business consultant and speaker Dave Ratner, Agawam, Mass. "I got better terms and lower rates when I switched."

Another negative in splitting up your banking is the additional paperwork involved. Few

(continued on page 56)



EYE-Q™ Can Change How You Do Business



Lawn maintenance business owners often wish they had eyes in the backs of their heads. After all, tracking a fleet of mowers, multiple crews, hundreds of properties and repairs shop backlogs all at once is no easy task. If only there was a device to capture all the pertinent information that a business needs to heighten productivity and keep everyone on task... Thanks to Gravelly, now there is.

The new Gravelly Eye-Q Productivity System

records and reports data on everything from mower maintenance to operator location, making opportunities for business efficiency easy to see.



GRAVELLY

What's Your Mowing EYE-Q™?



Lawn mowing is the backbone of most maintenance contractors' businesses and a well-kept lawn is a customer service necessity. For landscaping pros with demanding client lists, the Gravelly Eye-Q Productivity System is essential for meeting productivity goals and keeping mowers in good working order.

"The Eye-Q™ is an exceptional product that's going to allow a landscape manager to measure his or her business performance while they're on the job," says Ariens/Gravelly President Dan Ariens. "There are a lot of tools in the Eye-Q system that were unavailable in the past that let you measure employee productivity, mower wear and tear and job costing information. This tool is going to change the way landscapers manage their businesses."

How it Works

The Eye-Q Productivity System currently is available on all Gravelly 100 Series and 200 Series ride-on mowers, with the exception of the 34-inch zero-turn model. Preprogrammed with each mower's specific information including model number, serial number, parts numbers and maintenance schedule, the system is ready to mow. The operator simply enters his or her user and job numbers and the Eye-Q Productivity System takes over, tracking operator information and hours in use, alerting the user when scheduled maintenance is required.

Aftermarket Availability

Not only will the Eye-Q Productivity System be available on nearly all Gravelly models beginning in 2004, but contractors who use other mower brands can benefit from the technology as well.

"During development, we had focus groups with landscape contractors who told us that they would use the tool but wanted to have all of their equipment under the Eye-Q system," notes Dan Ariens, president Ariens/Gravelly. "That led us to come up with an aftermarket version that can be used on any other piece of equipment."

While contractors will have to input their own mowers' specifications for the aftermarket version, users will still benefit from the increased productivity and maintenance benefits the Eye-Q Productivity System affords.

Additionally, with the optional Scanmate™ — a wireless, remote download module — Eye-Q Productivity System users can automatically download stored information for up to 16 units at a time.

"As it comes standard, a maintenance user can scroll through all the stored information right on the Eye-Q itself," comments Corey Bucher, Gravelly Research and Development Manager. "But with the Scanmate, the user can press a single button and automatically have the information downloaded to their PC and sorted by mower."

Time Management Benefits

Landscape contractors sell time and the Eye-Q Productivity System helps users identify inefficiencies and eliminate wasted minutes. Here's how:

- Based on job information provided by users, the Eye-Q Productivity System tracks when and where equipment is being used, keeping operators on schedule.

- Built-in time sensors display the amount of mowing time allotted to a specific property and warn operators when they go past their scheduled quotas.
- Optional GPS feature records job locations automatically and monitors the average cutting speed on the job, as well as the distance the operator travels on the jobs.

Maintenance Benefits

In terms of productivity, nothing is more costly to landscape contractors than equipment that's in need of repair or waiting in the shop. The Eye-Q Productivity System is the ultimate maintenance calendar based on these facts:

- By monitoring the equipment maintenance schedule, the Eye-Q Productivity System ensures that 24 maintenance items, including oil, belt and filter changes, are performed on time, preventing costly breakdowns.
- Solid State switch measures the load on the clutch to prevent damage.
- Customizable maintenance schedule can be adjusted from warranty specifications to include more frequent maintenance as regional needs dictate.
- Optional shock sensors record instances when mowers experience unusual stress, such as excessive speed or run-ins with trees or fence posts.
- Optional temperature and RPM sensors record engine and hydraulic drive system information that may indicate and prevent future problems.
- The Eye-Q Productivity System will keep a running log of all maintenance performed for the life of the mower, allowing users to identify trends and common concerns like blade sharpening or engine maintenance frequency.

Training Benefits

Productivity often is a function of how well employees know their jobs. Here are some ways the Eye-Q Productivity System can be used as a great training tool:

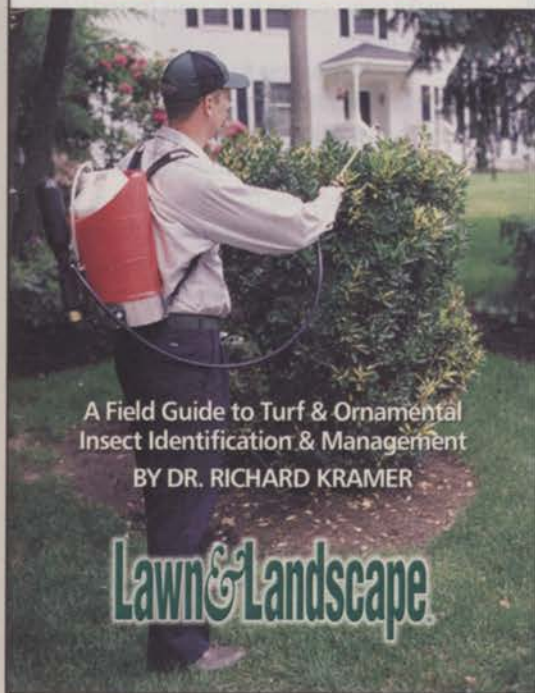
- Because the Eye-Q Productivity System records equipment information in combination with the operator using it, business owners can use productivity reports in performance reviews. Time reports may illustrate the operators' strengths in finishing jobs on schedule, while shock sensors can show places for improvement in terms of equipment handling.
- Comparing productivity reports from one operator to the next may show which less efficient employees can be paired with productive employees for training purposes.



CONTACT GRAVELLY For more information on the new Eye-Q Productivity System from Gravelly, as well as a dealer locator, visit www.gravellyeye-q.com

Lawn & Landscape Technician's Handbook

Technician's Handbook



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BY DR. RICHARD KRAMER

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Smart Financial Management

(continued from page 52)

landscaping professionals would look kindly on the need to deal with more paperwork.

Separate Accounts. It may seem simpler and less complicated to use your existing personal bank accounts for your business, especially if you are operating as a sole proprietor, but most financial advisors recommend against it.

If the IRS comes calling with an audit, combined personal and business funds will complicate your situation. "Trying to identify cash flow for the business if it's mixed up with personal funds could become a real disaster," says Denise O'Berry, a Tampa, Fla.-based author and consultant. "Keeping separate accounts also is more professional. With a busi-

ness account, people make payments out to your business. It's simply not a good idea to tell a customer 'Don't make the check out to my business name, make it out to me.' Also, building up a credit rating for the business is important. If there are no accounts in the business name, that's tough to do."

On a practical note, "don't make your life any more complicated than the government already does," Ratner adds. "Spend your time building the business – not doing extra paper work. You need separate accounts to make sure you can track your financial business health."

Avoid Business Savings Accounts. With the interest rates commercial banks pay these days, savings accounts are guaranteed to lose money when inflation is factored in.

If you keep any of your receipts in a bank savings account, close it and put the money in an account that will pay you a higher rate of interest – a money market account. These accounts can pay you significantly more interest than a savings account and still allow you to withdraw your money on demand with limited restrictions. Some money market accounts even allow you to write checks against them.

The improvement in interest on money market accounts may not be as those from certain other investment vehicles. However, when interest rates begin to move up again, so will the interest income appearing on your bottom line.

Keep Less Money in Checking Accounts. Most banks pay little or no interest on business checking accounts, so keep that balance to a minimum while making certain that you never overdraw it or incur minimum balance fees.

Open Transfer Options. Ask your bank to link your money market account to your checking account so that you can transfer money between them by telephone or online. From that point on, never make a direct deposit into your checking account. Make all deposits into the money market account where they will immediately begin drawing interest. Transfer money to the checking account only as needed to cover the checks you write. This is one of the smartest ways to maximize your operating funds.

Keep a Lid on Bank Charges. In 1999, banks made an astonishing \$5 billion from assessing bad check charges.

Let's say you accidentally overdraw your

(continued on page 58)

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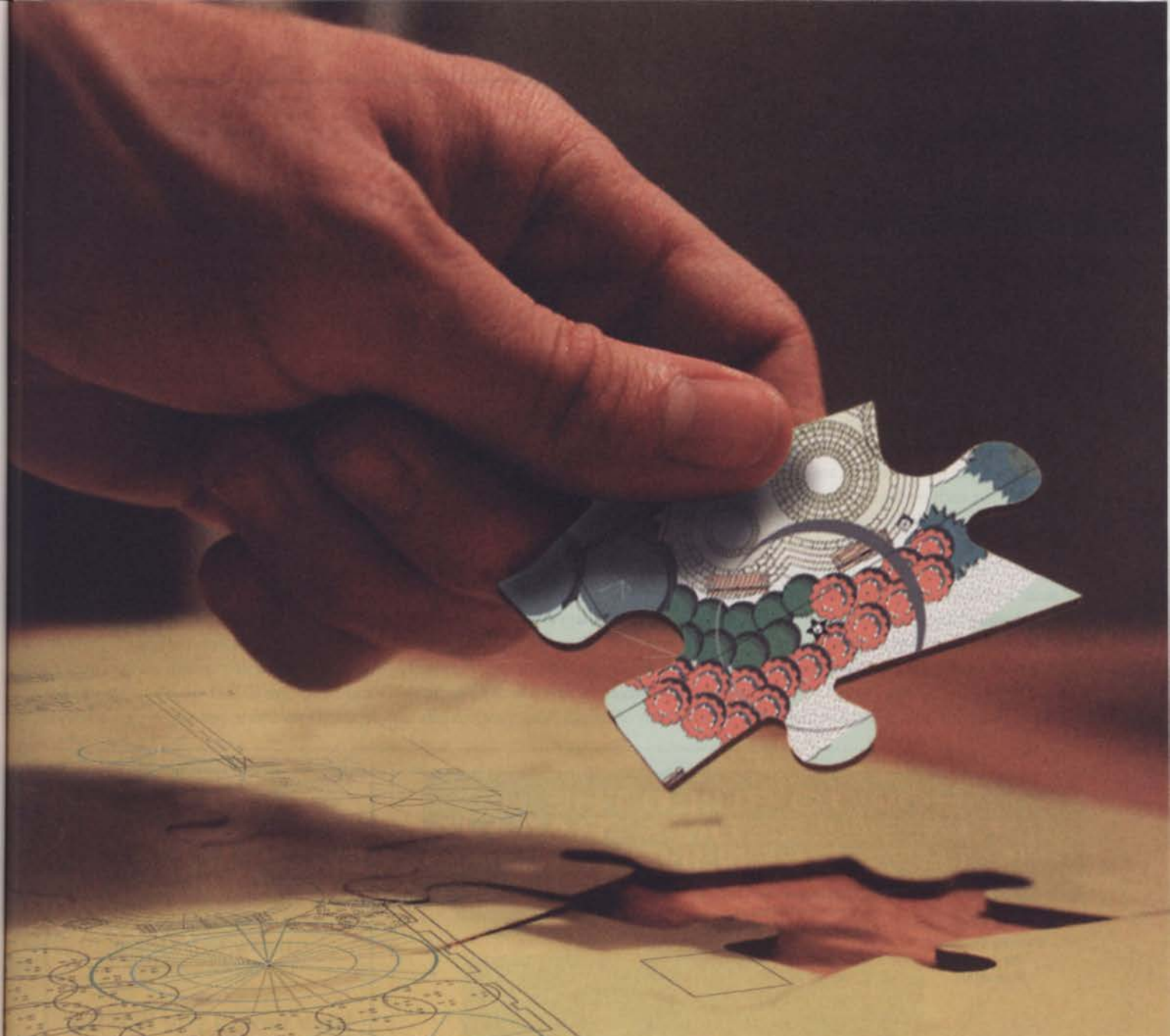
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Smart Financial Management

(continued from page 56)

business checking account. You have \$300 in the account and you write three checks in one day. The first for is \$10, the second for \$20 and the third for \$320.

Some banks process checks not in the order they receive them but in order of size. In such a case, the \$320 check would be processed first. That would mean all three checks, not just one, would bounce. Then you'd be hit with three separate bad check charges. Besides an overdrawn account, you'd be out as much as \$105 in painful overdraft charges (some banks are now charging \$35 for each overdrawn check).

Use Credit Cards Wisely. For some landscape contractors, the use of credit cards is mandatory. "Often credit cards are the only way small businesses can finance important purchases because they either can't qualify for a small business loan or they don't want to go to the effort of creating a plan for presentation to a bank or investor," O'Berry says.

But proceed with caution because using

credit cards to finance business purchases can create far more serious problems than it solves. For instance, the 12 to 18 percent interest charged on the unpaid balances by some card issuers can impose an impossible

"I USED TWO BANKS FOR YEARS, BUT THEN DECIDED I WOULD RATHER BE A REALLY GOOD CUSTOMER OF ONE BANK THAN AN OK CUSTOMER OF TWO BANKS."

— **DAVE RATNER**

burden on a small landscaping operation.

"Credit cards can be lifesavers and the devil at the same time," Ratner says. "We use credit cards to pay for everything we can. It gives us an extra 25 days to pay for purchases. Also, the amount of time-consuming check writing is cut down dramatically. The devil part is the percentage they whack you with if you don't pay off the full balance each month."

"When you consider the use of credit cards as a source of funds for your business, you must begin with a solid analysis of cash flow and a plan for return on investment," O'Berry adds, pointing out that if you decide to use credit cards, having a strict budget for repayment is critical.

Don't Accept the First Offer.

Shop around for interest rates before you sign on with a bank. Bank deregulation has produced a competitive environment with wildly differing interest rates and bank charges. If you can find a better deal for your business accounts than your present bank is offering, take it. There is no reason for you to stick with a bank that isn't competitive.

Consider Certificates of Deposit (CDs).

In an unstable economy, the best investment accounts available through most commercial banks are CDs. Typically, CDs can be opened for varying periods between 90 days

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USE READER SERVICE #47

USE READER SERVICE #48

and five years. Each of these maturities will yield a different interest rate, depending on the current market and local competition.

As a rule, the longer you are willing to leave your money in a CD, the higher rate of interest it will return.

One popular way to gain maximum advantage when investing in CDs is to break up your total kitty into several equal parts and invest them in CDs with staggered maturity dates. This technique will allow you to take advantage of the highest available interest rates while ensuring that a maturing CD and its penalty-free cash are never very far away.

But don't expect your bank to give you the best available rate when you allow a CD to roll over automatically. It almost surely won't, so always call or visit the bank and ask to review all current interest rates for CDs, including any promotional rates that might be available. Banks often run special promotions offering interest rates higher than their regular rates. You can be certain

that an automatic renewal won't get that rate unless you ask.

Most banks will do a dependable job of sending you a reminder when each CD approaches its maturity date. The notice will explain that you don't have to do anything at maturity if you don't want to. If the bank doesn't hear from you, they'll just roll it over. That is, they'll renew it for the same period as the original and pay you their current interest rate.

Sounds fair enough, so millions of today's busy small business owners take that easy road. The banks love people like that, but those millions of people are making a mistake that you should avoid.

Don't Use ATMs. Remember when your friendly bank introduced those new-fangled Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs)? Many people didn't take to those gadgets at first, so the banks embarked on extensive marketing campaigns designed to persuade you to help them lighten their payroll load. The ads

trumpeted the convenience of ATMs compared to visiting a live cashier. What's more, this new service would be entirely free.

In time, ATMs became almost as familiar as stop signs. Once the public became hooked on ATMs, banks began to levy charges on customers' accounts if they used another bank's ATM. At last count, nearly 90 percent of banks are assessing ATM surcharges. Fees now average from \$1 to \$2 per transaction.

This outrageous situation presents one more opportunity to keep the bank's hands out of your pockets. If you're paying anything at all to use ATMs, stop using them. Simply cut up your ATM card and step inside the bank to transact your business.

Dumping your ATM card can be a marvelously liberating experience, requiring nothing more than a slight change in your timing. Once you accept the fact that you must arrange your schedule to visit your bank only during banking hours, you have

(continued on page 62)

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Smart Financial Management

(continued from page 59)

won the battle. With the extended banking hours offered by most banks these days, the whole process is a non-event. In fact, you are likely to find that the line waiting to use the ATM machine is often longer than the line inside the bank.

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Develop a Personal Relationship with Your Banker. Even if your landscape business is small, cultivating a personal relationship at the bank where you do business is a good idea.

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Overall, developing a winning strategy for your business banking isn't a difficult or time-consuming job, and the financial rewards can make a significant contribution to your bottom line. **LL**

The author is a former management consultant and authored Money: How to Make the Most of What You've Got. He can be reached at wlynott@cs.com.

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Budget-Sensitive Designing

by Tammy
Stables
Battaglia

Design on a DIME

Offer budget-sensitive clients ways to maximize their properties without depleting their savings.

Traipse the walkway of a South Florida hotel, and hundreds of striking red begonias or lacy purple petunia might provide a welcoming swath of color. A grand entrance like this makes a favorable first impression on visitors – and it also can put a dent in a client's landscape budget.

But clients don't need to downsize their concentration of color, even if their landscaping budget has shrunk, points out Joe Janssen, president of Stiles Landscape Co., Pompano Beach, Fla. Customers who want to cut costs might drop the number of plants per square foot by 30 percent, but they will lose the look, he notes.

"It looks like you're going cheap, but you can make subtle changes where the guest to the building isn't going to see a huge difference," says Janssen, who specializes in commercial installations with emphasis on the hospital industry. Rather than lessening the color impact, he would rather decrease bed sizes in other areas of the landscape plan.

These considerations are common when discussing landscape design with clients today. With a shaky economy, landscape professionals often find themselves working with neatly trimmed budgets. But tightened purse strings don't have to mean less-than-lovely land-

scapes. Professionals just need to pinpoint a budget, think creatively and make a plan to make the most of a minimum budget.

CUT COSTS, NOT CORNERS. According to a survey by the American Nursery and Landscape Association, 3.2 million homeowners spent an average of \$3,502 in 2002 on landscape installations and construction projects. That number jumped from \$3,260 in 2001 and \$1,772 in 1997. But what happens when the \$3,502 budget isn't just for a single bed or a retaining wall, but instead for the entire landscape design and installation?

When working with a minimum budget, resist the urge to throw in a cheap, low-quality solution for the sake of immediate gratification, advises Kent Gordon England, landscape architect and director of chapter services, California Landscape Contractors Association, Sacramento, Calif. Overlook bed preparation and install mediocre nursery stock, and the client will end up replanting the property within five years, he says.

"It provides a low-cost solution," England notes. "But when thinking long-term, cutting corners is not the best choice for the client because they are throwing money away. That's a great way to ruin your reputation. But

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Budget-Sensitive Designing

(continued from page 64)

that's a big part of the industry because some landscape professionals don't get it. They just don't understand."

Instead, take time with clients to determine their budgets and devise a plan that will fit financial constraints. There is a definite dance to determining how much a budget-conscious client wants to spend, points

out Sandra Koslowski, general manager of the design/build operations at James Martin Associates, Vernon Hills, Ill. She suggests preparing a portfolio filled with pictures of previous work, project ideas and industry promotional pieces. The effort spent organizing pictures is well worth the time saved when trying to determine what

a client likes and how much it will cost, Koslowski says.

Also, a portfolio gives the professional a tool to use to gently explain the cost of a custom-installed marble fountain or dry-stacked stone wall, she points out. "Most people have never done landscaping before and do get sticker shock," Koslowski says. "I might come back to them and say, 'Well, a wall would be great. Unfortunately, it is going to consume two-thirds of this budget.' I let them know the cost in relation to their budget right away."

The portfolio is especially useful with clients who decline to discuss specifics of how much they want to spend—or not spend, Koslowski adds. As a client points out appealing landscapes, explain how much each aspect of the project costs. Their reactions can tell you whether their budget is higher or lower than the project amount. "We start talking budget and asking 'How does that sound to you?'" she says.

But even if a landscape budget seems small, don't immediately refuse the job. A rule of thumb Koslowski refers to—between 2 and 10 percent of a property's value should be spent on landscaping. But tell that to a homeowner who just spent \$80,000 redecorating the interior of a \$250,000 home or to an entrepreneur who just spent \$4 million buying a business. Planting isn't always a priority at first.

However, just because a potential client doesn't have oodles of cash to spend today, doesn't mean they won't spend more with you later, England notes. "Maybe a year later they refinance their home or they sell stocks, or maybe they were spending money on a child's college education," England points out. "Clients' monetary status changes from year to year."

Instead, consider the \$3,000 job as an investment in tomorrow's business, says Jason Watlington, landscape designer and project director at New Garden Landscaping & Nursery, Greensboro, N.C. "If you pass that client up, you may have passed up \$3,000 now," he says. "But in three years, you passed up \$10,000."

PROJECT BY PROJECT. Rather than maxing out a client's budget on a first-time installation, piggyback small projects in one

(continued on page 68)



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Budget-Sensitive Designing

(continued from page 66)

area, suggests Christopher Wager, president of Superior Design Landscapes, Minneapolis, Minn. And reward clients who are willing to wait until the busy season passes. Wager has offered discounts up to a 25 percent to clients who schedule installations after the spring rush.

"The discount is pretty significant," he

admits. "But if I know I'm not paying my guys time-and-a-half, like when they're working 70 hours a week in the spring, we still make money."

Or, rather than racking up labor hours and taxing your crews, see if clients are willing to get their hands dirty. Do-it-yourselfers who are willing to add "sweat eq-

uity" to the installation effort can reduce their overall project cost. Instead of spending on simple planting tasks, these customers can use their budgets for major work – the creation of beds, tree planting and excavation, Koslowski notes.

"We still get a \$3,000 contract, which is a day's worth of work," she relates. "And that customer will tell their friends about us and also call us for the next phase. That is definitely worth it."

And just because clients decide to install plants themselves doesn't always mean lost business. After Watlington installs plant beds, he tries to increase his retail sales by encouraging do-it-yourselfers to purchase their plants at New Garden's retail store.

"I don't push it – I don't try to limit them,"

"CONSIDER THE JOB AN INVESTMENT IN TOMORROW'S BUSINESS. IF YOU PASS UP \$3,000 NOW, YOU MAY HAVE ALSO PASSED UP \$10,000 IN THREE YEARS."

— JASON WATLINGTON

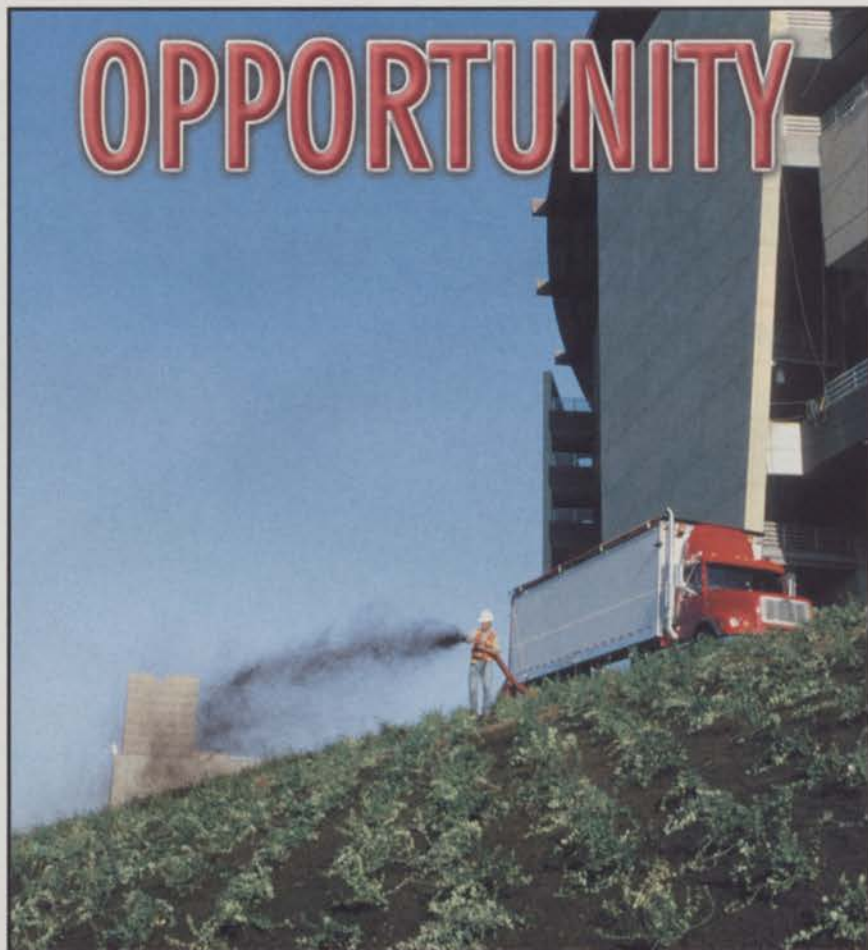
Watlington says, noting that while he encourages clients to see what his store offers, he doesn't pressure them to buy. "Don't limit your client at the expense of losing a relationship."

However, plant quality is an important factor in the overall effect of a landscape design, and England recommends that his clients purchase the highest quality stock they can afford. That may mean only landscaping the entrance to a home rather than the entire front elevation, or filling beds in a patio area rather than a back yard.

"Create an oasis," England says. "This small area will not only give clients a place to enjoy the great outdoors, but it will show them the potential they have in the rest of the garden."

Determine the focus area of the property and concentrate efforts in this area, Janssen suggests. For example, commercial installations require more attention near signage or at entrances. He recommends using color and texture in plantings to boldly emphasize those areas. "Start at the monument signs,

(continued on page 70)



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Budget-Sensitive Designing

(continued from page 68)

and as your budget grows, you can reach out into some of the other areas," he points out.

COST CONVERSATIONS. Certain components of a landscape installation simply cost more than others. One of these is hardscapes, which are often the most expensive parts of a landscape plan, notes Linda Pattie, senior designer, The Pattie Group, Novelty, Ohio. Spend money on hardscapes wisely, and use them in the most noticeable spaces in the landscape.

Another significant investment is a wrought iron fence. Clients who ask for the fencing to span the perimeter of their properties will likely break their budgets. Instead, install a wrought-iron gate at the entrance and wrought iron near the house. A black-coated chain link fence along the back will fade away into the vegetation and the background, Pattie notes.

Walkways can be another landscape budget-buster, but sometimes spending a little

(continued on page 72)

Looking for money-saving ideas to use in an upcoming project? We asked designers to suggest budget-basic ideas that give clients a polished look for \$3,000.

For a typical colonial with a center entrance and a walk, most of our professionals began with tall corner specimens. Then they filled in the rest of the landscape by using the following techniques.

Sandra Koslowski, general manager, design/build, James Martin & Associates, Vernon Hills, Ill. – Spend money on the plants. Go for 6-foot river birches or flowering crabapples on each corner to add height. Then, fill in each side symmetrically using three evergreens (yews are a good choice) and five flowering shrubs – spirea for sun or hydrangea for shade.

Jason Watlington, landscape designer and project director, New Garden Landscaping & Nursery, Greensboro, N.C. – Start by framing the house with a tall, pyramidal Foster holly at each corner. Add interest to the front door with a needlepoint holly on each side of the entrance. Fill in each side with inexpensive bushes like Little Richard abelia. Invest in those four plants and when

you stand back and look at the house, you'll get instant height and your house will be softened by the plant material.

Christopher Wager, president, Superior Design Landscapes, Loretto, Minn. – Emphasize corners by installing river birches, Japanese lilac or serviceberry. But use taller shrub roses or deciduous bushes like weigelia or ivory halo dogwood as accent plants. Punch up the color in a front yard with a perennial border of golden Stella D'Oro lilies, yellow bursts of coreopsis, blue spikes of veronica or rich leaves of fucera 'Purple Palace.' Perennials are fairly inexpensive, and they add color.

Joe Janssen, president, Stiles Landscape Co., Pompano Beach, Fla. – Bold, dramatic color is key, especially in the hotel industry. Rotate annual beds, starting with impatiens, petunias, snapdragons or cold-hardy pansies in winter. Salvia, paldium, pentas or coleus fill the beds in summer, and begonias bring color up in late summer and early fall.

But if a client is on a budget, he or she will decrease the annual bed size. If this happens, use ornamental bushes like Crown of Thorns or dwarf Snow on a Mountain to add color and interest.

– Tammy Stables Battaglia

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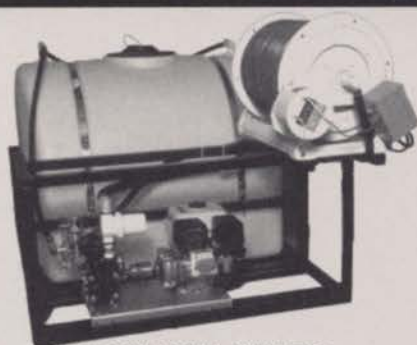
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Budget-Sensitive Designing

(continued from page 70)

more than expected yields worthwhile results. Sidewalks installed by The Pattie Group typically measure 4 feet or wider so couples can walk hand in hand or an elderly friend can easily take an arm, Pattie explains.

"Talk about blowing someone's budget; maybe this walkway does," Pattie says. "But they're going to say, 'Oh, I love that walk!'"

However, when extra dollars are out of the question, clients don't have to give up big ideas when they have small budgets. Many professionals rely on creative use of plants and alternative materials to replace expensive hardscape accents, Pattie says.

That doesn't mean inexpensive material can't look good. The key is to use it effectively, in a way that blends with the overall landscape style, Pattie says. For instance, instead of authentic stone, Pattie has used concrete to create custom patios for a fraction of the cost. "We've done exquisite homes with stamped concrete,"

she notes. "It can provide a great effect."

Koslowski steers clients toward cost-effective solutions by replacing expensive items, like stone walls, with more modestly priced substitutes. Eighteen- or 24-

**"BETWEEN 2 AND 10 PERCENT
OF A PROPERTY'S VALUE SHOULD
BE SPENT ON LANDSCAPING."**

— SANDRA KOSLOWSKI

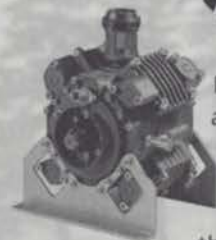
inch boulder accents can lend the same effect, she notes. "That's not a solid, fancy, bordered wall, but it gives that stone look," she describes.

Water lovers that cannot afford a stream babbling through the back yard or a sparkling pond might instead enjoy a more affordable fountain, suggests Pattie. "And those can be all kinds of price ranges," she says.

And if maintenance costs are bogging down a budget, use ornamental bushes and other plant material with colorful leaves or visually interesting structures, Janssen suggests. Ornamentals require less care than annuals that must be changed out regularly.

These cost-conscious clues not only help clients stick to their budgets, but they also provide appealing, affordable solutions. And when clients are ready to add to their existing designs, they generally show their appreciation by offering the company their repeat business. "You really have to put yourself in the client's shoes," Janssen relates. "Ask yourself, 'What would I do if this was my property and I had a limited amount of money to spend?'"

The author is a contributing editor to *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached via nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.



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Pest Management

by Lauren Spiers

For many lawn care CEOs, winter is time to scrutinize P&L statements, perform system-wide SWOT analyses and hold HR and R&D staff meetings to put the business on track for a better ROI after the first of the year.

Of course, once customers renew their accounts and technicians head back to their routes, LCOs – lawn care operators, that is – need to start speaking plain English. This is particularly true regarding a lawn care acronym that is gaining popularity and importance: IPM.

Known in long-hand as integrated pest management, IPM accepts weeds, insects and diseases as parts of the great outdoors, focusing on more holistic pest management practices and the judicious use of pesticides. Even with this guideline, IPM definitions vary widely, and recent legislative and regulatory actions are compounding the issue. But there are two points on which everyone involved agrees: IPM is an effective and environmentally sound way to deter lawn pests, and communicating this information to both customers and employees is crucial.

IPM: UNDEFINED. A given company's definition and practice of IPM is dependent upon region-specific pest problems, as well as customers' expectations.

"How you practice IPM all depends on what type of plant material is there, what type of insects or diseases they're prone to, and the history and weather in the area," explains Cindy Halm, vice president, Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y.

Instead of trying to define the concept, Halm looks at IPM as a systematic approach to caring for a client's property. "Scouting is our No. 1 practice and we scout on a regular basis," she explains. "When we find a problem, we first use a combination of cultural practices like pruning out the particular insect or disease, or advising the customer on watering and mowing practices."

(continued on page 76)

Properly performing IPM involves input at the customer, contractor and manufacturer levels.



Communicating IPM

Practicing IPM includes a process called scouting for turf pests, which is done before using pesticides. Then, if pests are found, LCOs use cultural practices to improve turf and eliminate the problem or apply spot pesticide treatments to control the problem.

Photo: Naturalawn of America

Pest Management

(continued from page 74)

Philip Catron has a similar approach. "We use a three-pronged approach of prevention, monitoring and controlling," comments the president of NaturaLawn of America, Frederick, Md. "Prevention can be done first and foremost by conserving a pest's natural enemies, using improved plant and turfgrass varieties and invigorating lawns with aeration and overseeding. You can drastically minimize any need for insect controls with prevention alone."

Catron and Halm agree that monitoring soil and plant conditions is essential. "Whether you're monitoring soil temperatures or phenological indicators, after several seasons of tracking you can directly correlate climactic events with the presence of certain pests," Catron says.

Contrary to some IPM beliefs, when monitoring and cultural practices aren't enough to inhibit pests, LCOs do apply pesticides, albeit sparingly. For instance, "if there aren't any natural predators present, we'll make

A recent Lawn & Landscape Online poll asked: Does your company practice IPM in lawn care services? Here are the responses:

Yes, we always follow strict IPM guidelines.	17.5%
Yes, we incorporate some IPM principles.	40%
Yes, but legislation is making IPM more difficult.	12.5%
No, but we're planning to start using IPM.	5%
No, legislation is preventing our entry into IPM.	10%
No, our customers don't understand IPM.	7.5%
No, training and equipment make IPM too expensive.	7.5%

Poll Response

a treatment using a consistently effective product that's least toxic to the environment, our customers and our employees," Halm says.

Other contractors incorporate these IPM principles, though they may focus less on monitoring and more on using pesticides wisely.

"We try to grow healthy lawns and plants by advising our customers on cultural practices, but they've seen you go over the entire lawn with every product so often that it's a different mindset for the customer," com-

ments Bob Ottley, president, One Step Lawn & Tree Care, North Chili, N.Y. "To incorporate some IPM principles, we use an all-granular fertilizer with a high sulfur-coated urea product to get better fertilization, which keeps a lot of weeds from emerging in the first place. From there, instead of spraying pesticides only where there are weeds, we use the theory of spraying everything except where there are no weeds." Though the dis-

(continued on page 78)

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USE READER SERVICE #65

Pest Management

(continued from page 76)

tion is small, Ottley explains that this helps his technicians miss fewer weeds in the lawn, thereby reducing customer callbacks.

CLIENTS DON'T HAVE ESP. Even with diverse working definitions, IPM still is a strong trend in the green industry, thanks to communication among both LCOs and lawn care product suppliers.

"I think people are more aware of IPM and it's something LCOs can talk about with homeowners that most of them will understand - 'These are the things we're doing to reduce the amount of pesticides we use,'" says Kyle Miller, turf and ornamental senior technical specialist, BASF, Raleigh, N.C.

Halm takes many different approaches to educate her clients about the IPM process.

"Making sure that the homeowner and technician are communicating is the most important part," Halm says. "So we make sure to hire and train our employees so they're able to

(continued on page 80)

Undoubtedly, lawn care operators who practice integrated pest management (IPM) need to have a strong working knowledge of how weeds, diseases and insects attack lawns and landscapes, as well as an understanding of how to alleviate those problems without dousing the lawn in pesticides. Philip Catron, president, NaturaLawn of America, Frederick, Md., explained that taking this approach to lawn care helps solve entire lawn problems, rather than simply treating the symptoms.

"If you've got clover in a lawn, it can be treated with a broadleaf weed control," Catron notes. "But the clover is a symptom that's indicative of three environmental conditions: a low fertility soil that just hasn't been taken care of, a very acidic soil where the pH is low or a compacted soil where oxygen levels are low."

In an IPM approach, Catron says he would first aerate and overseed the lawn to thicken it up because a good root system will keep the soil porous. From there, corrective lime applications over the course of a couple of years will provide long-term health benefits.

"Finally, I'm going to put it under the right fertility if the potassium is too low or the sulfur is too high," Catron says. "Those are three different approaches and none of them involve chemical applications per se."

Though Catron notes that these solutions will not provide instant results, they will encourage the turf to out compete the clover over time. "At the same time," he adds. "If I need to make an application of a control material for customer satisfaction, that's legitimate because I'm building the foundation for the turf as the main solution. If I only sprayed and didn't include the other aspects, I'd never solve that problem and wouldn't be practicing IPM." - **Lauren Spiers**

IPM In Practice



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Pest Management

(continued from page 78)

explain – face-to-face or in writing – exactly what they found on the property and the steps needed to correct the problem.”

Also, Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care publishes quarterly client newsletters, maintains up-to-date informational links on their Web site and leaves “Green Tips” fliers with clients on every visit. “The fliers are one of our best educational tools with information about things that we may see during that time of year or reminders about cultural practices for the homeowner,” Halm adds.

Still, Halm and Ottley agree that explaining IPM to sell the

service is less effective than marketing the level of expertise that comes with IPM.

“When we started incorporating IPM, we explained to our customers what it was, but during applications we tried to make it as invisible as possible,” Ottley says. “That lessened any concern on their part that we weren’t making the right applications on their lawns, but let them see the positive results at the same time.”

“Instead of marketing IPM, we market the level of service and the education of our technicians,” Halm adds.

In terms of employee experience, Catron notes that one hurdle of IPM is ensuring that all employees believe in and understand the program. “If you don’t believe that IPM will work, it will be impossible to train your people,” he says.

“Your doubts will come across, so IPM won’t be practiced it in the field and you probably won’t hold technicians accountable.”

NaturaLawn of America employees receive between 40 and 60 hours of classroom training during the first month of employment, followed by two months of ride-along experience before a technician goes out on his or her own. Additionally, the company has three-day regional training sessions each winter and six agronomic manuals covering insects, diseases, fertility, IPM, calibration and general operations, which employees must study.

For an equally intense training program including classroom sessions, ride-alongs and weekly company meetings, Ottley says his company spends \$3,000 to \$6,000 per employee, annually, for ongoing training.

Though the training investment may seem steep, “what would it cost the company not to do that?” Catron asks. “If I can keep a knowledgeable employee for five years or

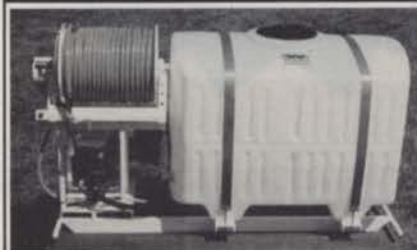
(continued on page 82)



Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care uses ‘Green Tips’ (right) to communicate IPM to clients.

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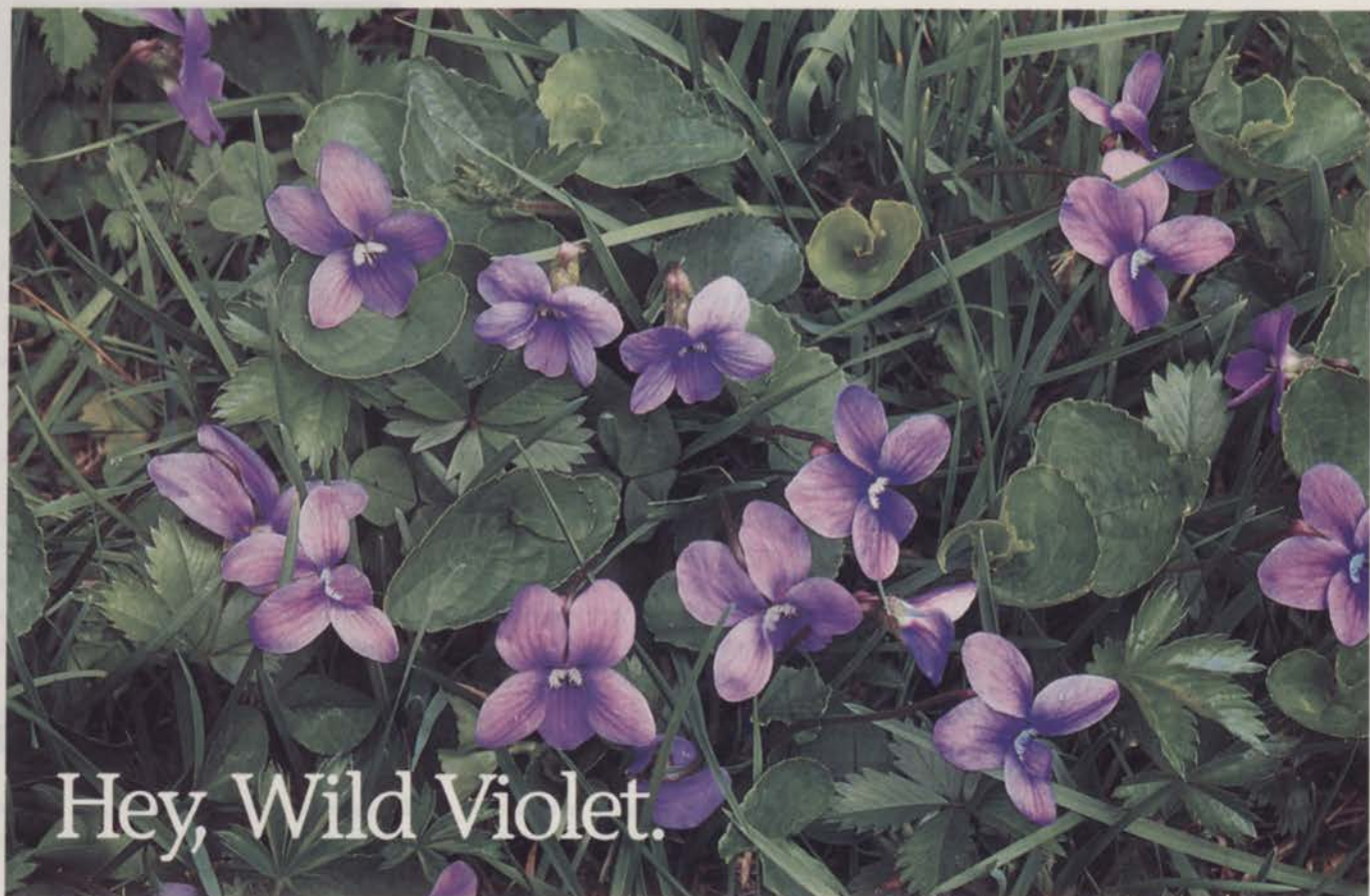


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Pest Management

(continued from page 80)

longer, that translates into huge savings in terms of recruitment, lost time and even more training. We get back 10-fold what we invest in training."

LAW OF THE LAND. But while IPM seems to be holding strong, with 57.5 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* Online poll reporting that they use some IPM principles or strict IPM guidelines in their lawn care operations, label changes and legislation is threatening IPM in some areas. In 2000, Ottley expressed concern that new requirements for 48-hour notification of pesticide applications would increase his operating costs to the point where IPM may no longer be possible.

"Thankfully, my company has not had to comply with the 48-hour notification because our county has not opted-in to the law," Ottley notes. "I do know a few companies who adopted that practice and moved away from IPM because they can't afford to miss some-

thing after they make a notification. Rather than risk expensive callbacks, a lot of companies have returned to blanket spraying."

Halm also is concerned about the notification laws, commenting that any increase in pest populations during that two-day period could severely harm a landscape. "If I found that a particularly damaging insect like a spruce spider mite had reached a threshold level, that population could do significant damage before I'd be able to treat the area," she explains. "At that point, the insects would be more mature and there would be more of them, so I would end up using either more pesticides to control it or a more toxic pesticide because the insect is older."

At the same time, Catron sees other types of legislation as helpful for IPM in general.

"Last year the state of Maryland finally passed a law that any property more than 10,000 square feet must be soil tested before any kind of application or treatment is made," Catron says. "I think that's a good

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Check our January Online Extras section to find out how legislative changes are positively impacting the practice of IPM.

thing. How do you expect a doctor to treat you properly without a blood test? A legitimate soil sample will show you where nutrient and pH ranges are and will help define some of the management practices you should use."

While practicing IPM may seem like a large task – especially with the EPA placing restrictions on certain active ingredients – LCOs need not have PhDs in order to implement the approach in their programs. "It's not a difficult switch to make when you start using IPM in your business," Ottley says. "You just have to make sure all your people are on board and that your customers have a basic understanding that you're being a good steward of environmental health." **LL**

The author is assistant editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at lsapiers@lawnandlandscape.com.

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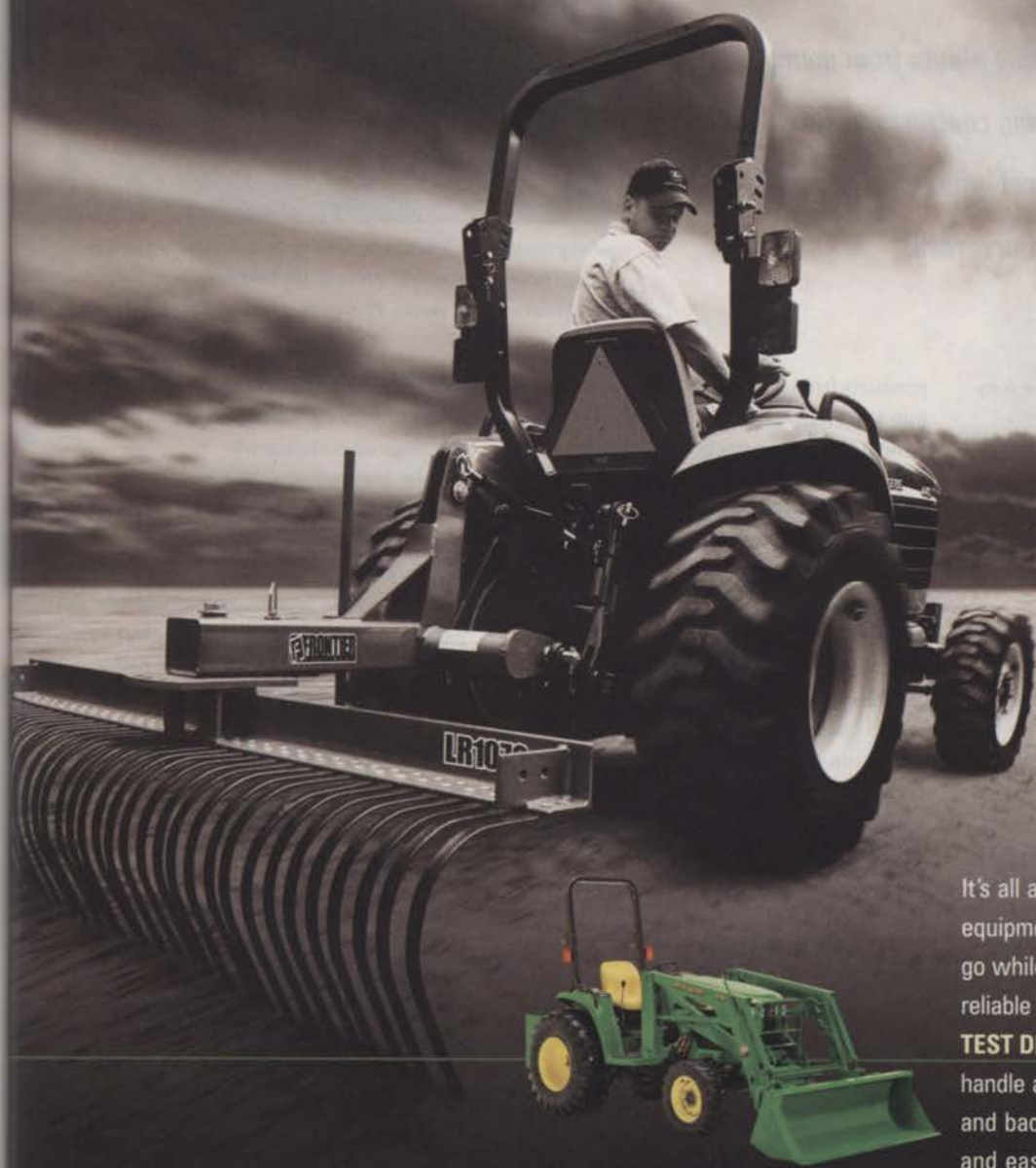
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Nursery Know-How

by Jessie Atchison

Instead of just ordering plants from many of the nurseries around town, contractors should build bonds with a few local growers to boost plant material arrival and accuracy.



Many growers specialize in dealing with landscape contractors. Those growers will provide the best service tailored to meet contractors' needs. Photo: Ball Horticultural Co.

Part of becoming a better landscape contractor is being a better planner, and part of this success is getting the right plant material for installation jobs. One of the most effective ways to do both is to work directly with a grower.

Building a relationship with a good grower gives contractors better planning ability and makes it easier for them to get exactly what they want. Contractors who usually buy plants for jobs at the last minute are stuck with whatever the grower, nursery or garden center has on hand. But if they order through a grower, it's less likely that they'll have to accept substitutions, and it's much more likely they'll get the exact color and cultivar they want.

Working with a grower also gives contractors access to additional horticultural expertise and experience. Getting the right

products from the right suppliers translates into successful plantings, which often leads to new – and repeat – business.

SEEK THEM OUT. Finding a good grower doesn't have to be complicated, but it does take a little research. Producing high-quality live plant material is a challenging job, and the goal is to find a grower who excels at it.

There are several ways to locate local growers. First, join local landscape associations – many publish supplier directories, which can be good sources of contact information as well as networking opportunities with other members to find out which growers they prefer. Many growers who regularly deal with the landscape trade also are members of landscape associations, so contractors can get to know them by joining and attending association events.

Additionally, contractors should join state growers' associations. Membership directories give contractors lists of local grower

members, and members also get to know area growers by attending grower-specific meetings or trade shows.

The Internet also is a good source for finding the dates of grower association events, many of which are open to non-members. State floriculture agents, extension agents or university horticulture departments can often provide grower references. Once contractors have learned about local growers, they should whittle their lists down to a few good prospects and make appointments to visit their facilities. All of this work is worth the time it takes to ensure the best supplier choice.

VISITATION RIGHTS. Visiting growers gives contractors the best indication of which grower is right for them.

While visiting, evaluate the cleanliness of the facility. Make sure the staff is familiar with the plant material and can answer ques-

(continued on page 86)

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Nursery Know-How

(continued from page 84)

tions about plant use, care and variety selection. Look at the plant material in the greenhouses – does it look healthy? Contractors should look for growers who focus on growing the types of plants they want, whether they're annuals, perennials or woody plants. Ask about minimum orders, delivery charges and scheduling to uncover how they operate. Finally, ask about the best time to place orders. Growers have to be economical with space, and some may ask for more lead time than others in order to accommodate all orders.

Many growers specialize in dealing with the landscape trade, and those growers will provide the best service and information tailored to meet contractors' needs. Contractors should ask growers they visit if they have literature or other information that targets landscape contractors: price lists, product lists or other pieces are good signs that the grower has experience working with landscapers and their unique needs.

Good growers also should ask contrac-

tors some questions, such as: "When do you want to receive the material? What colors do you want? How much lead time is there? What type of material do you want: 4-inch finished pots, flats, gallon containers?" A good grower should be interested in learning exactly what contractors need and when they need it. Remember, good growers will distinguish themselves with good service, and contractors should absolutely expect good service from a grower.

BUILD A PARTNERSHIP. Once contractors select their primary grower, building a partnership with them is crucial. Keeping orders as consolidated as possible with one grower allows contractors to grow the relationship over time, which usually results in the best pricing and service. However, depending on the plant volume contractors need and their diversification, building relationships with a couple of other local growers is advisable.

A Grower Timeline

UP TO 12 MONTHS BEFORE INSTALLATION

Keep records of the sites you've planted to build knowledge of what works well. Exemplary service one year often leads to repeat business the next, so invest the time to evaluate the site.

Observe the light and soil conditions and note which colors work well in the area and which permanent plants or structures will affect the colors you choose. Document what you planted there in the past and how it performed. Were you and your client pleased with the results? Were the plants installed at the right stage? Did you use the right plants for the area? If one variety doesn't perform well for you, make sure you were using the best specific variety for the job, and remember that you don't have to use the same plants again. Now is also the time to start visiting and selecting potential growers.

SIX TO NINE MONTHS BEFORE INSTALLATION

Start working with your grower. Discuss which colors and varieties you'd like to use. If you're not sure about which variety is best for your region, ask your grower's opinion. Get examples of the different colors available and try to see the plant material in person if possible. Discuss proper timing for placing your order to be sure you get the variety selections you want.

Ask the grower or a sales representative to visit the site with you. Talk about diseases or insects that might affect the varieties you've chosen. Ask about plants' maintenance requirements, spacing, growth habits and fertilizer needs.

Nursery Know-How

For instance, if contractors deal in trees and shrubs as well as annuals and perennials, having a specialized grower for each area is a good idea. Also, if contractors need a particularly large volume of an item, a relationship with a second or even third grower could provide a valuable backup plan if one grower is unable to supply the quantity needed. Keeping other leads in mind is important, so continue to network even after settling on a primary grower.

When it comes to good service, the right grower will make this a priority. Contractors can have their grower or someone from the grower's staff visit a planting site whenever possible. Many growers have their own salespeople who are available for this purpose. By doing this, contractors build the grower relationship as well as establish an opportunity to talk about plant selection and make sure the chosen plants will work well in the area.

While contractors should expect excellent service from their grower, they should

also be respectful of their own responsibilities to help the process flow smoothly. Establishing a final date for order changes with the grower and sticking to it is important. Contractors also should increase their volume with the grower by consolidating orders whenever possible and be sensitive of delivery dates.

Most of all, paying bills on time and referring new business to the grower if they provide quality service helps boost the relationship. When referring other contractors, make sure the grower knows who sent the new business their way.

PLANT MATERIAL SELECTION. Once contractors establish a relationship with a grower, keeping tips on hand for choosing adequate plant material is important.

Plant selection can be intimidating, but a little planning goes a long way toward success. Research plant varieties on the Internet,

(continued on page 90)

Follow this timeline to ensure on-time delivery of the best plant materials.

FOUR TO SIX MONTHS BEFORE INSTALLATION

Time to place your order. Have final discussions with your grower about variety selection, preferred container size and color choices. Schedule the delivery date and discuss the stage at which you will accept the product. Planning this far out allows for flexibility and makes it more likely you'll get the delivery date you want. Ask the grower for confirmation that your order was placed.

ONE MONTH BEFORE INSTALLATION

Confirm the delivery date with your grower. Plan a visit to the facility to inspect your crop. A good grower will keep you informed along the way, so there will be no surprises. Confirm your order one last time, checking the quantity and color you've ordered of each variety.

DELIVERY

Schedule your crew and the delivery location. Make sure the delivery spot can accommodate the delivery truck and the quantity of plant material, particularly if the location is somewhere other than the job site.

— *Jessie Atchison*

Six to nine months before installation, contractors should discuss plant colors and varieties with their growers and get recommendations. Photo: Ball Horticultural Co.



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Speaker: Chris Davitt, Ruppert Nurseries

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3:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

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Saturday, March 6, 2004

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Job Costing: Are You Losing Money?

Equipment & Vehicle Leasing: Pros and Cons

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2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

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4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 7, 2004

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

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Speaker: Ed LaFlamme, Grass Roots Consulting

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Speaker: Jack Mattingly, Mattingly Associates

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USE READER SERVICE #78

Nursery Know-How

(continued from page 87)

review catalogs or other literature, consult the grower and visit trials whenever possible. Many universities conduct plant trials every summer (many also have spring and fall trials), and attending one in the area can give contractors a good idea of what will work for their landscape projects.

If contractors have built great grower relationships, they shouldn't have to worry about the quality of the plants they receive. Plants should be "cracking" color at the time of installation—about 25 percent open blooms is best—with lots of other buds indicating

A GOOD GROWER SHOULD BE INTERESTED IN LEARNING WHAT CONTRACTORS NEED AND WHEN THEY NEED IT. GOOD GROWERS WILL DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES WITH GOOD SERVICE, AND CONTRACTORS SHOULD EXPECT GOOD SERVICE FROM A GROWER. — JESSIE ATCHISON

new flowers are on the way. At this stage, plants can handle the stress of transplanting and acclimatization, and will provide color quickly. When the plants aren't in full bloom, they will open within just a few days. However, if there is no color on the plants, it will take too long for a good show to develop.

Additionally, look at simple characteristics: Are the roots healthy? Is the plant green—not brown? Look for signs of disease; even if you don't know what disease it is specifically, you can usually tell if a plant doesn't look healthy. Just follow this simple guideline: "If you wouldn't plant it in your own yard, don't plant it in your clients' yards."

Great plants from great suppliers provide the first steps to great landscapes. **LL**

The author is public relations coordinator, Ball Horticultural Co., West Chicago, Ill., and can be reached at 630/588-3457 or jatchiso@ballhort.com.

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by Lauren Spiers

Control the CUL-DE-SAC

Patience is a virtue when dealing with residential mowing jobs.

There's a big difference between people who head to the \$5-a-cut barber and those who opt for the \$50 "trim" at a high-end salon. The former wants quick service at a good price so he or she can look decent and get on with the rest of the day. The latter, however, has suggestions for the stylist and is willing to pay more for extra attention and a perfect finished product, not to mention the added costs of highlights and styling gel.

But this phenomenon isn't exclusive to hair grooming. Lawn maintenance companies notice a similar difference between their commercial and residential clients when maintaining their lawns.

"Most residential accounts require a higher degree of finish work," comments Tom Wright, owner, Homestead Landscaping, Bondville, Vt. "Commercial accounts aren't as demanding."

Knowing this, contractors face the challenges of completing mowing jobs on time while still meeting clients' high expectations. Wright and other contractors agree that to do this residential mowing requires sharper blades and stronger people skills to maintain clean-cut accounts.

IN THE DETAILS. Because homeowners take such pride in their lawns, residential

maintenance crews are obligated to focus on the smaller clean-up jobs like edging, pruning and blowing. According to Wright, this finish work makes residential accounts more time consuming. "On commercial sites you can go at a greater speed and get a lot more done per hour," he says. "Residential clients require you to spend more time blowing off patios and walkways, and being particular with the trimming."

Other contractors attribute this to homeowners' strong connections to their landscapes. "Residential accounts need a little more hand-holding and that's not a negative thing," says Chuck Carr, president, Carr Landscaping, Northridge, Calif. "They live there day in and day out, whereas commercial property managers may only be on-site once a month."

Carr notes that of the 20 to 30 client phone calls he receives weekly, almost 90 percent are in reference to residential accounts. "I think that's why a lot of landscape companies want to get away from residential jobs as they grow," he adds. "They tend to be lower dollar value accounts, but the service required is much higher, which is the opposite of what you would like."

Still, contractors keep residential accounts because homeowners eagerly buy into landscape enhancements, comments Mark Hutcheson, president, Hutcheson Horticultural, Woodstock, Ga. He adds that, for companies performing maintenance in addition to landscaping, projects like seasonal color change-outs or small hardscaping jobs are more profitable than only mowing lawns.

However, Carr explains that homeowners often have less sophisticated knowledge of

(continued on page 94)



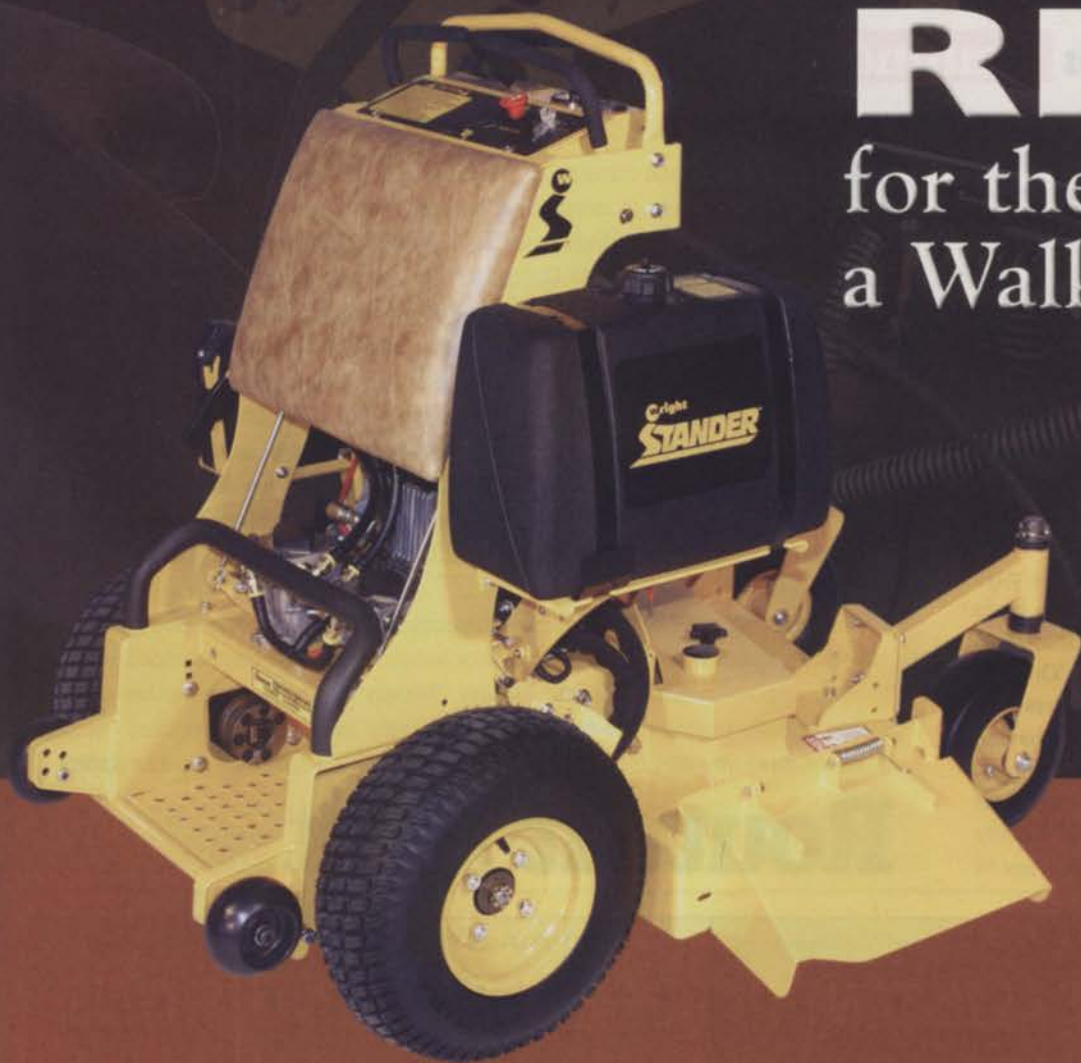
Oddly placed trees and plant beds can turn residential lawns into mower obstacle courses.

Having crews visit the same sites routinely makes handling these tricky areas easier over time.

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SPECIAL FOCUS: Commercial Mowers

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landscaping, resulting in more questions regarding the whys and hows of lawn maintenance. Appeasing these folks requires patience and attention to detail.

"It's really a matter of educating the client," Hutcheson agrees. "You have to find out the client's expectations up front. If they had maintenance before, find out what they liked about that company and why they're switching. Then explain the services you offer and what you'll do to meet their needs."

Additionally, Hutcheson notes that even a little effort on the part of a contractor to put the finishing touches on a landscape pays dividends in client satisfaction. "We try to set ourselves apart by doing extra, little things for the customer," Hutcheson says. "On some accounts we might clean out the gutters if we happen to be there, or if the client is having a party, we'll come out the day of or the day before and make sure the patio is cleared off and everything looks nice. We don't usually

(continued on page 96)

Many landscape installation companies who offer residential maintenance services do so to increase per-account revenue and guarantee homeowners' satisfaction. But what if the high-profit installation customer is in an inconvenient location for maintenance crews? Chuck Carr has had just that experience.

"All our installation clients want to buy into our maintenance because they look at it as a guarantee on their property," says Carr, president, Carr Landscape Management, Northridge, Calif. "But there are some accounts that may have been good jobs to install, but are a little too far from any of our existing routes to maintain."

Still, even if a client lives outside of Carr's 30-mile work radius, he knows he can't guarantee the health of the client's property if he can't be on site regularly. To solve the problem, Carr minimizes the number of far-away accounts that he takes on, "but if we have a job that we installed and we want to maintain, we'll start knocking on some doors in the area."

Carr uses door-to-door marketing techniques to turn long-distance jobs into business-building accounts. "We'll put door hangers out in the neighborhood and try to market up and down the street," he says. "Usually we can pick up another account or two to make the trip more worthwhile. Having the crew out for two or three jobs cuts down on drive time and brings in more revenue for the company." — **Lauren Spiers**

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SPECIAL FOCUS: Commercial Mowers

(continued from page 94)

charge for things like that, but they're things that everyone appreciates."

Carr agrees that details and professionalism go a long way toward making an impression on residential accounts. "That comes from clean trucks with logos and crews with clean uniforms," Carr says. "Not only do we want our crewmembers and equipment to be clean and in good condition, but we always make sure to leave the lawns that way, as well - the edging is a little straighter, the pruning is a little neater, so when someone goes by they can tell it's well cared for. We get a lot of referrals that way."

Wright's crews also take pride in leaving lawns looking crisply cut. "We try to mow in different directions every week and provide a different pattern," he comments. "It's excellent for the lawn and challenging for the crews to figure out all the patterns. But the homeowners appreciate it and it can really set us apart on a suburban block."

(continued on page 98)

With the national housing market booming, "refinance" is the word on the street and homeowners are sprucing up their formerly humble abodes.

"I think since 9/11, people are trying to enjoy life a little more and they're willing to spend some dollars to have a nice lawn and landscape," notes Tom Wright, president, Homestead Landscaping, Bondville, Vt.

Chuck Carr agrees. "Homeowners are definitely putting more money into their lawns," says the president of Carr Landscape Management, Northridge, Calif. "That's the biggest growth part of my business right now. I call it 'residential landscape renovation,' because there's not a lot of new home building going on, but a lot of people who are buying 10- to 50-year-old homes want to upgrade their landscapes."

Though Carr and other contractors note that the money homeowners saved by refinancing is mostly increasing requests for landscape installation, maintenance contractors are benefiting just the same.

"We do mowing and maintenance in addition to landscape installation," Wright says, referencing a business mix common in the industry. "We don't require our installation customers to buy into maintenance, but we strongly encourage it because we don't just want to mow grass. We're in the business of offering full service to our customers and one of those services happens to be mowing." - **Lauren Spiers**

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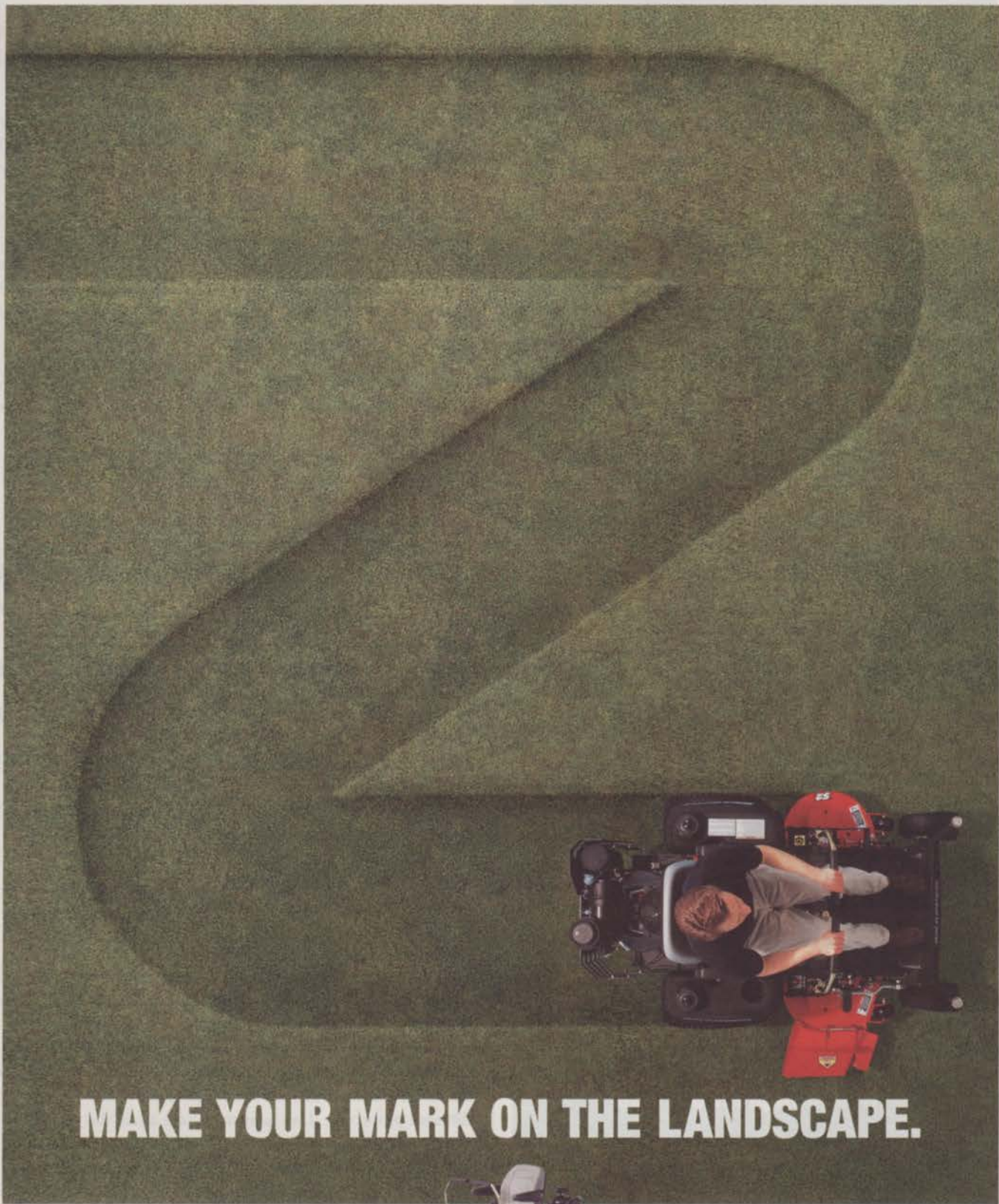
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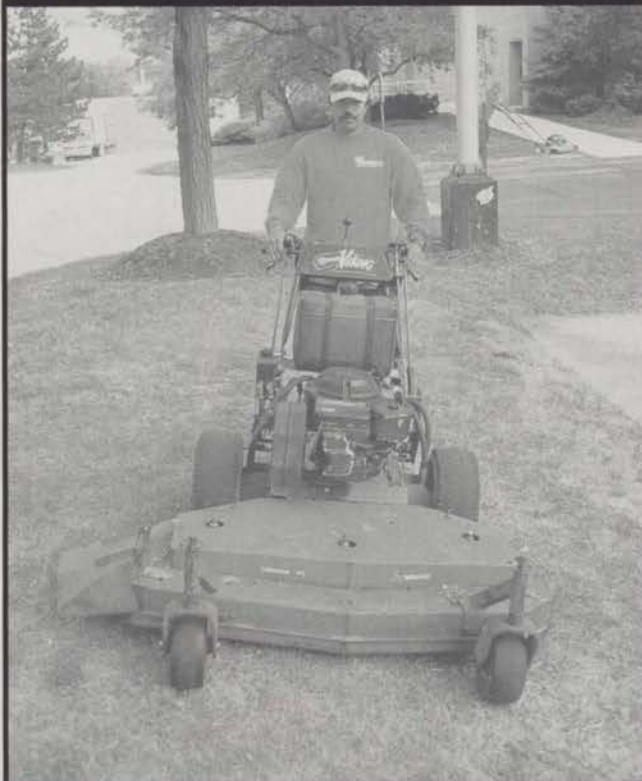
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SPECIAL FOCUS: **Commercial Mowers**

(continued from page 96)

Additionally, Hutcheson notes the importance of customer service offsite as well as on the job. "Our staff is trained to always be courteous and responsive, so that if the client calls with something they're upset about we can handle it immediately," he comments. "If a complaint or a request comes in, we do what we can to route it immediately and let the supervisor on that route know what needs to be taken care of. Our first rule is that you have to call within a 24-hour period to tell the client you're aware of their concern and let them know that you'll take care of it, even if you can't get to it that day. As long as you do what you say you'll do, homeowners are happy."

DOOR-TO-DOOR SERVICE. Like a talented hairdresser with a full client list, residential maintenance contractors must fit all their clients into a master schedule.

"One of our biggest challenges is that all of our residential clients want to be mowed right before the weekend," says Hutcheson. "They can also be very particular about the timing. If you come on Thursday, they want you to come every Thursday. Or they may request that you come after 10 a.m. or before 3 p.m. — that's their schedule."

Handling clients who equate signing up for lawn maintenance to scheduling a hair appointment can be difficult, but Hutcheson and other contractors have developed solid systems to keep residential mowing accounts in line and complete them on time. For instance, to accommodate his homeowners' scheduling requests, Hutcheson plans his maintenance routes around a four-day workweek. For the most part, Hutcheson's crews handle commercial jobs at the beginning of the week and complete residential accounts on Wednesdays and Thursdays — as close to the weekend as possible.

"Homeowners really like consistency," Hutcheson says. "They like the same crew every week and the same timing every week, and that helps us because the crews really get to know their routes and the different properties. If we happen to have a rain day, the four-day workweek lets us reschedule a lot easier and gives us time to get in touch with the customers so they're aware of the situation."

Hutcheson adds that each foreman has a folder for his or her routes with information on special requests or challenges for each. "The folders might have client requests, such as checking that all the gates are locked when the crews leave on accounts that have dogs, or making sure that they clean up any clippings from water features at the end of the job," he says. "Even if we have a foreman call in sick, we can always keep up with the consistency by looking at the folder."

Wright also finds that consistency benefits both the company and the homeowner.

"IT'S EASY TO BUILD GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH HOMEOWNERS. IF YOU DO A GOOD JOB FOR THEM, THEY'RE VERY LOYAL AND THEY'LL TELL OTHER PEOPLE ABOUT THE WORK YOU DO, BUT YOU CAN'T LET THE WORK SLIDE. THEY'LL ALWAYS EXPECT GOOD SERVICE IN RETURN." — CHUCK CARR

(continued on page 100)

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SPECIAL FOCUS: Commercial Mowers

(continued from page 98)

"Our mowing crews are strictly mowing crews," Wright says. "We dedicate an individual to a certain area like mowing and find that those people gain knowledge and skill through operating that equipment and can often operate very efficiently." Having well-maintained equipment also helps the company stay on schedule and provide a quality cut, he adds.

IF THE CREW FITS. In addition to routing and scheduling, having the proper size crew on a job is key to retaining residential work. For Wright, two-person crews are optimal for residential accounts and each crew's foreman decides who tackles certain aspects of a given job.

"Each job will have its own requirements based on size," Wright notes. "The crew will generally have a larger-deck riding mower, a smaller-deck walk-behind and then some push rotaries, string trimmers and blowers. On some crews, you'll only run one mower

and the second person will trim. But we try to balance things out and divvy up the desirable and less desirable portions of work so the crewmembers stay interested in their work and keep from getting bored."

Carr agrees that two-person crews are the most efficient for residential maintenance accounts in his area. "Our lawns are not as big as those in the Midwest," he comments. "Two thousand or 3,000 square feet is a big lawn for us. One crewmember can handle that with a 21-inch mower while the other person does the edging, blowing and sweeping. A third crewmember on a job like that would end up just standing around – it's hard to keep him busy."

For Hutcheson's residential accounts, the jobs are large enough to warrant three-person crews. To further ensure that crews finish their work efficiently, Hutcheson sets man-hour goals for each project or route and offers bonuses to supervisors if the crews meet their hour budgets.

"We set a goal of hours per week – usually around 40 or 45 – and if they meet or beat that they can take part in profit sharing," Hutcheson says. "We do this quarterly and it really keeps the crews on task. The bonuses can be as much as a paycheck, and sometimes the supervisor will share the bonus with his crews to thank them for their hard work."

Without a doubt, hard work is the name of the game for residential maintenance contractors. But attention to detail often is rewarded with a loyal clientele. Carr notes that happy clients will stick around for a while. "It's easy to build good relationships with homeowners," he says. "If you do a good job for them, they're very loyal and they'll tell other people about the work you do, but you can't let the work slide. They'll always expect good service in return." **L**

The author is assistant editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at lspiers@lawnandlandscape.com.

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USE READER SERVICE #88

by William Lynott

Purchasing POINTERS

Need a new mower for the spring season and not sure if you should buy or lease it? These tips might help you make a decision.

Should a contractor buy or lease equipment such as walk-behind and riding mowers? The debate over that question is likely to continue as long as there are landscape contractors in business.

The fact that there are so many advantages and disadvantages of both leasing and buying equipment is probably why many financial experts take refuge in a noncommittal position. Hence, contractors trying to decide whether to lease or buy mowers will find little guidance.

How do government agencies feel about the lease/buy question? Does Uncle Sam offer guidance on this subject? Not much as it turns out. Here's what the official Web site of the Small Business Administration has to say on the subject: "This is a good question and needs to be considered carefully. Leasing does not tie up your cash; a disadvantage is that the item then has no resale or salvage value since you do not own it. Careful weighing of alternatives and a cost analysis will help you make the best decision."

DECISIONS, DECISIONS. Reduced to their simplest terms, the pros and cons of leasing vs. buying place the burden of the decision on the unique circumstances of the business involved. Does the owner take psychological comfort in owning vs. leasing? Is the business well established with a stable cash flow or is it a new business struggling with start-up expenses? These and a myriad of other issues place the responsibility for making the best decision squarely on the shoulders of the



According to a Lawn & Landscape survey, 83 percent of contractors prefer to buy vs. lease their mowers, a figure that is comparable to the ratios at small businesses in other service industries.
Photo: Kubota

contractor and his or her tax adviser.

Whether it's the psychological comfort of ownership or the result of cost vs. benefits analyses, most contractors prefer to buy. A recent *Lawn & Landscape Online* poll found that 83 percent of respondents always purchase their mowers. From the sheer standpoint of majority opinion, that figure, which is comparable to the ratio in other small businesses, suggests meaningful advantages in ownership.

CPA Carol Katz, Leonard J. Miller & Associates, Baltimore, Md., offers the following summary highlights to help contractors choose their purchasing preference.

REASONS TO BUY. If you decide to buy the equipment, you will have the psychological satisfaction of owning it upon completion of the financing. Additionally, these reasons tend to pull contractors toward the buying option:

- The interest rate built into the lease payment is often greater than the interest on a loan taken out for purchase of the equipment.
- Many lessees are not aware that there is often room to negotiate the lease terms due to built-in financing costs and the residual value calculations, so the equipment winds up costing more (when purchased at the end of the lease) than it would have had they bought the

(continued on page 104)

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SPECIAL FOCUS: Commercial Mowers

(continued from page 102)

equipment and financed it with a loan.

• New laws passed in 2003 allow most small businesses to expense up to \$100,000 for equipment in the year of purchase (under IRS Section 179). Even in cases where immediate expensing is not allowed (due to excessive amounts of equipment purchased or business losses), for federal tax purposes there is now a first year special 50 percent bonus depreciation available for new equipment purchases.

REASONS TO LEASE. Leasing will usually require less cash for down payments and monthly payments, assuming you will finance the purchase with a loan rather than pay for it up front with cash savings. A lease requires less cash because, in essence, the lessee is buying only a portion of the equip-

ment – just the amount of wear and tear during the period of the lease. Other reasons contractors lease mowers include:

- The lease on new equipment can often be extended, making it unnecessary to purchase it at the expiration of the lease.
- You may write off full lease payments each year, eliminating the need to maintain depreciation schedules.
- It makes sense to lease if you will be able to use the cash in your business or in your investments to earn a better return.
- Because some states have rules that disallow portions of special bonus depreciation and/or Section 179 expensing, there may be significantly fewer tax compliance concerns with a lease.
- The sales tax is spread over the life of the lease, rather than all up front, and it is

based on a smaller portion of the total cost.

• Leasing protects the owner against obsolescence. Since the equipment is being leased, it usually can be exchanged and upgraded through the leasing company.

NO PERFECT ANSWER. Obviously, there are advantages and disadvantages in each of the lease/buy options. Perhaps the major disadvantage of buying is the initial capital required for the purchase. You can minimize the cash outlay by financing the purchase, but this could affect other aspects of a company's financial situation.

While any equipment a contractor buys will appear as an asset on the company's balance sheet, the loan will appear as a liability. Many lenders and bonding companies become concerned when they see large amounts of capital tied up in equipment. Thus, substantial liabilities may adversely affect your ability to qualify for a loan or a line of credit.

A lease can minimize such problems, but leasing has its own set of disadvantages. Although purchasing requires a large cash outlay up front, a lease may contain an unpleasant surprise at expiration. Most lease terms consider residual value at the end of the lease period. The leasing company must predict depreciation, wear-and-tear, and other considerations during the time the equipment is in a contractor's hands. If at the end of the lease the residual value is less than projected, you will have to come up with the difference to compensate for what the lessor is likely to call "excess wear-and-tear."

So, what is the best choice for a landscape contractor who needs to acquire new equipment? Most of the experts we consulted prefer buying as the better choice, unless cash is so tight that you are forced to lease.

CPA Wendell Waite, Las Vegas, Nev., makes no bones about his attitude toward leasing: "When you lease, you are usually leasing from a third party financing company," he says. "Logically, these companies have to make money as the middleman between you and the dealer."

That additional profit, of course, must come from the contractor. **LL**

According to Rental Service Corp., more landscaping contractors are renting equipment and tools.

"More people are starting to see that it's just like renting a car, skis or a movie," says Jay Carlyn, regional sales manager, Rental Service Corp. "Why buy a car for a short business trip or a DVD you'll watch once? Why buy skis if you only ski once a year? The same thing can be said about buying equipment. People are figuring out that they can let someone else shoulder the maintenance and other ownership costs and, when they're done with it, they can simply take the equipment back."

Renting instead of purchasing equipment has some advantages over short-term usage, Carlyn says. "Most rental stores carry only the latest tools and equipment, and they keep these items in good shape because they're cleaned and serviced after each rental," he says. "The general rule of thumb is that if they expect to use a piece of equipment more than 75 percent of the time, then they should consider buying the equipment. Otherwise, rental is almost always the most cost-effective method. The most obvious advantage of renting equipment is that contractors only pay for what they use."

Carlyn stresses that many rental stores don't just rent equipment; they also offer advice and consultation. Here are some tips he offers for getting the most out of a rental transaction:

- Call your local rental store and describe the project you would like to complete with rented equipment. When store personnel know the details of your project, they can recommend the type and size of equipment you'll need for most projects. They will also help you to organize any additional supplies you'll need to complete the job effectively and efficiently.
- Before heading to the rental store, organize the site. This preparation will save you money because the rental store charges for the time the equipment is in your possession.
- When you pick up the equipment, ask the rental employee how to use it safely and correctly.
- Make sure you understand the store's rental rates, store hours and return policy.
- Have a good idea of how long you'll need the equipment so you can pick the appropriate rate structure. – *Melanie Braden*

The Renting Option

The author is a former management consultant and authored *Money: How to Make the Most of What You've Got*. He can be reached at wolymott@cs.com.

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USE READER SERVICE #91



by Will Nepper

FOCUS ON DESIGN SOFTWARE

THE Software HARD SELL

Landscape design software is rapidly evolving from nifty innovation to contractor necessity. In a business where competitive upselling is key, the accuracy, efficiency and aesthetics of design software are quickly becoming the rule – not the exception.

From two-dimensional blueprint-style computer-assisted design (CAD) drawings, to three-dimensional photo-realistic renderings – the wide array of modules are in a constant state of development and have become a highly-regarded industry tool for closing sales, upselling and enhancing the design process.

PHOTO FINISH. There are two ways design software produces finished landscape drawings and images – through CAD or imaging features.

Software with imaging tools creates a completed visual design, which gives both the designer and customer an accurate view of what the property will look like after installation, says Pete Lord, president, Drafix Software, Kansas City, Mo.

“The main software modules are for imaging,” Lord says. “That’s where you can take a digital picture of the customer’s house or the commercial building and do a visual



Photo: Nemetschek

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Lawn & Landscape receives daily inquiries from landscape contractors looking for more information on various products, proving there is a need for more education on these new developments. In this monthly section, we pinpoint key product areas on which readers need insight.

Even technophobes are finding that landscape design software isn't just for geeks anymore. It's on its way to becoming a competitive necessity.

landscape design with plants, hardscapes, water features, mulch – anything.”

CAD software has been around longer than digital imaging and still is used widely to produce blueprint-style graphics. “It’s a scaled drawing that has been drawn by hand,” Lord explains. “A lot of times, you can show that to a homeowner and give them a birds-eye view of the entire project.”

Many manufacturers say that the primary difference between photo-imaging and CAD-style software is that the latter speaks more to the actual process of design, while photo imaging – though helpful to the designer – is generally utilized for selling designs.

John Tilton, chief executive officer, Design Imaging Group, Holtsville, N.Y., says the majority of contractors buying imaging software don’t necessarily need CAD to get their projects completed. “What they need is a tool that is going to get that sale closed with the customer,” Tilton says, explaining that imaging software is useful when working with customers who don’t know “the difference between a rhododendron and a plum.”

“You can take a picture of the front yard and lay it out the way it’s going to look when it’s finished,” Tilton says. “Then the customer will look at it and say, ‘I really like it. Here’s my deposit check.’”

“There’s a comfort factor that goes along with showing the customer the finished design with imaging as opposed to trying to be organized with a CAD drawing, using symbols and a catalog from the manufacturer,” Lord adds, mentioning that this doesn’t mean blueprint software doesn’t have a place in actual design.

CAD CAN. Before design software, landscape designers drew by hand. However, the advantage of using CAD software over hand drawings is that it automates some of the routine tasks, points out Dan Monaghan, marketing director, Nemetschek North America, Columbia, Md. “If you’re drafting by hand and a change occurs in design, it becomes a manual process,” he says. “On a computer, it’s the click of a mouse.”

CAD software tackles such complex calculations and couples them with assured accuracy, streamlining the design process, Monaghan says. “If I wanted to fill a complex shape with a 3-inch depth of mulch, that type of calculation could become difficult for the average contractor,” he says.

(continued on page 110)



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USE READER SERVICE #102

Product Spotlight

(continued from page 108)

"With CAD you're also able to create a higher quality drawing – particularly for your planting crew when you don't want any ambiguity," Monaghan adds, pointing out that this smoothes the installation process.

Lord says that a CAD drawing is useful for the property owner, too. "Especially on larger projects, where you can show them the design in conjunction with pictures," he says.

This doesn't mean, however, that contractors hoping to combine CAD-style designs with imaging necessarily need to invest in two different software packages. "There are overlaps," Monaghan explains. "If you're drawing in CAD, then you probably have some visualization tools and if you're doing some image editing, you probably have some basic site design tools," he says.

SELLING WITH SOFTWARE. Closing sales is where many contractors believe design imaging software becomes invaluable – whether imaging or CAD-based. One benefit is that contractors, in many cases, are able to design on site with the customer standing by. "When you're sitting down with a customer and you're putting an actual shrub in, they can say either 'I like that' or 'I don't like that,'" Lord explains.

This is often what sets a company apart from a competitor bidding on the same project, Lord says. "If they're coming in with a hand-drawn sketch and a hand-written estimate, it just doesn't look quite as credible," he explains.

Selling jobs this way also can save time in that a contractor can close a deal in one visit because all visual elements of the job can be previewed on a laptop, Tilton adds. "This way you don't have to drive around to nurseries to show them plants and say, 'That's the plant I'm talking about,'" he says.

"We have a lot of customers who take the software out on a laptop to the customer's house and get there 10 minutes early to take a picture of the house and download it to the computer," Lord says. "They sit right down at the customer's kitchen table and do the design and generate the bid right there. In one hour, they get the sale."

This secures a job far more efficiently than meeting with the customer, taking measurements, going back to the office to draw up a design and making a second appoint-

ment to offer a bid, Lord adds. "You do that three or four times and put eight hours into it, when it could have been just one hour."

Tilton says that 70 percent of his software sales come from people who don't want to buy the software, but just lost a job to a competitor who does have the software. "We're across the street from a nursery and periodically they will tell us about a new contractor who's come in and has just got a job, priced it and has no idea what he's doing," he says. "Customers are much more comfortable looking at a finished picture rather than scribbles on a legal pad."

Selling is one thing, but the upsell is another valuable aspect that becomes much easier with imaging software, Lord says. "When you're designing the front of a house and the customer says they'd like to put black plastic edging around a bed, that is certainly not a moneymaker for a contractor," he says. "The contractor can say, 'I can certainly do that, but let me just show you what a rock wall would look like.' You drop in a rock wall image and nine times out of 10, the customer is going to say 'Wow, that looks great. That's what I want.' Now you've just sold a \$2,000 rock wall that more than paid for the software."

INNOVATION SPECIALIZATION. As more new contractors use design software, new innovations are called for to meet their specific needs. Design software that interfaces with other computer programs to increase efficiency meets one of these needs. "Contractors are also using other software," Lord explains, citing software that is able to link accounting software to a design process that generates bids, allowing contractors to keep track of invoicing. "They have an accounting system and if they do maintenance they probably have a system for scheduling their crews, so the design software has to integrate with those products."

Estimating is another way that design software can move beyond its primary function. "There's the ability to put in your prices and your tax rate and the software automatically creates the bid," Lord says. "Then you print it out with a professional looking layout by exporting it to a spreadsheet program or word-processing program to finish up."

Monaghan says that as customers become more tech-savvy, the visualization side

of design software becomes sharper. "Although the technology has existed for landscape designers for 10 or 15 years now, it really hasn't been until the advent of HDTV (high definition television) that customers have begun to expect this kind of output," Monaghan says.

"Now we have the ability to remove old landscaping from a design or remove objects from the original photograph," adds Tom Riccardi, president, Visual Impact Imaging, Akron, Ohio, citing tools that texture surfaces, adding grass and mulch to a design. "When the first programs came out, the imaging looked like cartoons. Now we have the ability to bring very high-resolution images into a design. You can actually paint the textures on after you've placed other objects in the design."

Tilton says that some packages even include features that allow landscapers to create their own personalized image libraries. "They can take pictures of hardscapes or plant groupings that they've done and the software will let them add that to their libraries," he explains.

Even without a contractor's own contributions, software packages are continually packing their discs with more images that can reproduce just about any type of design, plant or hardscape a customer can imagine. Beyond this are some products' Web capabilities, which encourage contractors to continually add to their libraries by dipping into the software companies' ever-expanding online databases.

Monaghan also believes that in addition to raised expectations among customers, there is an unstoppable force driving the software revolution. "The new generation comes and takes the place of the old generation and to them the technology is not as daunting or special. They expect things to be done this way." **LL**

The author is a staff writer for *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at wnepper@lawnandlandscape.com

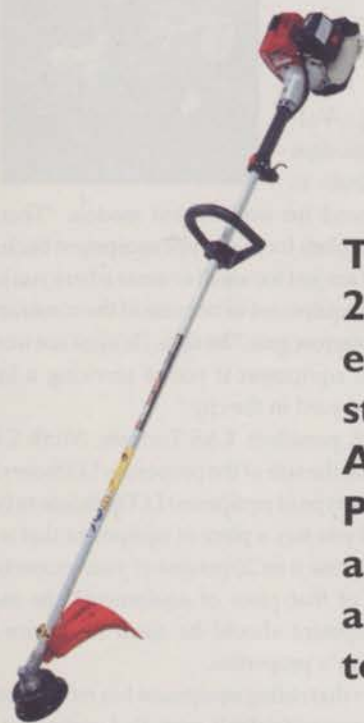
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by Will Nepper

FOCUS ON SPRAYERS & SPREADERS

Application EDUCATION

Ride or walk? Sit, stand or push? Spread, spray or both? There's an awful lot to ask before picking out sprayers and spreaders. Lawn & Landscape guides you toward your answers.

Investing in pesticide application equipment is a big deal for any lawn care operator.

In addition to choosing the right equipment to suit a company's specific needs (sprayer, spreader or combination of the two), there also are the considerations of walk-behind, self-propelled walk-behind and ride-on models. Adding size and price to this list further complicates the challenge facing LCOs who battle lawn pests.

ENERGY CONSERVATION. To ride or not to ride? That may very well be the first question an LCO should ask before picking up a manufacturer's catalog.

Walk-behind spreaders have been around since the dawn of pesticide application but are finally being given a run for their money by ride-on technology, which often combines spreading and spraying capabilities.

Left, a ride-on, combination spreader/sprayer in use on a slope. Above, a self-propelled, combination spreader/sprayer with boom spray valves in action. Photos: Perma Green Supreme (left), Gregson-Clark Spraying Equipment (above)



Despite the popularity of riding models, Tom Jessen, president, Perma Green Supreme, Valparaiso, Ind. acknowledges factors that contribute to the continued demand for walk-behind models. "There's always going to be a place for push-type equipment because there are lawns that are just too small or areas where you just can't get motorized equipment in because of the constraints of something like a narrow gate," he says. "It's just not worth it to use motorized equipment if you're servicing a little postage stamp-sized yard in the city."

Ted Shackelford, president, C&S Turfcare, North Canton, Ohio, agrees that the size of the properties LCOs service plays a big role in the type of equipment LCOs choose to best suit their needs. "If you buy a piece of equipment that is so big that you can only use it on 20 percent of your properties, what is the value of that piece of equipment?" he asks, asserting that equipment should be sized to service 90 percent of a company's properties.

Shackelford says that riding equipment has more to offer than push-behinds or standard self-propelled equipment on larger commercial properties because it levels the playing field with regard to labor. "With riding equipment, age isn't really a limitation anymore when hiring," he comments. "You're not limited to the young man who still has a lot of energy and stamina and can push a machine all day."

Shackelford believes riding equipment neutralizes the issue of general operator fatigue and strengthens a technician's ability to provide a more consistent application. "Everyone is equal on a riding machine and you're able to maintain a constant application speed," he adds.

"Riding equipment eliminates the variables that human beings are subject to that result in poor applications," Jessen adds. "If you're walking a little too fast in the morning, you might be under-dosing the lawn."

The sales for motorized equipment have consistently gone

(continued on page 114)

PRODUCT TRENDS

Lawn & Landscape constantly collects details about the latest product trends. In this monthly, in-depth section, we highlight these developments to bring you up-to-date on emerging issues concerning your third greatest asset behind your employees and clients - equipment.

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USE READER SERVICE #101

Product Trends

(continued from page 112)

up, Jessen explains. Over the past six or seven years, demand has grown in the turf industry for self-propelled application equipment, agrees Rhett Clark, Gregson-Clark Spraying Equipment, LeRoy, N.Y. "This has been driven by the need to increase efficiency and also to make the job of the lawn care technician less physically demanding," he says.

Jessen explains that the growth in the market probably stems, in part, from the drought of qualified labor. "As people started hitting the wall with labor issues, these machines started hitting the market and it has probably been the main driving force behind sales," he says. "LCOs are trying to protect their experienced labor, increase productivity and remain profitable. It's all about keeping the quality people and keeping that production pace up."

Jessen concedes that when riding equipment is not appropriate for a job, self-propelled, motorized walk-behinds can still have a positive effect on labor and boost efficiency. "Anything you can do to take the stress and strain off of the operator, the better off you'll be in the long run at retaining that employee and improving application consistency," he says.

PRICED TO MOVE. The benefits of self-propelled or riding equipment are clear enough

Ride-on application equipment can cost a lawn care operator anywhere between \$6,500 to \$9,000, depending on its features and capabilities.

Photo: Gregson-Clark Spraying Equipment



that it may make one wonder what place a standard push-style walk-behind has in the marketplace. The fact that walk-behinds are considerably cheaper is the easy answer.

"Unfortunately a lot of lawn care operators are used to just paying \$300 for a spreader," Shackleford says. "So riding equipment provides a little bit of sticker shock for them."

Shackleford says that combination spreader-sprayers can run from \$4,500 to as high as \$16,000, while a basic spreader runs between \$250 and \$350.

"A sprayer could cost anywhere between \$199 up to a \$50,000- or \$60,000- tanker truck," Shackleford says, explaining that the range in sprayers is significantly wider. "Typically, however, the technicians who are spreading granular fertilizer are not buying tanker trucks so when they buy a sprayer they typically spend an average of \$2,000."

For a standard, commercial-quality, walk-behind spreader, Jessen says LCOs can expect to pay between \$350 and \$400.

"Some power spreaders cost in the \$1,200 to \$1,400 range," Shackleford says of the motorized walk-behinds. Ride-on equipment is more expensive, he points out, with "stand-on" riders ranging from \$5,000 to \$7,000.

"When you get to sit-down riding sprayers or spreaders, you're in the \$6,500 to \$8,000 or \$9,000 range," Shackleford says. "It can go higher than that when you get into auxiliary equipment. When you have a big machine you have to have some way to transport it. With a high-priced machine and a trailer, you might end up spending in excess of \$12,000."

NARROWING THE SCOPE. Like other types of equipment, spreaders and sprayers are constantly evolving to iron-out kinks in design and increase durability. Some newer innovations can even increase productivity by saving time and encouraging accuracy.

Chuck McKuen, Golf Green Lawn Care, Pekin, Ill., offers that some newer model sprayers he uses are computerized. "We can plug in how many gallons we want per acre and no matter how fast we're going, the computer regulates it so that we're still putting down the same amount."

But sometimes new innovations are as simple as bigger hoppers on spreaders that save time by requiring fewer fertilizer refills.

Clarke also points to the introduction of the hydrostatic drive, which uses fluid under pressure to transmit engine power, as an important improvement in ride-on equipment. "Until recently most of the ride-on type units have been converted lawn mower designs, which have some limitations, particularly in weight distribution and traction," he says, adding that this is the reason the speed and maneuverability of the hydrostatic drive is catching on.

"If it's hydrostatically driven," Shackleford

For more information on pesticide application equipment, contact these companies:

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C&S Turf Care

www.csturfequip.com
800-872-7050

Durand Wayland

www.durand-wayland.com
800-241-2308

GNC Industries

www.gncindustries.com
870-248-9901

Graham Lawn

Equipment
www.grahamlawn-equipment.net
770-942-7026

LT Rich Products

www.z-spray.com
765-482-2040

Sprayer Parts Depot

www.sprayerpartsdepot.com
305-235-0967

Tuflex Mfg.

www.tuflexmfg.com
954-785-6402

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Earthway

www.earthway.com
574-848-7491

Spyker Spreader

www.spyker.com
800-972-6130

SPRAYERS & SPREADERS

Brandtek Inc.

www.brandtekus.com
407-656-1088

Gregson Clark

www.gregsonclark.com
800-706-9530

Lesco

www.lesco.com
440-783-9250

Perma Green Supreme

www.ride-onspreader.com
800-346-2001

Turbo Technologies

www.turboturf.com
800-822-3437

Supplier Stats

says, "it isn't affected by terrain changes or hills. It still maintains a constant speed, which is hard for an individual to do when walking."

Some new models also feature ground speed-sensitive fertilizer metering and spray-rate control, both of which increase application accuracy during changes in ground speed, Clarke adds.

Shackleford also mentions that some newer models of ride-ons carry their applicator booms in the rear of the equipment to aid in proper herbicide application. "Weed controls are compact herbicides and have to stick to the leaf of a weed to control it," he explains. "If you drive over what you just treated, you disrupt some of the control."

In addition to this, he says that some of the rear-boom models prevent "blow-back" of applications, which can fly into an operator's face when the wind picks up.

Also, Jessen believes that the advent of the sprayer-spreader combination unit has only just begun to compete with other forms of

application equipment. "There's no reason to not look at a more cost-effective way to provide a service to the customer," he says.

Shackelford says that there always has been some form of spreader-sprayer machine around. "But now they're maneuverable enough to fit on small properties," he says. "Before then we were taking farm equipment or golf course equipment and trying to adapt it to the lawn care industry, but that equipment is best suited to crops, fields and golf courses. For a long time, there wasn't anything that would fit in around a residential property."

Jessen believes that the appeal for LCOs is that spreader-sprayers cut the time spent on a job in half. "It allows you to get the weeds at the same time that you're spreading fertilizer," he says. "Why go over the same lawn twice?"

The element of competition is constantly boosting the appeal and necessity of the dual-purpose equipment, Jessen adds. "It allows you to bid on properties

that you just can't do manually," he says.

McKuen says that his company uses many different types of application equipment, but generally employs spreader-sprayers for his mid-sized commercial properties. "If you just went in and sprayed with liquid by hand it would take so much longer," he says. "But with one pass of a ride-on sprayer-spreader, you get two applications."

Whichever type of application equipment is best for an LCO, new innovations are continually being added to the arsenal of features designed to push productivity and save labor. "The technology is being improved all the time," Jessen says. "We're now into the heart of development when it comes to these machines. It's a growth trend that I can't see stopping in the foreseeable future - not until the majority of the fertilizer is being applied by machines rather than people." **LL**

The author is a staff writer for *Lawn & Landscape* and can be reached at wnepper@lawnandlandscape.com.

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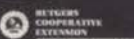
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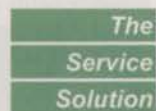
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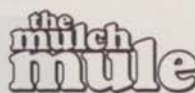
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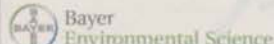
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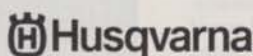
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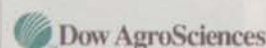
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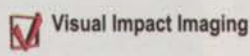
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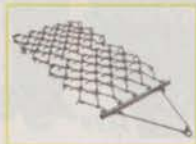
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Contact: Laura A. Gardner at 770/432-7761
Fax 770/333-0621 or e-mail to
lgardner@gibbslandscape.com.

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Landscape Architect Lunch Seminars at CoCal Landscape

At CoCal Landscape, Denver, Colo., we really focus on our efficiency during the winter months, including honing our sales and marketing plans.

As part of our marketing plan, we focus on our relationships with landscape architects (LAs), whom we view as our clients. They may not execute the contract or send us a check directly, but often LAs have the power to influence property owners. Frequently, the owner will rely on the LA's opinion or past experiences with a contractor for guidance when awarding a contract.

In 1998, we began looking for ways to improve our relationships with local LAs and contacted them directly to find out what they needed from landscape contractors. The consensus was that they needed help interpreting seed, sod and soil amendment specifications, occasional budget pricing advice, knowledge of maintenance issues related to design, how change orders work and suggestions on snow design issues.

With this feedback in hand, we created CoCal Landscape's LA Lunch Box Seminars. About twice a month during the winter, we visit one of the 15 landscape architecture firms with which we do business and discuss many of the above topics and any other points where they have questions.

To get the initial scheduling ball rolling for a seminar, our sales and marketing director contacts the principle, owner or senior associate at the landscape architecture firm to outline a meeting agenda and set a date. After this meeting, the principle generally delegates other organi-

zational responsibilities like RSVPs to another staff member who becomes our main contact person.

Once we have an idea of what the firm wants to discuss during the seminar, we will tailor our previously designed PowerPoint presentation to that particular meeting. When we began holding the seminars, we developed a group of PowerPoint slides to answer LAs questions on how CoCal handles everything from soil amendments to estimating. We update the slides as company operations change and because PowerPoint is easy to work with, adding or removing slides to customize a presentation takes minutes.


Most of the firms we visit have an LCD projector and screen to display the presentation. However, technology can be finicky, so we always back-up our CD-ROM presentation on a floppy disk and also bring the slides on transparencies, along with an overhead projector.

We structure the presentation to last about an hour. Depending on the topics at hand, our owner or chief estimator may also attend the meeting to answer specific questions in their areas of expertise.

In addition to providing attendees with information on CoCal's operations, we treat the LAs to lunch. A day or two before the presentation, we ask our contact person for a final attendance tally so we know how much food – usually pizza – to order. With 12 to 18 attendees per seminar, the cost for lunch is usually under \$100.

Managing the amount of discussion time spent on a given topic is important. We try to limit the discussion to three to five topics to use everyone's time effectively.

In terms of space, until CoCal built a new facility in 2002, we had no room for these large LA seminars at our own office. Instead, we ask the landscape architecture firms to host the events in their larger conference or presentation areas. We currently are getting LAs' opinions on having the seminars at the CoCal office and are curious to see how that change will impact attendance.

These meetings allow CoCal to be in front of several firms' employees and principles, all of whom appreciate our contribution to their employees' education. The seminars also create loyalty toward CoCal and make it easier for the landscape architects to call us when they need assistance. Loyalty translates into better dialogue during the bidding process. – Blake Williams 

The author is director of sales and marketing, CoCal Landscape, Denver, Colo., and can be reached at 303/399-7877.

5 KEYS TO *Landscape Architect Lunches*

1. Ask the landscape architects you work with what specific questions they have about your design process and job site specifications.
2. Create a PowerPoint presentation based on this information and back-up the files on a disk or with transparencies.
3. Have a contact person at the landscape architecture firm publicize the meeting and develop a final attendance tally to identify how much food will be needed for lunch.
4. Find a meeting location with enough space for all the participants, as well as access to appropriate technical systems, such as projectors and a computer for the presentation.
5. Limit presentation topics to a few minutes each in order to keep the meeting on schedule and save time for questions.

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