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02 | 05



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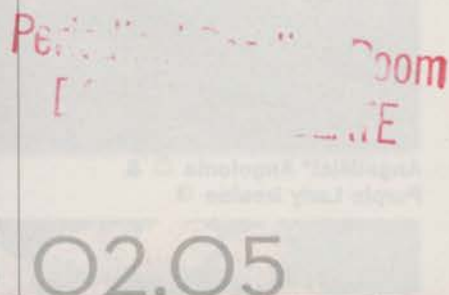
USE READER SERVICE # 11



Cover Story – What Your Customers Really Think

57

We asked your residential and commercial clients for their industry perceptions.



> > > Features

74 Breakthrough Series — A Direct Hit

Attract new clients and boost client retention with proven direct mail marketing techniques.

84 Best Of Web — Standing Out

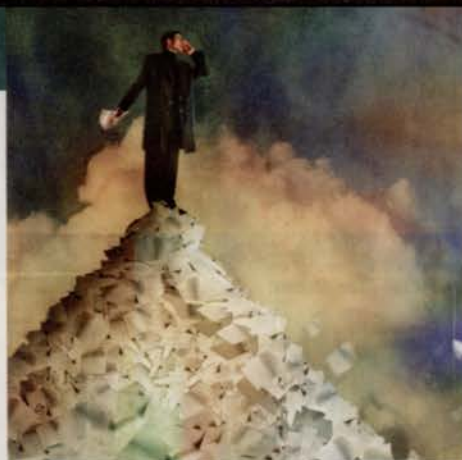
Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users discuss ways small to mid-sized lawn care companies can compete with larger operations for new clients.

96 Play It Safe

Even in a business where time is money, mower manufacturers and contractors stress the importance of spending some of that time on boosting field safety.

113 Nip it Before the Bud

Effective preemergent herbicide programs can raise customer satisfaction and reduce labor costs later in the season by targeting weeds early.



122 The Partnership Pipeline

Irrigation contractors can get the most out of dealers by forming solid relationships and knowing their inventory requirements.

140 Small Wonders

By using the right attachments for compact skid steers, a daunting task can become a dream.

150 Green Side Up

To lay sod there are a few tricks of the trade that allow contractors a smooth and profitable service.





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Lawn & Landscape

> > > **Features**

160 Battling Back
Tree care companies are using newer methods to combat an old enemy. Here, contractors and pesticide manufacturers share some more recent developments in pest control.

168 Paradise Restored
When a hurricane ravaged Bermuda in 2003, Jeff Sousa and his crew picked up the pieces to restore the Fairmont Southampton to its full glory.

176 Product Spotlight — On Holey Ground
Even well-fertilized turf cannot survive if its roots are suffocated. Take a look at the products on these pages to find an aerator that will open up clients' lawns and let the turf breathe free.

184 Product Spotlight — Turf Boosters
Fertilizer is a lawn care essential. Keep your clients' lawns dense and green with these professional fertilizer products.

188 Product Spotlight — Slow & Steady
Plant growth regulators are problem-solving products for unique sites, such as highway medians. Consider these PGRs when slower, steadier growth can make your maintenance work easier.

Departments

- 10 Editor's Focus
- 12 Sales & Marketing
- 14 Business Operations
- 16 Human Resources
- 18 Industry News
- 32 Market Trends
- 39 Calendar
- 40 Industry Progress
- 42 Lessons Learned
- 48 Business Opportunities
- 189 New Products
- 196 How We Do It

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(GIE Media has decided to support relief efforts for the victims of the Tsunami in Asia. While we feel strongly in this cause, we realize your choice may not reflect ours. Upon your request, we can contribute 10% of our revenue from your online book order to Habitat for Humanity's Asia Tsunami Response Fund. If you wish your sales to be included with this effort, please enter HABITAT in the promotional code box when placing your order.)

best of the web

With more lawn and landscape companies coming into the market all the time, how do you stand out from the competition? This question is especially important when you consider the resources that large companies can put into marketing and deal making, compared to small businesses' often limited budgets. *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board users recently tackled this issue, sharing ideas of how they make their companies stand out from the crowd. Check out this month's *Best of the Web* feature to find out what was discussed and then visit the Message Board to follow up with other questions or add your own thoughts.



sweepstakes!

Lawn & Landscape Online Sweepstakes!

They say it takes money to make money, and when it comes to running a business, regularly shelling out for new equipment, materials, office supplies and more comes with the territory.

Thankfully, there are ways to get the products and equipment you need without having to open your wallet. Each month, *Lawn & Landscape* partners with an industry supplier to bring you hundreds – or even thousands – of dollars worth of great prizes in our *Lawn & Landscape* Online Sweepstakes. From new trimmers and other hand-held equipment to cases of lawn care application products to hardscaping materials, great products that you use every day can be yours for free just by visiting *Lawn & Landscape* Online!

To enter this month's Online Sweepstakes for a chance to win a lighting package from Frog Lights, visit *Lawn & Landscape* Online today! Simply click the link on the right hand side of the page that says *Lawn & Landscape* Sweepstakes and you'll be redirected to the quick contest entry form. Once the monthly sweepstakes is closed, *Lawn & Landscape* will notify the randomly chosen winner of his or her prize, followed by an announcement in an article on *Lawn & Landscape* Online. If you're still thinking, "I never win anything," just remember that almost every Online Sweepstakes winner tells us the same thing!



online extras

- Learn more about direct mail marketing tactics in our February Online Extras section. Also be sure to visit the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board to share the experiences you've had with direct mail and other forms of marketing at your company.
- This issue of *Lawn & Landscape* showcases a renovation project by Sousa's Landscape Management in Bermuda. See more before-and-after photos of the Fairmont Southampton resort, which they restored after Hurricane Fabian ravaged the island.
- This month's *Product Spotlight* sections of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine focused on fertilizers, aerators and plant growth regulators. Check the Products section of *Lawn & Landscape* Online for more products in these categories and other products you can use to help you grow your lawn care and landscape business.



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Making Change

This issue debuts a new design for *Lawn & Landscape*. The challenge in redesigning a magazine that already enjoys a strong following is to make improvements without screwing anything up. Readers have a relationship with their favorite magazines and you want to find the information you expect in about the same place in the magazine every month.

Our redesign goals were to make *Lawn & Landscape* a little easier on the eyes and to give you a more logical presentation of the information. To do this we've created some new editorial departments, such as "Lessons Learned" and "Business Opportunities", and split out the "Market Update" department from the general "Industry News" department. We have not made any changes just for the sake of change.

The commitment to help you succeed in business remains. We have reached our 25th year of industry service mark this year. The key to our past success has been to focus on helping you achieve your's. That focus will continue and I welcome any comments, suggestions or ideas you have to improve the magazine at rstanley@gie.net or at (216) 961-4130.

This issue also features a first-ever research-based report on consumer perceptions about maintenance of their green spaces and professional lawn and landscape companies. We've wanted to investigate and report in more depth about the market from the buyers' perspective for some time, so when Kohler decided to sponsor this research we contracted the job to a national online research firm that specializes in doing consumer studies for Fortune 500 companies. The research report inside this issue provides useful insight on what buyers and prospects are thinking today, and equally important it will serve as the benchmark to track future trends.

Our consumer research supports very positive predictions for future industry growth. The total potential customer base is still largely untapped and, coupled with the aging of the Baby Boomer generation, an increasing number of homeowners will hire professional help in the coming years. Another favorable trend is the investment of homeowners and businesses in their properties and the continued rise in property values that helps to justify the investment.

As we begin our 25th year of industry service we look for continued success for the magazine and the industry, but also pause to take into consideration others less fortunate. Last year's series of hurricanes in the southeastern United States, and the recent tragedy in the Pacific, underline the need to count our blessings and help those in need. GIE Media has made a corporate commitment to help survivors in the Pacific, and we have offered to run public service advertisements at no cost for a number of deserving charities in 2005. We are also reporting on the generosity of many contractors and industry suppliers toward the relief efforts. The lawn and landscape industry is a vital factor in our nation and world, and if the past 25 years are any indication, the best is yet to come. We look forward to working with you to shape that exciting future.

RON LOWY Publisher
rlowy@gie.net

ROGER STANLEY Editor-in-Chief & Associate Publisher
rstanley@gie.net

NICOLE WISNIEWSKI Managing Editor
nwisniewski@gie.net

LAUREN SPIERS Web Editor
lspiers@gie.net

KATHY FRANZINGER Associate Editor
kfranzinger@gie.net

JONATHAN KATZ Assistant Editor
jkatz@gie.net

ALI CYBULSKI Contributing Editor
acybulski@gie.net

www.lawnandlandscape.com

MARK ROOK Creative Director

HELEN DUERR Director, Production

SAMANTHA GILBRIDE
Advertising Production Coordinator

CINDY CODE Account Manager
Specialty Chemicals
ccode@gie.net

DAVID BLASKO Account Manager
dblasko@gie.net

KEVIN YATES Account Manager
kyates@gie.net

MIKE DIFRANCO Account Manager
mdifranco@gie.net

DAVE SZY Account Manager
dszy@gie.net

JOHN CURRID Account Manager
jcurrid@gie.net

ANNEMARIE GILBRIDE Internet Marketing Coordinator
agilbride@gie.net

MARIA MILLER Conference Manager

JENNIFER HALAS Classified Advertising Manager
jhalas@gie.net

CORPORATE

RICHARD J. W. FOSTER President and CEO

DAN MORELAND Executive Vice President

DOUG ADAMS Director of Marketing & Research

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JAMI CHILDS Director, Business Resources & IT

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Lawn & Landscape

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What's in a Name?

One of the most important components in a company's marketing strategy is its name. Choose it once and choose it well.

First, make certain you do not select a name that another company is using or has the legal rights to. Ask your attorney to do a search for you to make certain you are permitted to use the name you have chosen. If you are, legally register it and any slogans you wish to use with it to prevent anyone else from stealing them.

Choose a name that clearly and succinctly conveys what you do and is easy to remember. Let's say you're considering naming your company The Green Co. Sounds simple and succinct, and maybe even suggestive of landscaping. But if people were to see this name splashed on the side of a vehicle parked in their neighborhood, would they know what services your company provides? Not necessarily. They might think Green is a family name and that The Green Co. is a construction or delivery or extermination business. And you might be missing out on a great marketing opportunity.

It's true that there are remarkably successful companies whose names do not convey what they do – Amazon, Monster.com and Yahoo come to mind. These companies can also spend enormous amounts of money on national advertising to communicate what they're about. But we're landscapers and we're generally competing locally. We don't have large advertising budgets. We need potential customers to see our names and immediately know what we do.

Now let's say your name is Mrs. Donovan and you name your company Donovan's Landscaping Co. Your company's name is simple, succinct, and it communicates what you do. What's more, you can now build your brand around your own persona. You

can put your picture on your business cards, pen an article on landscaping for the local newspaper, serve on the board of the chamber of commerce, and offer lawn tips on local TV. The brand starts to take shape and after a few years of complementary marketing initiatives – a newsletter, direct mail postcards, job site signs, and, most of all, jobs well done – people begin to recognize you and frequently ask, "Are you Mrs. Donovan the landscaper?" If you had chosen not to use your own name, you'd have missed out on all of these wonderful opportunities to reinforce your brand.

When you put your last name on the door, people take notice. In my experience, people who hire landscapers like to do business with the owner; using your last name says you stand behind your work. Look around at the successful companies in your area and chances are you'll find that many of them are named after the owner. This is not a coincidence. This is because the owner personifies the company and the owner makes a company successful.

Now let's talk about a slogan for your firm. Create one that leads clients and prospects to take notice. For example, Target's slogan – "Expect more. Pay Less" – manages to convey in four words exactly what customers get from shopping there. Mark Baker from Turfmaster's in Fort Wayne, Ind., has an excellent slogan too: "Green grass, great service." It's simple, it communicates what the company is about, and the alliteration makes it memorable. Look at what your clients have come to expect from your firm and build a slogan around that. Ask your team for ideas. Once you come up with a few, send them around to other experts and ask them what they think. There are also consultants and firms that specialize in creating names and slogans for companies struggling to find an identity; you might want to consider seeking their help. **LL**

marty grunder

is a speaker, consultant and author, as well as owner of Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. He can be reached at 866/478-6337 and via www.martygrunder.com.

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USE READER SERVICE # 16



Spring into Action

For parts of the country, only a few weeks remain before spring cleanups begin. Because this work can be substantial, this is an area that can eat up a labor budget quickly and you can find yourself behind the eight ball before you know it.

The safest way to provide this service is to never give the client a contractual price but, instead, offer a per-labor-hour rate, including equipment. Using this approach, you are assured to not lose money. On the other hand, it is often times difficult to "sell" a client on this approach, as he wants to be assured you will meet his budget. Therefore, be sure to estimate sufficient labor-hours for the job and add another 10 percent at the minimum to cover unforeseen circumstances.

When planning for spring cleanups, consider developing crews that are specialized in a particular function, such as sand removal. Another crew could arrive at a later date and perform the bed clean-ups and edging. A third crew would be your mulching crew. The client generally understands this type of organization and will not force you to perform the entire job at one time. With a routine function, your crews will become extremely efficient and equipment and vehicle management will be easier, as well.

Also, take time now to consider the type of mulch your crews will be using during this process. With hardwood or pine bark, try using bagged mulch, not bulk, to lower overall costs and help you make more money. While it's true that bagged mulch is generally more expensive than bulk, bagged mulch allows crews to distribute the material more easily in beds. With bulk mulch, crews often dump an unspecified amount in the bed and then spread it out until the next load arrives. Doing this creates various thicknesses of mulch throughout the beds.

With bags, one crewmember can dictate the mulch thickness by placing a certain number of bags in each bed. Another person can open bags and begin to spread the mulch, while a third crewmember can evenly spread the mulch with a rake. This process is more efficient and helps crews complete jobs quickly and accurately. It also eliminates much of the cleanup that bulk mulch requires and does not require a loader on the job site. Try using this bagged mulch system this spring and see if it saves you money, as it has for many other contractors.

When edging plant beds, edger operators must be careful not to remove the turf while edging. I see some contractors hauling off large amounts of turf strips and soil, only because the edging got out of hand – a major cost. Still, look at turf areas before edging and see if you can alter the edges slightly to make maintenance easier. For instance, remove small strips of turf behind trees or beds to eliminate the need for a 21-inch mower in those tight areas.

The most important recommendation I can make is to always give your crews the total budgeted labor hours for specific functions or jobs, and post those hour budgets in a public area. When the crews come in at the end of the day, have them write their actual hours on these sheets beside the budgeted hours. This reinforces the importance of performing within the budgeted hours and helps you track labor – your biggest expense – more effectively.

Finally, take a look at the equipment sitting in your shop right now and inventory your small tools, as well. Make sure each piece is ready to go for spring and consider taking the time to wax the paint on your riding mowers. Doing this can boost your crewmembers' morale and can help them learn to respect the equipment and care for it better this year. Plan and execute now, as your operations will run smoother when business starts booming in the spring. **LL**

jack mattingly

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

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Resignation or Termination?

You're fired!" "I quit!" Two phrases that have been universally understood by employers and employees alike – until now, that is. If being fired is "black" and resigning is "white," let's call the latest form of separation that has re-emerged – constructive discharge – "gray."

Generally speaking, when an employee quits, it is considered a "voluntary" separation of employment. The employee willfully decides to depart from the business, exercising his or her "employment at will" rights. But what happens when an employee feels "forced" to resign? In most cases, courts and government agencies take the position that being forced to resign is akin to being terminated. We call this "constructive discharge," and based on a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling, the stakes are even higher when it comes to constructive discharge cases.

As a result of the ruling in *Pennsylvania State Police vs. Suders*, employees who can prove that they were "forced" to resign (constructively discharged) because of sexual harassment or a hostile work environment can now sue employers under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. To prove that the resignation qualifies under the constructive discharge doctrine, the employee must be able to establish that (1) he or she suffered harassment or discrimination so intolerable that a reasonable person in the same position would have felt compelled to resign, and (2) the employee's reaction to the workplace situation – that is, his or her decision to resign – was reasonable given the totality of the circumstances.

A constructive discharge is typically considered to be an "involuntary" resignation. Courts commonly agree that an employee need not be told "You're fired," to prove that he or she was terminated. If the employee can prove that the working conditions were so intolerable that a reasonable person would be compelled

to resign, then the employee is considered to have been constructively discharged. If the intolerable working conditions involve a protected class (race, sex, religion, age, sexual harassment, disability, etc.), even though the employee may deliver the "I resign" message, the separation will be treated by most courts, fair employment agencies and unemployment divisions as a discharge. Likewise, threatening an employee with termination if he or she does not resign (e.g., "You can resign now or be terminated.") is also considered constructive discharge.

The same legal remedies that are available to illegally terminated workers are available to constructively discharged employees. Here are some examples of types of actions that can support a claim of constructive discharge:

1. A humiliating demotion or extreme pay cut
2. Transfer to a position with unbearable working conditions or menial or degrading work
3. Reduction in job responsibilities, particularly for reasons other than poor job performance or economic circumstances
4. Badgering, harassment or humiliation
5. Ignoring an employee's harassment complaint or failing to follow the company's procedure for investigating the complaint
6. Retaliating against an employee who lodges a legitimate complaint of harassment

The question of whether or not a particular situation or conduct is so intolerable that it necessitates resignation will be determined on a case-by-case basis and will depend upon the venue in which the question is being raised – the courts, a government agency such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or the unemployment compensation division. Regardless of the venue, this new Supreme Court ruling reinforces an employer's obligation to carefully scrutinize all separations. **u**

jean l. seawright

is president of Seawright & Associates, and she can be reached at 407/645-2433 or jpileggi@seawright.com.



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- American Jewish World Service** – 800/889-7146 or www.ajws.org
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- Catholic Relief Services** – 877/HELP-CRS or www.catholicrelief.org
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- Church World Service** – 800/297-1516 or www.churchworldservice.org
- Concern Worldwide, U.S.** – 212/557-8000 or www.concernusa.org
- Direct Relief International** – 805/964-4767 or www.directrelief.org
- Food for the Hungry** – 800/2-HUNGERS or www.fh.org
- Episcopal Relief and Development** – 800/334-7626 or www.er-d.org
- Habitat for Humanity International Asia Tsunami Response Fund** – 229/924-6935 or www.habitat.org
- Heart to Heart International** – 888/800-4327 or www.hearttoheart.org
- International Aid** – 800/968-7490 or www.internationalaid.org
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** – 41-22-730-4222 or www.ifrc.org
- International Medical Corps** – 800/481-4462 or www.imcworldwide.org
- Orthodox Christian Charities** – 877/803-4622 or www.iocc.org



Industry-Related Corporations Give to Tsunami Relief

From big box companies to pesticide manufacturers to computer and software businesses to cell phone providers, many industry-related companies are offering millions in cash, donations and services to help the victims of Dec. 26, 2004's earthquake-triggered tsunamis in southern Asia. These include:

- Syngenta is donating a total of \$100,000 to aid agencies in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand. In addition, the company will provide 10,000 safety kits with gloves and masks for the Red Cross and specific insecticides to reduce the risk of dengue fever spreading in affected regions. Syngenta says it will also work with regional and international agencies to contribute to additional aid initiatives and programs.

- Home Depot is giving \$500,000 to the American Red Cross International Response Fund in an effort to provide relief and rebuilding support to the devastated areas. "I know that all associates at The Home Depot share my feelings of sympathy and concern over the devastation that this tragedy has wrought," says Home Depot President, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Bob Nardelli.

ASSOCIATION NEWS



ALCA and PLCAA Unite to Form the Professional Landcare Network

The Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) are now merged and have announced their new name: The Professional Landcare Network. This new green industry association represents more than 4,000 member companies and their more than 100,000 employees.

When ALCA and PLCAA began talks about merging more than two years ago, they cited the similarities of the two organizations – both had enthusiastic members, and most agreed that merging the two groups would result in one better, stronger association. They also agreed that the name components of the existing associations had their pros and cons, but neither name was a perfect fit for the new organization.

They further agreed that the name and logo must be consistent with the values and personality of the new organization and that the name must be broad enough to encompass what the organization will become in the future, without being meaningless now.

George Rogers, president of Eyeninety Communications in Hamilton, Mass., was selected to develop the new organizational name and logo. Eyeninety surveyed a broad array of stakeholders across the country to establish the name.

Seventy-six possible organizational names were initially considered. Each name was tested on its merit of meeting key objectives and then ranked according to the number of attributes that it met. Sixteen of the 76 names met at least five of the six criteria. These 16



"Our company has continually been a leader in helping with disaster relief and rebuilding efforts due to the devastating tsunami in Asia Pacific." In addition to the company's initial donation, The Home Depot Foundation also has created a fund-matching program for associates' donations between \$25 and \$1,000.

The Home Depot encourages customers of all of its companies, including The Home Depot, The Home Depot Supply and The Home Depot Landscape Supply to join in the relief effort and make donations to the American Red Cross and other organizations. The company says its relief plans will continue to evolve as the needs of affected areas are determined.

- Microsoft founder Bill Gates is giving money through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, pledging an initial \$3 million to nongovernmental organizations.

- Motorola is also relieving support communication needs in the region.

- BP gave \$1 million to the Red Cross and is considering a matching fund program for employees.

- Exxon-Mobil plans to give \$5 million to assist relief efforts; affiliates in the region have donated planes and medical supplies and a matching program for employees.

- Verizon Communications plans to give \$100,000 and match employee contributions 2 to 1 for contributions made to UNICEF or the Red Cross.

- Additional reports on industry-related companies giving to the Tsunami relief efforts will continue to be reported at www.lawnandlandscape.com, as well as in upcoming issues of the magazine.

names were then tested with focus groups. The chosen name that tested the strongest and received the most positive feedback is "Professional Landcare Network."

"The name conveys the many disciplines of our new membership," says Jason Cupp, a member of the Professional Landcare Network and its board of directors, as well as its marketing chair.

The services represented by the new organization are diverse and include sod and seeding, nursery, interiorscaping, sports turf, water gardening, landscape design/build and maintenance, natural area management, wetland management, lawn care, landscape restoration, landscape architecture, tree and shrub care, irrigation and snow removal. The new name encompasses these services and allows for organizational growth.

The new name components

were initially identified under context guidelines developed by Eyeniney. Words such as "green," and "environment" were deemed confusing by consumers. "Professional" was chosen because "our credibility/competency is promoted in everything we do," according to the new organization. Finally, "landcare" was selected to represent the diversity of the membership base, and "network" to identify the association.

The Professional Landcare Network will continue to be headquartered in Herndon, Va., and will also have a satellite office in Atlanta, Ga. New employees have been hired at both locations to further serve the membership, and new member programs will be announced soon.

"Our main goal is to be the voice of the green industry," Cupp says.

International Relief Teams –

619/284-7979 or www.irteams.org

International Rescue Committee

– 877/733-8433 or www.theirc.org

Latter-Day Saints Welfare Services

Emergency Response – 801/240-3544

or www.lds.org/ldsfoundation

Lutheran World Relief South Asia

Tsunami – 410/230-2700 or www.lwr.org

MAP International – 800/225-8550 or

www.map.org

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Asia Earthquake – 800/852-2100 or

www.mercycorps.org

Northwest Medical Teams – 503/624-

1000 or www.nwmedicalteams.org

Operation USA – 800/678-7255 or

www.opusa.org

Plan USA Asia Disaster –

800/556-7918 or www.planusa.org

Project Concern International

Asia Tsunamis – 858/279-9690 or

www.projectconcern.org

Project HOPE Asia Tsunami

Response – 800/544-4673 or

www.projecthope.org

Relief International – 800/573-3332 or

www.ri.org

Salvation Army – 800/SAL-ARMY or

www.salvationarmy.org

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Tidal Wave Relief Fund – 800/728-

3843 or www.savethechildren.org

Salvation Army South Asia Relief

Fund – 800/SAL-ARMY

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Asia Emergency – 212/870-3815 or

www.umcor.org

United Way International

South Asia Response Fund –

703/519-0092 or www.nationalunitedway.org/tsunamiresponse

U.S. Fund for UNICEF –

800/4-UNICEF or www.unicefusa.org

World Concern – 800/755-5022 or

www.worldconcern.org

World Emergency Relief –

760/930-8001 or

www.worldemergencyrelief.org

World Hope International Asia Relief

– 888/466-4673 or www.worldhope.org

World Relief SE Asia

Earthquake/Tsunamis – 443/451-1900

or www.worldrelief.org

World Vision – 888/56-CHILD or

www.worldvision.org

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REGIONAL REPORT

Minnesota
Landscape
Industry
Booms

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Minnesota's green industry should grow 30 to 50 percent by 2005's end, according to a study conducted by the state's Nursery & Landscape Association.

The study also revealed that the state's nursery and landscape companies generate annual sales of more than \$2.1 billion. Between 1995 and 2000, the average gross sales of companies in the nursery and landscape industry increased by 97 percent.

Minnesota green industry employees received a total annual payroll of \$697.9 million. According to the study, there are more than 10,000 full-time employees, 1,700 part-time employees and 16,500 seasonal employees in Minnesota. Most of the industry's companies employ fewer than 10 full-time workers, according to John Mickman, president of the Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association. There are approximately 3,000 family-owned companies in Minnesota that comprise the professional nursery and landscape industry.

This economic impact study was the first conducted on the state's professional green industry. Data was compiled and analyzed by the St. Cloud State University Department of Economics. Spearheaded by the Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association, partners in the project included the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, AgStar Financial Services and the University of Minnesota. More information regarding the study is available at www.mnlandscape.org/mnlacharts.pdf — Jonathan Katz

MANUFACTURER MINUTES

ASV Issues 2005 Outlook

GRAND RAPIDS, Minn. — ASV anticipates its net sales for the year ending Dec. 31 will be in the range of \$210 to \$230 million, an increase of 38 to 45 percent over its anticipated sales of \$153 to \$158 million for 2004. ASV anticipates sales of its R-Series Posi-Track products will account for 45 percent of its projected 2005 net sales, with undercarriage sales to Caterpillar accounting for approximately 33 percent of its projected net sales for 2005, an increase of 27 to 28 percent over 2004. Sales from ASV's



recently acquired subsidiary, Loegering Mfg., are expected to account for approximately 12 percent of ASV's projected net sales for 2005, with parts and used equipment accounting for approximately 10 percent.

During 2004, ASV increased its quarterly gross profit percentage, despite rising steel costs. For 2005, the company anticipates its gross profit percentage will be in the

continued on page 29

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

The Pickseed Cos. Group Acquires Seed Research of Oregon

The Pickseed Cos. Group and Land O'Lakes, owner of Seed Research of Oregon (SRO), announced the sale of SRO to Pickseed. Land O'Lakes also has purchased Seeds Ohio, a regional seed distributor based in West Jefferson, Ohio owned by Pickseed. The transactions closed Dec. 31, 2004.

SRO will operate as an independent business unit of the Pickseed Cos. Group in its existing Corvallis, Ore. facility, under the direction of the current management team. SRO will continue its broad initiatives in research, technical support, quality assurance and superior customer service, including the ongoing supply of turf and forage grass seed to Land O'Lakes.

"Pickseed is excited about expanding its long-term strategic alliance with Land O'Lakes," says Robert Clark, president and chief operating officer for Pickseed. "The acquisition of Seed Research of Oregon represents significant market share expansion for Pickseed within U.S. and international markets."

Dave Seehusen, vice president of the seed division for Land O'Lakes adds, "Seed Research will become a core asset with Pickseed Cos. Group and a key supplier of competitive turfgrass products to Land O'Lakes, Seed Solutions and CROPLAN GENETICS marketing programs."

The Pickseed Cos. Group, is a developer, producer and distributor of turfgrass and forage seed crops. The group includes Pickseed West and Turf-One in Tangent and Corvallis, Ore. and Pickseed Canada, with locations at Lindsay, Ontario; St. Hyacinthe, Quebec; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Sherwood Park, Alberta; Abbotsford, British Columbia; and Dawson Creek, British Columbia. The Group has been operating since 1947 and is privately held.

continued on page 29

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USE READER SERVICE # 13

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Nextel and Sprint Announce Merger

OVERLAND PARK, Kan., and RESTON, Va. —Sprint and Nextel Communications announced that their boards of directors have unanimously approved a definitive agreement for a merger of equals. The combination will allow the companies to offer consumer, business and government customers new broadband wireless and integrated communications services. The new company, which will be called Sprint Nextel, also intends to spin off to its shareholders Sprint's local telecommunications business following the merger.

Sprint and Nextel currently have a combined total equity value of approximately \$70 billion and serve more than 35 million wireless subscribers on their networks and 5

million additional subscribers through affiliates and partners. The two companies, along with their affiliates and partners, operate networks that directly cover nearly 262 million people.

The new company will have a balanced mix of consumer, business and government customers. Sprint Nextel's service offerings position the new company in several fast-growing market segments including mobile data and push-to-talk services. Additionally, Sprint's global Internet network will allow the new company to provide differentiated communications solutions through integrated applications for business and government and new broadband wireless services for consumers.

Total pro forma revenue for the year ended Sept. 30, 2004 for Sprint Nextel

were approximately \$40 billion, which includes approximately \$6 billion in revenue generated by the local telecommunications business. Sprint and Nextel are being valued equally in the merger and their shareholders will each own approximately 50 percent of the new company after the merger.

Sprint Nextel will have its executive headquarters in Reston, Va., and its operational headquarters in Overland Park, Kan. The new company's common stock will be listed on the New York Stock Exchange. The merger is expected to close in the second half of 2005 and is subject to shareholder and regulatory approvals, as well as other customary closing conditions.

"Together, we will be positioned to provide the communications solutions customers demand," says Gary Forsee, chairman and CEO, Sprint; future president and CEO, Sprint Nextel.

Timothy Donahue, current president and CEO of Nextel, will become chairman of the new company.

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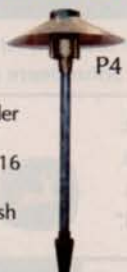


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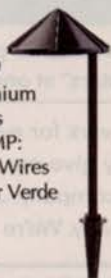
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USE READER SERVICE # 22

NEWS TO NOTE

ServiceMaster Reorganizes Management Team

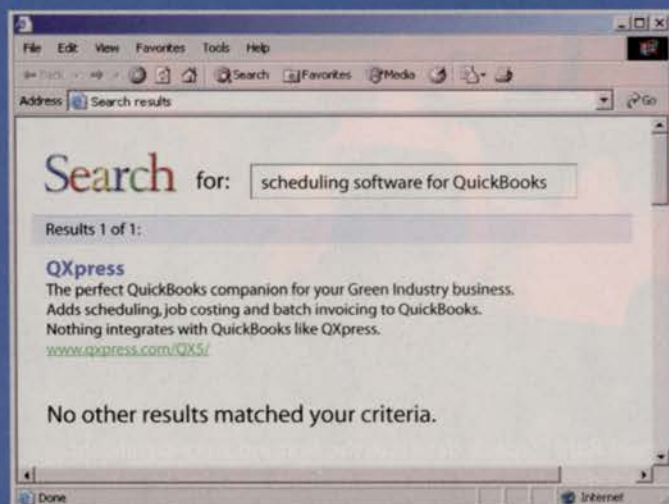
TRUGREEN

DOWNERS GROVE, Ill. — Management changes at ServiceMaster continue with the announcement that TruGreen ChemLawn and TruGreen LandCare will now report to Ernie Mrozek, president and chief financial officer of ServiceMaster. This, after

Don Karnes, former TruGreen Cos. president, and Dave Slott, former president of TruGreen ChemLawn left the company in November 2004.

"Our TruGreen Cos. will benefit from Mrozek's seasoned leadership as we work to align our lawn care and land care teams to better serve our customers," says Jonathan Ward, chairman and chief executive officer of ServiceMaster. "We look forward to improved coordination and efficiencies between the two sides of the business yielding improved operational performance and results."

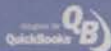
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PRICE WATCH

What to Expect with Fertilizer Increases

Throughout 2004, most landscape and lawn care operators (LCOs) noticed the rising gas prices when they paid at the pump to fill up their vehicles.

And while it doesn't seem like the two would be related, natural gas used for heating and cooking also is a key component in the production of urea — the main form of synthetic nitrogen used in most lawn fertilizers. As such, LCOs reported seeing higher fertilizer prices in 2004 and they expect this to continue through 2005. According to *Lawn & Landscape* reports, most fertilizer suppliers are comfortable when natural gas prices stay between \$2 and \$3 per MMBtu. In early 2003, prices hovered around \$5 per MMBtu and with current prices nearing the \$7 mark, many companies on both the manufacturing and lawn care service sides already are feeling the pinch.

"Fuel and natural gas are significantly more expensive this year, as well as the cost of transporting fertilizer," explains Bob West, director of marketing for LESCO, Cleveland, Ohio. "On the manufacturing side, we're buying raw materials with a high price tag and ultimately, we have to pass on some of that cost to our customers."

LESCO sent out a letter to their fertilizer customers earlier in 2004, outlining the price increases for raw materials and explaining the reasoning behind the higher costs. According to the letter, the cost of urea has increased 45 percent from \$165 per ton in the

continued on page 28



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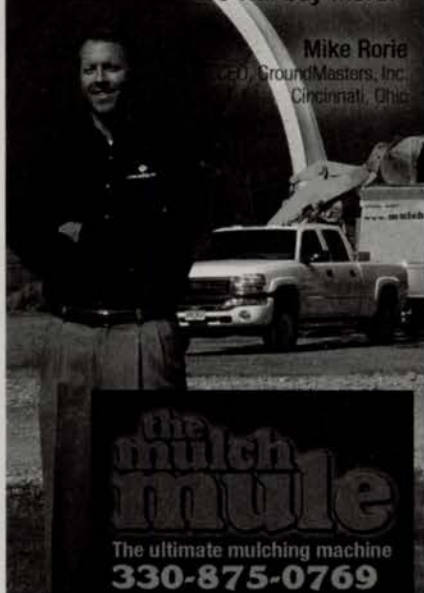
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USE READER SERVICE # 26

industry news > >

continued from page 26

PRICE WATCH

spring to \$240 per ton in September. Additionally, potassium and phosphorus – two other main fertilizer components – also have increased in price. Phosphorus is up 10 percent to \$210 per ton and potassium has seen a 33-percent increase to \$140 per ton. West references a strong global demand for these two elements as the reason for the increases.

Other manufacturers are also noticing the price jumps. Ray Buckwalter, Product Manager for Lebanon Turf, Lebanon, Pa., says his company's costs are up 10 percent. And Don Johnson, general manager, Best Turf Fertilizer, Pocatello, Idaho, has also experienced increases, saying these rising prices are actually a global issue. "China is a big consumer and a lot of other countries are buying, as well," Johnson says. "Additionally, the other element that plays in is sulfur, which is used in the reaction with phosphoric acid to make phosphorus fertilizer. It's a by-product of oil production and the cost is extremely high. We've seen it more than double in cost from last year and if you look at two years ago, it's almost triple the cost."

With the resulting higher costs, LESCO, for one, has increased contractors' materials prices 8 to 12 percent on fertilizer products and 3 to 7 percent for combination products. Other suppliers are doing the same.

"But our customers appreciated the advance notice of the price increase," West says. "It lets them plan for their businesses because their costs are rising, too. A lot more customers are buying their fertilizer earlier and even if they cannot buy it now because of storage constraints, they are contacting us to make sure their pricing is lined up for when they are ready to buy."

Indeed, contractors around the country are working out plans to pass on their increased costs to customers without putting too much tension on the contractor-client relationship. "Last year, I raised prices \$1 per customer, per application," remembers Bill Culp, owner, The Greenskeeper, Columbia City, Ind. "We actually got some static from that, so right now I'm working on the best way to approach the situation in 2005. I've spoken with other friends in the industry who said they're planning to raise prices 5 to 10 percent. With an average lawn costing \$30 an application, a \$3 increase might be too much for

our customers. I may go across the board with another \$1 increase or bite the bullet and not raise it at all." Culp says his business is booming – up 70 percent – but the increased number of customers also adds to his cost of operation. He expects to pay 20 percent more for fertilizer, which would be around \$12 per bag. "Early on, our cost was only about \$6 a bag, so that's a hefty increase over the years," he says. "The challenge is deciding whether to raise prices and take a chance on losing clients or not raise prices and take a hit on your bottom line." Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green, St. Cloud, Minn., says, "We are seeing a 5 to 7 percent increase for fertilizer and I'm assuming that soon it will end up being more than that."

Beyond passing heightened costs onto customers, some industry professionals noted ways the contractors can keep their costs in line. "Contractors should know exactly what and how

much material you need to put down," says Bob Hoeft, soil fertility specialist, University of Illinois Extension, Urbana, Ill. "Use soil testing to determine what the levels are for phosphorus and potassium, especially. Keeping soil pH where it belongs can help maximize the nutrients the turfgrass is receiving from the soil and the fertilizer." Because ideal turf health varies by region, lawn care operators can contact their local extension agencies to find out how to administer an accurate soil test and compensate for lost or excess nutrients to reinvigorate lawns.

Additionally, West notes that lawn care operators may want to look into using combination products with weed control in addition to fertilizer. The popularity of these products is rising, he says, and as prices for those products had a smaller increase than for fertilizer and they take care of two problems at once, they may be viable alternatives for price-conscious contractors. – Lauren Spiers

continued from page 22

ASV Issues 2005 Outlook

range of 22 to 23 percent for the twelve months ended Dec. 31. With the acquisition of Loegering, selling, general and administrative expenses are expected to be in the range of 7 to 8 percent of net sales for 2005. Research and development expenses are currently expected to be in the range of 0.5 to 0.75 percent of net sales for 2005.

Finally, ASV currently has approximately 13.3 million shares of common stock outstanding, with Caterpillar owing 24 percent of ASV's shares. Based upon the factors mentioned above, ASV anticipates its diluted earnings per share for 2005 will be in the range of \$1.50 to \$1.65 per share. This represents an increase of 25 to 31 percent over the estimated range of \$1.20 to \$1.26 for 2004.

continued from page 22

Pickseed Acquires Seed Research of Oregon

Land O'Lakes is a national farmer-owned food and agricultural cooperative with annual sales in excess of \$6 billion. It does business in all 50 states and more than 50 countries, and provides agricultural training and technical assistance in more than 30 developing nations.

Pickseed says its specialization in forage and turf, throughout North America and internationally will be a valuable asset in creating synergy from the collaboration of these two enterprises. Both of these seed companies share a core belief that strong customer service and research based products will be strong contributors to the success of all its clients.

Correction

On page 74 in the December 2004 issue, Lawn & Landscape unintentionally used the incorrect product name with a product release. The correct product name for the No. 6 release in the Pesticides section of the Hottest Products of the Year is Chipco TopChoice Fire Ant Bait. Lawn & Landscape regrets the error.

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FOCUS ON SAFETY

GETTING IN GEAR

Safety gear is a must with any lawn care job, but getting technicians to wear the equipment is another story. Companies have different tactics they use to encourage protective gear use.

Technicians at Massey Services, Maitland, Fla., must wear safety goggles during applications, but anyone familiar with Florida weather knows how uncomfortable the heat can get. That's why supervisors at Massey Services fit employees with wrap-around, tinted side-lens safety glasses that are designed for more comfort, says Adam Jones, vice president and director of quality assurance.

And even though gloves aren't necessary, some technicians insist on wearing them, which can cause skin irritation from constant moisture. Massey Services supervisors teach technicians to avoid these problems by cleaning their gloves daily and maintaining their skin by using moisturizers.

Supervisors at Senske Lawn & Tree Care, Kennewick, Wash., conduct follow-up spot checks to make sure employees are wearing their protective gear, which includes eye protection, a mixing apron, head gear, rubber boots and rubber gloves—all totaling \$71 per employee, says company Vice President Dan Warehime. Technicians must wear eye goggles when applying certain chemicals, but the company often finds employees leaving eye protection on trucks during hot days. Warehime says, "If they are found without the proper gear, they get written up with a warning; a safety violation goes on their permanent file, and if they have three safety violations, they're terminated." — Jonathan Katz

BETTER BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

An Argument For Outsourcing Payroll

Whether you process payroll manually or use a service, the outsourcing options available today to small businesses are better than ever.

If you're like most small business owners, you long for the good old days. Remember when you first started your business? Everything was about growing your business.

But over time you got bogged down with tedious, time-consuming administrative work that prevents you from focusing on your core business. Instead of growing your business, you're suffocating under a pile of mind-numbing paperwork.

The worst culprit? Payroll. Even experienced business owners find that payroll is a pain.

For starters, you've got to keep track of payroll regulations and changes in with-

holding tables—a time-consuming task. Calculating the actual payroll amounts and deductions is equally tedious. It's very easy to make a mistake.

Then, there's the arduous chore of writing checks and making all the proper quarterly and end-of-year filings for federal, state and local payroll taxes. It's not uncommon for small business owners to spend between two and eight hours processing payroll for each employee if they do it manually.

Mistakes are costly. Employee morale dips and employees lose faith in management when you give an employee a check or W-2 with errors. They may forgive but they don't forget.

The Internal Revenue Service never forgets and is far less forgiving than employees. File late or with an incorrect amount

continued on page 34



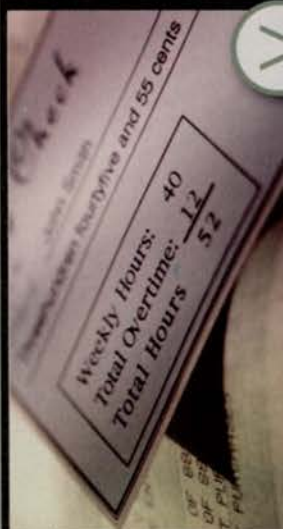
WHAT'S NEW IN PAYROLL

The Internet has greatly improved the process of outsourcing payroll. With SurePayroll's online payroll service, for example, you can enter and view payroll information from anywhere at anytime, as long as you have access to a Web browser.

Once you enter your payroll data, the service automatically calculates, deducts, pays and files all federal, state and local taxes. Paychecks can be printed on your laser printer or can be routed to your employees' bank accounts via direct deposit. W-2s are automatically prepared at the end of the year.

Online payroll lets small business owners save time and money. It only takes a few minutes to process payroll online, so time is freed up for more important things, like getting a new customer or spending time with your family.

How do the new services save money? Because the new online payroll services don't have the same cost structure as traditional payroll services, they can charge 30 to 50 percent less. Moreover, many payroll services guarantee you won't incur a payroll penalty, which can represent a considerable savings. — The author is Michael Alter, president of SurePayroll, www.surepayroll.com. Source: Broker magazine



FICTION

You may have heard that all 2-stroke engines are going away. You've heard wrong. **ECHO**
Ask Any Pro!™



Don't get caught in the mix.

Echo's 2-stroke engine technology is the superior solution now and in the future. Your business doesn't have to be turned upside down over emissions.

Other manufacturers have chosen to build their futures around 4-stroke technology variations. They've added weight, moving parts and maintenance — all things you don't want. Your business needs tools that provide solutions, not problems.

Echo's 2-stroke engine technology meets EPA and CARB emissions regulations through 2005 *and beyond*. In fact, our Power Boost Tornado™ technology not only meets tomorrow's stringent emissions regulations, but also provides equal or improved power, lower fuel consumption, longer run times and easier starting. Not bad for a technology that *some say* is going away.

ECHO
Ask Any Pro!™

FACT

continued from page 32

and you'll have to pay a payroll penalty. Every year, four out of 10 small businesses pay an average fine of \$845 for payroll errors with the Internal Revenue Service. When you add it all up, that's billions of dollars in fines.

Plus, there are new fines in the works that will penalize you if you don't keep good payroll records. California passed a law that imposes a \$750 fine on small businesses

that aren't able to quickly produce accurate payroll records upon an employee's request. Experts believe that many other states will follow with similar legislation.

When you consider these penalties and the value of your time, processing payroll internally can be a very costly proposition. Even if you've already outsourced payroll, there may be some room for improvement.

Payroll service offerings today are better than ever, and now is the right time to be thinking about making a switch.

Though the end of the year is the best time to sign up with a new payroll service, any time is a good time. It's estimated that 60 to 70 percent of small businesses that decide to outsource payroll each year do so effective Jan. 1 because they are starting with a clean slate and there's no payroll history to transfer over to the new provider. When you change payroll providers after the New Year starts, it requires more paperwork.

Outsourcing payroll is a no-brainer. It simply doesn't make sense to waste time, money and resources on a tedious task that is ancillary to your core business.

Getting started with payroll outsourcing is easy enough. You can find the payroll service that's right for you by searching on the Web or by asking your colleagues for a recommendation. In many cases, you can simply enroll online and get started immediately.

The key benefit of online payroll is enhanced control. Traditionally, payroll providers require small business owners to call in payroll at a designated time, even if that means having to leave an important meeting with a customer or an employee to do it. But with an online service, payroll can be processed whenever it's convenient.

Control also is increased through the availability of reports that let you track and monitor your payroll. Employers have access to online payroll reports in real-time after logging into a secure Web site. Similarly, employees can log in and access and print their payroll records, alleviating an administrative burden that frequently arises when employees need proof of payment history for loan applications and other purposes.

The bottom line? Making payroll is something that small businesses have to do. But the good news is, that from a process perspective, it's getting much easier to "make" payroll.

Switching to a new payroll service this year can alleviate the headaches and extra time and money your current situation is costing you and let you focus on what's most important — growing your business with focus and attention, just like you used to do back in the good old early days. — The author is Michael Alter, president of SurePayroll, www.surepayroll.com. Source: Broker magazine LL



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USE READER SERVICE # 31

Insignia[®] fungicide creates disease service opportunity

Disease is a potential problem on any turf, but while preventive fungicide treatments are routine on golf courses and sports turf, fungicide applications too often are seen as a tough-sell situation for lawn care professionals.

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One hurdle in lawn care is selling more customers on the need to protect their turf against a potentially serious problem. Unfortunately, if disease strikes and decimates a lawn, the problem becomes explaining why the disease outbreak was not prevented and the cost to restore the lawn.

Fungicide treatments also pose challenges on the technical side. Unlike golf course superintendents, who are on their turf every day and can monitor disease conditions constantly, lawn care professionals may only see a customer's lawn once every six weeks or fewer, depending on their current service plan. This makes residual protection an important benefit for lawn care companies.

While on a golf course the superintendent can select the most effective fungicide for a specific disease, the lawn care operator requires a broad-spectrum fungicide that acts to control the disease and provides residual protection to the turfgrass that supports plant health and increases turf vigor.

What has made all these considerations especially frustrating for turf professionals is knowing that disease prevention is a valuable service for customers who have a significant investment in their lawns and landscapes. Protecting that lawn investment increases customers' satisfaction while increasing revenue within the existing customer base.

What has been missing for many lawn care professionals is a broad-spectrum fungicide that offers the residual protection necessary to fit into a lawn care service schedule.

BASF has responded to this need with a fungicide that finally makes disease prevention practical for lawn care companies. Now registered for lawn applications by the EPA, and by 48 states (registration pending in Hawaii and California) Insignia® fungicide is labeled for use on more than 15 turf diseases and offers up to four weeks of residual protection. Additionally, this fungicide can provide curative activity for specific turf diseases such as Pythium blight, brown patch and leaf spot.

Insignia® Fungicide is labeled for use on more than 15 turf diseases and offers long-lasting control—up to 28 days with a single application. At just \$6.28 per 1,000 square feet of turf, it offers lawn care companies an efficient, broad-spectrum solution to meet disease control needs.

"Insignia has been field tested in university trials for more than seven years and demos were held on golf courses for two years," says Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist with BASF. "In 2003, it was registered for use on golf courses and has now undergone significant real-world use in that market. What makes this fungicide ideal for lawn care is it has excellent residual. Lawn care companies need a product that offers protection for up to 28 days, not a week or two."

Another important benefit, Miller adds, is that Insignia prevents brown patch, dollar spot, Pythium blight and all the major diseases common to both warm- and cool-season grasses.

"The active ingredient is pyraclostrobin, a proprietary BASF compound that is active on most turf diseases," he says. "The active ingredient acts as a respiration inhibitor that is effective against the disease during all growth stages of the fungi. For the lawn care operator that means that one product is effective on a wide range of diseases. Insignia is safe for all warm- and cool-season turf when used according to label directions. All these benefits make Insignia a solid foundational product for a lawn care disease control service program."

Miller says the active ingredient, pyraclostrobin, a strobilurin (QoI), is a relatively new class of fungicide. The other strobilurin fungicides in the same chemical class

**BASF, 26 Davis Drive, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709.
Call (800) 545-9525 or visit www.turffacts.com.**



15 turf diseases and single application. At are operators an challenges.

have little or no activity on dollar spot, an important turf disease.

Another product advantage for lawn care professionals are the label options. Insignia is formulated as a 20 percent WG (water dispersible granule) which can be applied at a rate of 0.5 oz. to 0.9 oz. per 1,000 square feet, depending upon the disease concern or the severity.

"With a number of turf diseases, the active ingredient also has a curative effect," Miller says. "So, if you already have disease present, it can be applied to control the disease and prevent it from reoccurring.

"The label rate options are also important in lawn care because the higher rates provide the longer residual needed," Miller adds. "At the same time even the higher label rates are low in active ingredient in comparison to a number of other fungicides. Using less active ingredient reduces concern about possible pesticide loading in the environment."

Selling plant protection

Disease prevention and control is increasing among lawn care companies at a double-digit rate, according to research done by *Lawn & Landscape* magazine*. Lawn care companies surveyed in early 2004 reported that fungicide treatments increased an average of 21 percent from 2002 to 2003, and that they were expected to increase by

more than 15 percent in 2004.

A number of factors explain the increasing importance of disease control as a service. Negative weather triggers disease conditions. Increasing use of irrigation on residential properties can create wet conditions that favor disease outbreaks, especially if it is misused. Ever-rising expectations of property owners make tolerance of disease less acceptable. And greater investment in turf makes it more important to protect the investment.

Like grub control, fungicide treatments are best sold and applied on a preventive basis. Customer calls about a disease outbreak usually mean it's too late. So, selling the service requires educating customers on the nature of the problem – that the right conditions will trigger certain diseases – and the potential cost. In an extreme case, Pythium blight can devastate a lawn before a curative treatment can be made.

"Unfortunately turf disease is not something that can be prevented with integrated pest management (IPM)," Miller says. "IPM can reduce the likelihood of disease, but is not effective at preventing disease because even the healthiest turfgrass is susceptible under the right conditions. What fungicides do, especially preventive applications, is ensure plant health. Failure to prevent disease means damage costs, so it really can be a 'pay me now or pay me later' scenario."

It's easier to sell fungicide treatments as an add-on service by monitoring the conditions that can trigger disease. One tool is to maintain historical records in a local area or even on a property to see when a problem occurred and which disease was the culprit. With this information it is possible to predict disease problems and offer customers preventive treatments when similar conditions exist.

Some state universities have created modeling systems to monitor disease risk factors, such as moisture levels and temperatures, to predict problem conditions, and post the information online.

"Disease control is becoming a more important service for lawn care companies as either a component of their standard service program or as an add-on service," Miller says. "Newer fungicide tools, such as Insignia, make it possible to include this service on a preventive basis along with standard service calls."

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WHEN THEY GROW UP.



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USE READER SERVICE # 32



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FEB. 6-10 Tree Care Industry Association Winter Management Conference, Los Cabos, Mexico. Contact: 800/733-2622 or www.treecareindustry.com

FEB. 7-8 Pennsylvania-Delaware Chapter of International Society of Arboriculture Annual Shade Tree Symposium and Trade Show, Lancaster, Pa. Contact: 215/795-0411

FEB. 8 University of California – Davis Extension Soil and Water Testing in Tree and Grape Crop Management Workshop, Davis, Calif. Contact: 800/752-0881 or www.extension.ucdavis.edu/agriculture

FEB. 12 Long Island Arboricultural Association Annual Tree Conference, Farmingdale, N.Y. Contact: 516/454-6550 or www.liaatrees.org

FEB. 7-12 Golf Industry Conference & Trade Show, Orlando, Fla. Contact: 800/472-7878 or www.gcsaa.org

FEB. 10-13 Associated Landscape Contractors of America Executive Forum, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. Contact: 800/395-2522 or www.alca.org

FEB. 14-16 Grandy & Associates' Basic Business Boot Camp, Minneapolis, Minn. Contact: 800/432-7963

FEB. 15 Wisconsin Green Industry Day on the Hill, Madison, Wis. Contact: 414/529-4705

FEB. 15-18 California Landscape Contractors Association 2005 Landscape Industry Show & Convention, Los Angeles, Calif. 916/830-2780 or www.clca.org

FEB. 16 15th Annual Nevada Landscape Association Trade Show, Reno, Nev. Contact: 775/673-0404 or www.nevadanla.com

FEB. 16-18 John Deere Landscapes University, Orlando, Fla. Contact: 248/588-2100 or www.johndeerelandscapes.com

FEB. 20-23 International Erosion Control Association's Annual Environmental Conference & Expo, Dallas, Texas. Contact: 970/879-3010 or www.ieca.org

FEB. 22-24 John Deere Landscapes University, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: 248/588-2100 or www.johndeerelandscapes.com

FEB. 23-25 Southern California Plant Tour Days 2005, Carlsbad, Calif. Contact: 760/431-2572 or www.planttourdays.org

FEB. 25-26 Associated Landscape Contractors Association Masters in Management for the Green Industry – 2, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/395-2522 or www.alca.org

FEB. 28 Southeast Regional Conference, Tarrytown, N.Y. Contact: 518/783-1229 or www.nysta.com

FEB. 28-MAR. 1 Fleet Management Symposium, Farmington Hills, Mich. Contact: 800/441-6832



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Top headlines from 1985-1989 Lawn & Landscape's first 25 years

April 1985 – "Pro Pesticide Sales Total \$1.9 billion in 1984"

That represents a sharp increase from \$1.2 billion in 1981. More than 125 companies offer 350 formulations for use in landscapes, golf, education, rights-of-way and other markets.

July 1985 – "Mowing Down Stereotypes"

The stereotype of the grubby "handyman" running a mowing company out of the back seat of a pickup truck has long haunted the mowing maintenance industry. A growing number of businessmen are turning their mowing business into big business.



August 1985 – "How to Ring Up Sales"

With the rising costs of direct mail promotions and personal sales calls, telemarketing is becoming increasingly popular. Once you understand proper telephone technique, you'll be able to implement a successful telemarketing program.

September 1985 – "Victory in Wauconda"

The Pesticide Policy Foundation (3PF) won a judgment striking down a 1984 Wauconda, Illinois, pesticide ordinance requiring an annual permit, prohibiting application with winds greater than 10 mph and posing for 72 hours following applications.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This year, Lawn & Landscape begins its 25th year of service to the industry. To help celebrate this milestone, each 2005 issue of Lawn & Landscape will reflect on the people, companies and events that have shaped our industry.



January 1986 – "Seasonal Employees"

Part of the lawn care industry's high employee turnover can be attributed to its seasonal nature. It's difficult to keep a man for all seasons.

March 1986 – "IPM for Lawn Care"

Integrated pest management (IPM) is an accepted practice in agriculture and a mark of professionalism in the structural pest control industry. Perhaps it is time lawn care operators adopt IPM practices.

October 1986 – "Nancy Reagan Awards Landscapers"

First Lady Nancy Reagan presented 18 awards for environmental enhancement at the American Association of Nurserymen awards program at the White House.



January 1987 – "Interior Plantscapes"

If you have a receptive market and qualified employees you could go far in the interiorscape field.

March 1987 – "Posting Problems"

Lawn care businessmen used to wonder if posting would ever affect their businesses. Now posting threatens to become an industry-wide reality.

May 1987 – "Cracking the Commercial Market"

The commercial market has a lot to offer the professional lawn care and maintenance operator. But beware, you may need to adapt your business to meet the needs of commercial customers.

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USE READER SERVICE # 33

Back to Where he Began



by jonathan katz

Bill Leuenberger found out the hard way how frustrating running a business can be. In 1984, he left his job working in the garden center for The Chalet, a Wilmette, Ill.-based landscape company, to start a lawn care company called Lawngevity. With just \$7,000 in seed money, Leuenberger was off and running, marketing his business in the Chicago suburb of Buffalo Grove.

Lawngevity fell short of Leuenberger's expectations, topping out at about \$110,000 in revenue by 1990. The money situation was tight, and Leuenberger was mostly a one-man show. "At the height of my career, I had two employees," Leuenberger recalls. "The majority of the time it was just me. I'd come home to an answering machine at 7:30 p.m. and had to call everybody back. I always felt I had to pick up the phone, so even on Sunday if people were calling, I'd pick up the phone. You have to have your own life when you own your own business or it can drive you out of your mind."

By 1992, Leuenberger couldn't take it anymore. That year, his career came full circle after a chance encounter with

his former Chalet boss, Kevin Marko, led to The Chalet's buyout of Lawngevity. Marko then hired Leuenberger as the company's lawn care manager. Since that time, Leuenberger has been recognized as an industry leader, helping the Professional Lawn Care Association of America's Illinois chapter grow while serving as its president. Overall, he says starting Lawngevity helped strengthen his leadership and industry skills.

Q. Why did you start your own company? I was working in The Chalet retail store in 1984 and took care of the lawn care needs of customers, and a lot of people complained that too many companies offered only liquid treatments. So I decided I was going to go off on my own and do granular fertilization. I got a \$7,000 loan from my father-in-law, and I already had a pickup truck. I got started by word-of-mouth and by advertising in coupon packets. From there, it just expanded. By the time I sold the company, I had 275 customers, and that was more than 8 years ago. My biggest pitfall was not having



Photo: Todd Fedler

enough money. I'd interview people, and they had jobs where they were making more money and I couldn't pay them that amount. I had a hard time getting and keeping employees, so I was doing most of the work myself.

Q. What were the biggest challenges you faced as a business owner? You

don't realize all of the hidden costs. I undercharged. I believe if I wanted to go into business for myself again, I would find a way to sell myself to the customer on something other than the price. There's no way you can just match competitors' prices and survive in business. You need to sell your personality and the quality of the product

you're using. You need to give clients the proper expectations. You need to take business classes. It's not just a matter of money coming in and going out. You need to know people, partner with people and hire good help. You need funding. If you have funding, you can bring in people and continue to grow from there.

Q. What type of business knowledge would have helped?

1.) Finances – just having someone in there to do your bookkeeping. 2.) Forecasting – how to figure out what direction you're going to take. 3.)

Advertising – I advertised in the city of Barrington, Ill. I sent out 10,000 brochures, but because I didn't have the knowledge of how to look into an area and decide if that's an area I should be going in, I spent long days measuring lawns and not getting much out of it because people in that area were very price conscious. Out of the 10,000

continued on page 46



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brochures, I got about five lawns. That ended up costing me about \$6,000, so it was fairly expensive, and the end result was not that great.

Q. What did you learn from your experience about funding a business?

I think there are two things to funding – getting the money and knowing how to use it. I think you have to sit down and write a business plan and know what you need. If I had to do it over again, I think I would try and sit down with some sort of business planner – get someone involved who really knows business.

Q. What was the best thing about owning a business? The best thing is there's no limit to the potential. There is no limit if you do it the right way – with proper capital and proper planning and people in the right positions. I don't regret being in business for myself. I think it was a great experience. You get an appreciation for what your

owner is going through. I can appreciate that he's taking all of the risks.

Q. Why did you decide to sell your business? I knew I wasn't getting anywhere with the business, and there were some rules and regulations coming in Illinois. They were requiring a rinsate pad for your spray equipment, and I had no place to put it – I was working out of a garage and basement. I was retesting for my pesticide license and saw Marko there, and I told him I'd had enough of running my own business. He said he wished I wouldn't have left The Chalet, and offered me a position.

Q. How does working at The Chalet differ from being self-employed? I think one of the big things I noticed at first is that it was really great to come in and talk to coworkers in the morning. When I rejoined The Chalet, it was with the idea that I was going to take over the lawn care department right away, but it took two years for me to get

to know the department and get in that position. At first I was not happy that it was taking that long, but after the first year, I was happy it did take that long. Sometimes, especially after owning your own company, you come in and want to change things right away. But in my own case, there were things that I wanted to do that probably weren't practical, and I realized that later on.

Q. What other important lessons did you learn about running a business?

You can't take losing a customer personally. You can spend a lot of time and energy trying to save a customer who you'll never save. That happened to me my first year in business. Sometimes it's just not worth losing money for one year trying to save a customer because you might not be able to save them no matter what. I also figured out which type of customers are trying to get something for nothing and which ones are really trying to fix a problem.

— Jonathan Katz LL

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USE READER SERVICE # 36

Sure Thing #1:

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decking out denver

by lauren spiers

Purchasing a holiday lighting franchise helped Swingle hang onto its employees during the winter and create a profitable new division.

At Swingle Tree, Lawn & Christmas Décor, Denver, Colo., the holiday season means more than just trimming trees. With their holiday lighting division, the company decks the halls, too – and the decks, the eaves, the windows and the bushes if their customers request it. Eight years ago, Swingle purchased a Christmas Décor franchise and added on the service to both supplement revenue and guarantee winter work for their employees.

“We used to subcontract our lawn and plant health care technicians to a decorating company that would decorate malls and other properties from November to January,” says Jeff Oxley, Swingle’s director of operations. “We called it ‘employee leasing,’ but we could tell it wasn’t working out very well. Having winter work available was a good way for us to retain our employees, but there was a lack of structure with this program. Instead, we saw an opportunity to get involved with a holiday lighting franchise and create a true add-on business for the company.”

Indeed, many green industry compa-

nies are “seeing the light” when it comes to add-on services. In a recent *Lawn & Landscape Online* poll, 27 percent of respondents said they currently operate a holiday lighting division, and an additional 33 percent are considering the add-on option for future seasons.

In terms of Swingle’s approach to holiday lighting, rather than creating a new add-on service from scratch, Oxley explains that the company opted to start a franchise. That approach, he says, provided the company with systems and processes that were already proven effective. “We were given books and materials and videos, which saved us all the expense of trial and error,” he says. “At the same time, they gave us a little more buying power and the ability to expand our region over time.”

The company’s initial investment in the franchise was minimal, Oxley says – only about \$12,000 for their original territory. Likewise, because Swingle has a large tree care division, the company already had much of the necessary equipment on hand, including ladders and bucket trucks, needed for holiday lighting work. Because

continued on page 50

Photos: Swingle Tree & Lawn Care

Sure Thing #2:

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of this, the amount of start-up capital necessary for the division to get going was quite low, though Oxley notes that other landscape contractors may have to invest in extra equipment. "If someone wanted to add holiday lighting to a landscaping company, they would have to invest in a couple of orchard ladders at about \$200 each, and they may have to buy a trailer or find another facility where they can store all of the parts and materials," Oxley notes. "Because of the scope of work with the storage and staging of materials, holiday lighting isn't something you can just start up and run out of your garage."

Recently, Swingle dealt with its own space constraints. Oxley notes that the company's holiday lighting inventory currently resides in 15



large containers on the company's lot. Because Swingle's holiday operation is turnkey, customers' decorations are stored by the company as part of the service package. As the division grows, the amount of space needed for this storage increases dramatically. Oxley also says that in order to accommodate the growth, Swingle Tree, Lawn &

Christmas Décor will either add onto its own facility to add more space, or move to a new facility within the next couple of years.

In terms of investment in stock, Oxley says that for a franchise that costs \$15,000, a contractor should expect to spend another \$15,000 in materials and plan a marketing budget on top of that. Thankfully, because of the franchise system,

contractors aren't individually responsible for working out the necessary budgeting formulas. Oxley says that when Swingle started its holiday lighting franchise, Christmas Décor helped Swingle determine its investment of capital, as well as the territory they should serve. "Different franchise com-

continued on page 52

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panies work different ways, but based on the revenue we wanted to reach, the company was able to tell us what our initial inventory should be, as well as what our marketing should be like," Oxley says.

Swingle's original territory included the better part of the Denver area and the franchise company helped Swingle get its feet wet by marketing to the right areas of the city before trying to branch out too far. "You're selling to people who have disposable income and you obviously want people to buy your service, so you need to market to the right consumer," Oxley advises. "Someone who makes \$50,000 and rents a house probably isn't interested in

holiday lighting services, but someone who makes \$100,000 and owns a \$500,000 home is my demographic because they're going to want to spend the money."

To identify where the holiday lighting target demographic was located, Swingle was provided with a list

of the zip codes in their territory and worked with an advertising company who helped them narrow down the number of targeted prospects in those areas. "You provide them with the criteria you're targeting, whether it be the size of the house or the homeowner's income and they'll tell you how many

people in that demographic are in a particular zip code," Oxley explains. "In some zip codes there might be five prospects and in others there might be 125. You have to make the decision on where you want to concentrate the core of your business."

By focusing in on the right demographic for the company, Swingle has turned holiday lighting into a solid

continued on page 54



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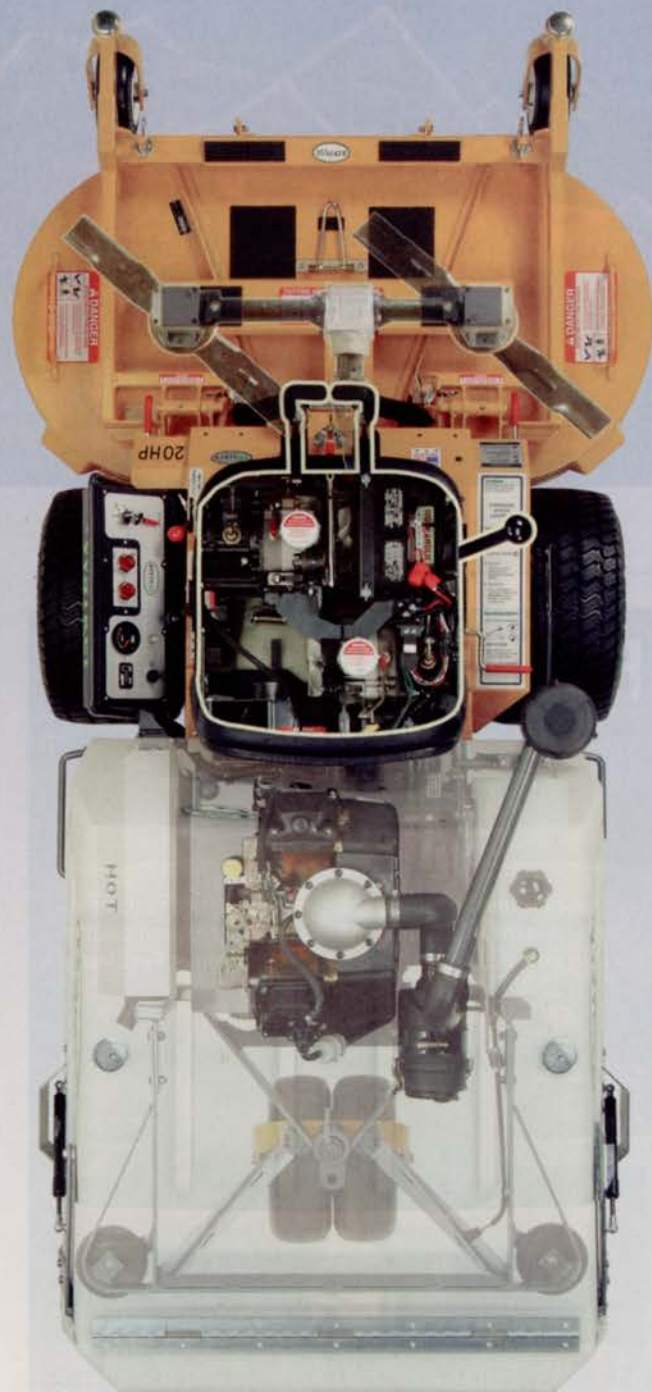
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profit center. Since the division began in 1997, revenue has steadily increased from \$150,000 to \$927,000 at a rate of 15 to 25 percent each year. The service has been as small as 19 percent and as large as 42 percent of the company's business.

Additionally, Swingle benefited early on from some sales "gifts," according to Oxley. "The company to which we had been leasing our employees asked us to do all of their outdoor lighting, so we had an instant stream of revenue right there," he notes, adding that some tourist towns hired the company to decorate the entire towns for a festive holiday season.

In order to keep up with that growth, Swingle anchored the division with a full-time supervisor who handles holiday lighting all year, rather than just in the wintertime as had been the case in the past. Additionally, the department now employs as many as 50 people during the peak season, operating up to 25 holiday installation crews.



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
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However, at the same time that the company was seeing its sales increase, Oxley notes that the percent profit that the company now earns on holiday lighting was down in recent years. "The profit has gone down the last couple of years, but the infrastructure to support the division and the manpower that we've had to feed into it has gone up," he says. For example, having a full-time supervisor for the division means paying a \$50,000 annual salary when the position used to require only four months of salary payment.

In order to increase productivity and profits, Oxley shares that the company is gleaming as much work as they can from their existing territory, which now extends through most of Colorado's Front Range and surrounding suburbs, before breaking into another territory

to which the company already owns the rights. Additionally, cross-utilization of vehicles and equipment has almost become a science for the company.

"We don't want a vehicle that's only going to work nine months out of the year," Oxley says. "We want that vehicle to be able to do holiday lighting, irrigation and maybe even tree trimming. We specify all of our vehicles, so when we start building a truck, if it's a

height, maybe that cost should be split with the holiday lighting department and not just the tree-trimming aspect." Spreading the cost of large equipment purchases across the two or three divisions that will be using the vehicle is an effective cost control and efficiency measure for the company because more than one revenue stream is carrying that overhead.

In operations and logistics areas

"Because of the scope of work with the storage and staging of materials, holiday lighting isn't something you can really run out of your garage. It's a service that can grow very fast, and you have to stay on top of that." - Jeff Oxley

sprayer we consider whether it's a skid-mount sprayer where we can pull the skid out and make it a tree-trimming truck in the winter. Or, if we buy a bucket truck that has a 50-foot working

like these, Oxley adds that he's grateful for the network created by being part of a franchise system. "There are different marketplaces for this end of the business and that means we have 300

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other dealers we can bounce ideas off of," he says. "Throughout the system we have an intranet that allows us to post questions for other dealers about products, sales or something as specific as how to deal with snow on roofs. I know the folks in Minnesota have to deal with that issue all the time. Having the ability to ask 'How do you do it?' and 'What do you do?' has been really nice."

However, one thing that each Christmas Décor franchise does on its own is create a pricing structure for their service. "Each individual franchisee is responsible for creating a labor burden, so what we charge here may not be what they charge in Indianapolis or Kansas City," Oxley says.

At Swingle, the pricing structure is broken down very specifically due to the parts-and-pieces nature of the business. "You have to charge for materials and you have to charge for labor, but then there are special add-ons or situations that you have to charge for," he adds. "We have different price points for each category and each project, so if you want large lights on a tree that is a certain height, and you want it done a certain way, we have a price for that. If it's roof lighting on a tile roof that I can't access, there's a price for that. We can't just go look at tree after tree and say they'll all be 500 lights and the same price for each."

On average, Swingle Tree, Lawn & Christmas Décor's customers spend around \$900 to \$1,100 annually for holiday lighting, and Oxley notes that product costs count for 10 to 12 percent of that. "The product cost may be less for some people and more for others because of what we buy and how much we buy," he explains. "We want to make sure that, from year to year, if our customers add lights that they are the same colors and quality that we used the year before. We purchase through certain channels in order to keep up that professional look throughout."

Also, Oxley notes that the company tries to reach about 30 percent profit on each job, though the amount of labor and use of certain types of equipment can cut into this.

Training is another business aspect that Swingle handles on its own. Because many technicians trade in their lawn sprayers and spreaders for holiday lights in the winter, the company holds a full day or day-and-a-half of training to refresh everyone's holiday lighting memories before the season begins. Topics covered usually include three or four high priorities like low-voltage wiring knowledge, power rules and safety training. Then, throughout the four-month season from October to January, the team meets every morning to discuss issues they've seen on different sites and how to handle them. Weekly hour-long training sessions also cover any additional safety issues that need to be addressed.

Without a doubt, the holiday season is as bustling for Swingle Tree, Lawn & Christmas Décor as it is for mall shoppers and children who are out of school for the winter — they're always on the go. But a dedicated staff and convenient network of dealers has helped the company quell the chaos and make holiday lighting a profitable add-on service that shows signs of continuing growth. Still, "this isn't a business you can just jump into and make \$1 million," Oxley notes. "You learn a lot about marketing and people's buying habits, but you have to be ready, willing and able to handle the interest in the service as it grows. When you're prepared, it can be very rewarding." LL

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USE READER SERVICE # 43

Lawn & Landscape®

Special Report:

WHAT YOUR CUSTOMERS REALLY THINK

What are customer and prospect perceptions about professional lawn and landscape companies and services? To find out, *Lawn & Landscape* commissioned a nationwide benchmark research in partnership with the Kohler Co., Kohler, Wis. We asked commercial and residential customers how many of them have a lawn and/or landscape, who does the outdoor work, how much they would be willing to pay for professional lawn and landscape services, how professional companies could improve their images and more.

The survey was done in late December 2004 and early January 2005. A total of 800 consumers and 180 commercial customers or prospects responded. The results shed light on the lawn and landscape market size and dynamics, and create a benchmark to measure industry progress and trends.

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Vice President - Marketing and Customer Service

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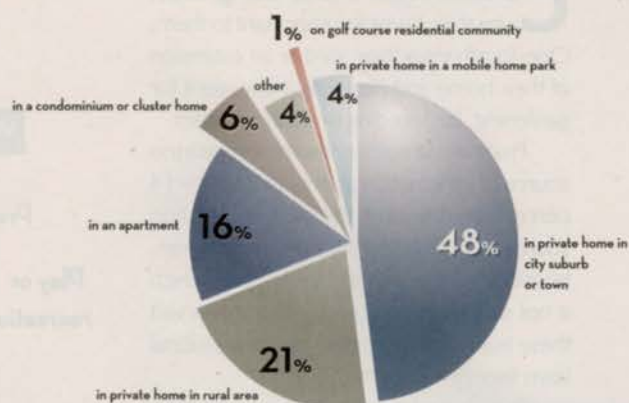
Residential consumer profile

Most residential survey respondents own their own homes (73 percent), have lived in their homes five or more years (50 percent) and have properties one acre or smaller to maintain (80 percent). More than half also work and live in a household with an income of less than \$100,000 (88 percent). Half live with a spouse or partner, about half have a pet with access to the yard and one-fourth have children.

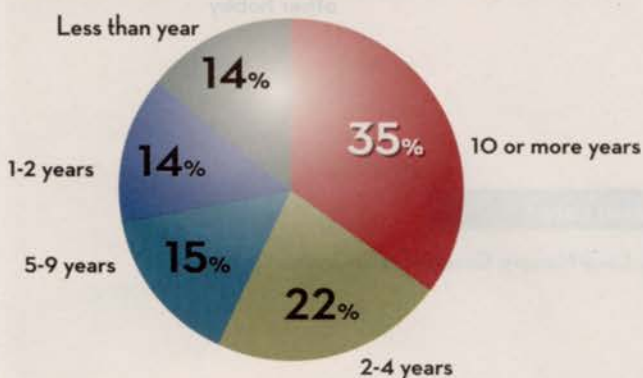
Overall, the residential market is large—only 11 percent do not have a lawn or landscape. However, one-fourth live at a property in which the lawn and landscape is serviced by the landlord, owner or housing community. This means that 75 percent of those responding to the survey must either handle the work themselves or hire someone directly to do it.

Research conducted by Insight Express.

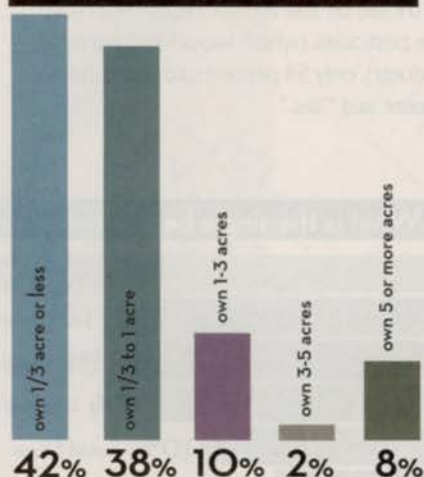
Where residential respondents reside



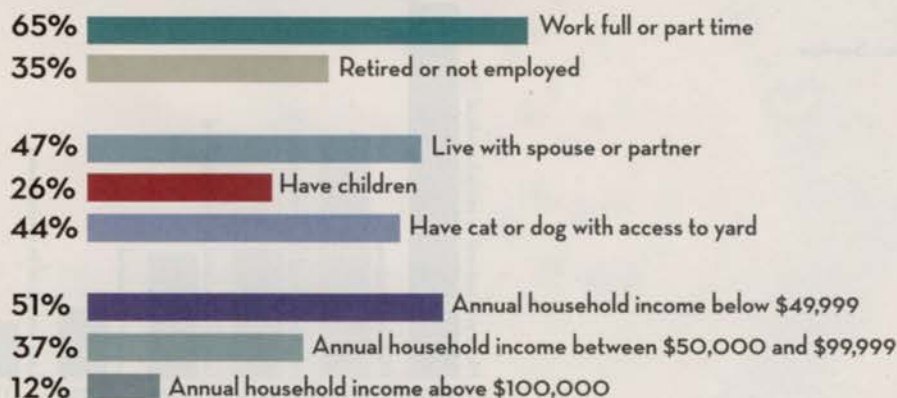
How long have they resided in their present home?



Average size of private properties



Lifestyle facts



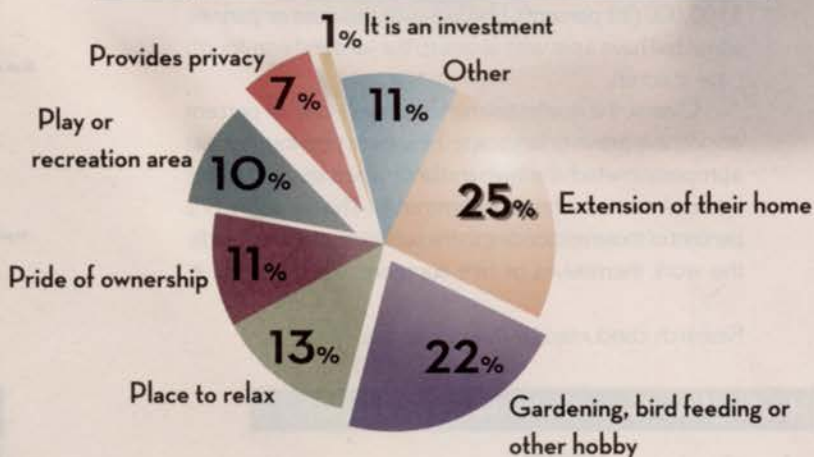
Residential consumer perceptions

Consumers have diverse feelings about why their lawns are important to them. One-fourth view their yard as an extension of their home and nearly as many use it for gardening, bird feeding or other hobbies.

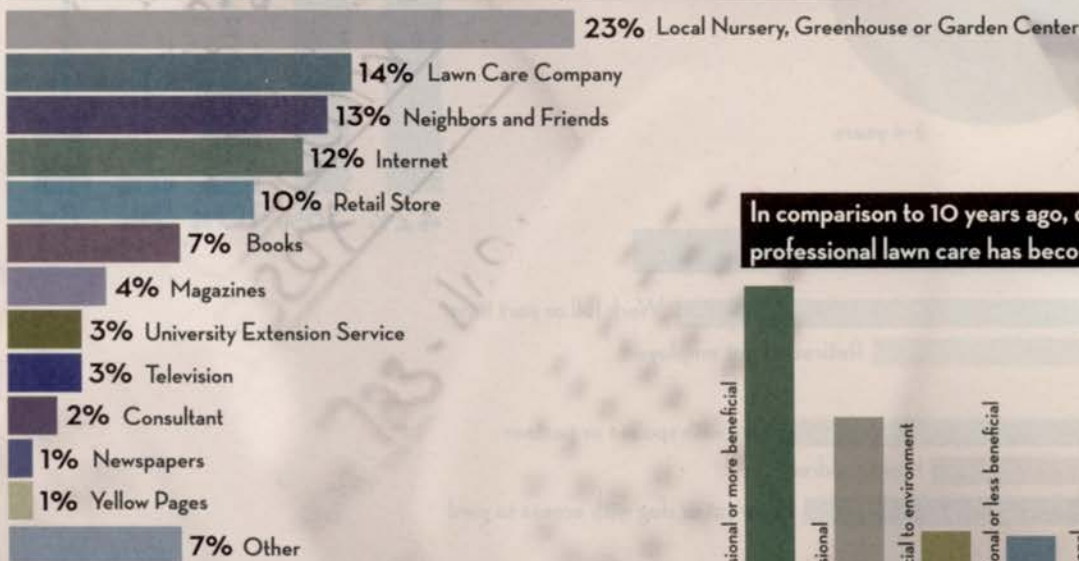
Professional companies are seen as a top source of information about lawn care – 14 percent say they are the best information source, and only the local nursery, greenhouse or garden center fared better, which is not surprising since more consumers visit these businesses than employ a professional lawn service company.

Professional landscape companies have a generally favorable image based on 75 percent of consumers saying that companies have become more professional or more beneficial to the environment in the past 10 years. However, when asked if communities should be able to ban the use of all lawn care pesticides (which would include retail products), only 54 percent said "No" and 46 percent said "Yes."

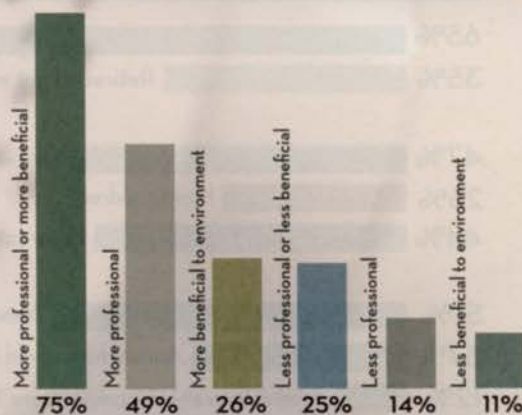
What one thing best describes your feeling about your lawn?



What is the single best information source about lawn care?



In comparison to 10 years ago, do you think professional lawn care has become?





Who actually does the work for consumers? The survey shows that the majority of work is done by the homeowner or a family member, or that certain services are not done at all. When it comes to the easiest tasks – planting flowers, cleaning up the yard in the spring or fall, and mowing, edging and trimming – six out of 10 homeowners said they or another family member do them themselves.

Handyman and students handle about 10 percent of mowing, edging and trimming work, and serve about 5 percent of the market for most other services.

The biggest message from this data is that market penetration by professional companies ranges from a low of 12 percent for snow and ice removal to a high of 27 percent for tree service – work that homeowners lack the equipment and expertise to handle. Many optional lawn care services are simply not done by anyone, perhaps because consumers are not aware of the

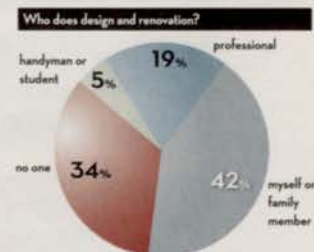
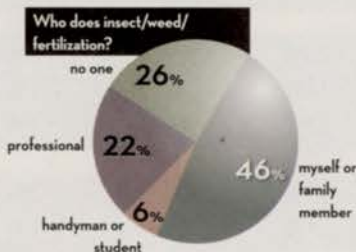
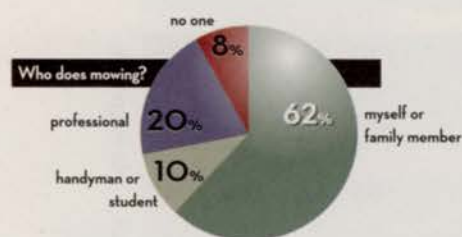
value of the service, or that it requires special equipment and knowledge.

Just under half the respondents said no one does organic weed and insect control on their properties, but about one-third said they do it themselves. Eighteen percent said a professional company provides this service.

To tackle a large design and construction project, consumers said they would take one of two approaches. About 38 percent said they would go the design/build approach by hiring a contractor to handle the design and construction. Conversely, 41 percent said they would hire a landscape designer or architect first, then do as much of the work they could themselves and subcontract what they could not do. Twelve percent would hire a designer or architect and then go with the contractor he or she recommends, and nine percent would hire a landscape designer or architect and then select their own contractor.

Who currently does the following lawn care work on your property?

Professional	Handyman/Student	Myself/Family	No One
Tree service 27%	Mow/Edge/Trim 10%	Mow/edge/trim 62%	Ornamentals 52%
Insect control 24%	Spring/fall cleanup 9%	Spring/fall cleanup 61%	Irrigation 46%
Fertilization 22%	Weed control 7%	Flowers/seasonal color 60%	Aeration 48%
Disease control 21%	Snow/ice removal 6%	Weed control 55%	Lighting 45%
Weed control 21%	Fertilization 6%	Fertilization 46%	Organic weed/insect control .. 44%
Mow/edge/trim 20%	Tree service 6%	Design/renovate 42%	Disease control 41%
Aeration 19%	Design/renovate 5%	Snow/ice removal 42%	Snow/ice removal 40%
Design/renovate 19%	Flowers/seasonal color .. 5%	Insect control 42%	Tree service 35%
Irrigation 18%	Aeration 5%	Lighting 36%	Design/renovate 34%
Organic weed/insect control .. 18%	Lighting 5%	Organic weed/insect control .. 34%	Insect control 29%
Spring/fall cleanup 16%	Irrigation 5%	Disease control 34%	Fertilization 26%
Lighting 14%	Insect control 5%	Tree service 32%	Flowers/seasonal color 22%
Ornamental service 14%	Disease control 4%	Irrigation 31%	Weed control 17%
Flowers/seasonal color 13%	Organic weed/insect control 4%	Ornamental 30%	Spring/fall cleanup 14%
Snow/ice removal 12%	Ornamental service 4%	Aeration 28%	Mow/edge/trim 8%





If you were to hire a professional lawn care service, what would you be willing to pay per year for the following services? (based on 787 responses)

	<\$100	\$101-\$249	\$250-\$999	>\$1,000	Not Interested
Mowing/edging/trimming	19%	13%	11%	2%	55%
Aeration	21%	5%	2%	1%	71%
Fertilization	26%	9%	2%	1%	62%
Insect control	22%	9%	2%	1%	66%
Weed control	28%	10%	2%	1%	59%
Disease control	22%	8%	1%	1%	68%
Organic weed/insect control	21%	8%	2%	1%	68%
Irrigation	14%	6%	3%	1%	76%
Design/renovation	14%	7%	7%	3%	69%
Lighting	13%	5%	2%	1%	79%
Tree service	18%	12%	5%	1%	64%
Ornamental service	13%	4%	1%	1%	81%
Flowers/seasonal color	19%	7%	2%	1%	71%
Snow/ice removal	14%	5%	2%	1%	78%
Spring/fall cleanup	23%	8%	1%	1%	67%

Household income less than \$49,999 (based on 309 responses)

If you were to hire a professional lawn care service, what would you be willing to pay per year for the following services?

	<\$100	\$101-\$249	\$250-\$999	>\$1,000	Not Interested
Mowing/edging/trimming	24%	12%	6%	1%	57%
Aeration	19%	4%	1%	NR	76%
Fertilization	24%	5%	1%	NR	70%
Insect control	21%	8%	1%	NR	70%
Weed control	27%	7%	1%	NR	65%
Disease control	19%	7%	1%	NR	75%
Organic weed/insect control	21%	8%	1%	NR	70%
Irrigation	15%	5%	2%	NR	78%
Design/renovation	16%	6%	5%	1%	72%
Lighting	15%	5%	1%	NR	79%
Tree service	20%	10%	3%	1%	66%
Ornamental service	14%	4%	1%	NR	81%
Flowers/seasonal color	23%	6%	1%	NR	71%
Snow/ice removal	17%	5%	2%	NR	76%
Spring/fall cleanup	24%	6%	1%	1%	68%

NR = No Response

**Household income \$50,000 - \$99,999** (based on 221 responses)

If you were to hire a professional lawn care service, what would you be willing to pay per year for the following services?

	<\$100	\$101-\$249	\$250-\$999	>\$1,000	Not Interested
Mowing/edging/trimming	14%	17%	12%	1%	56%
Aeration	22%	6%	3%	NR	69%
Fertilization	29%	11%	3%	NR	57%
Insect control	24%	9%	3%	1%	63%
Weed control	30%	15%	3%	1%	51%
Disease control	25%	9%	3%	1%	62%
Organic weed/insect control	23%	9%	3%	NR	65%
Irrigation	12%	5%	5%	1%	77%
Design/renovation	12%	7%	9%	2%	70%
Lighting	11%	3%	3%	1%	82%
Tree service	16%	18%	6%	NR	60%
Ornamental service	10%	4%	2%	NR	84%
Flowers/seasonal color	16%	10%	2%	1%	71%
Snow/ice removal	10%	6%	3%	1%	80%
Spring/fall cleanup	23%	9%	2%	1%	65%

NR = No Response

Household income more than \$100,000 (based on 73 responses)

If you were to hire a professional lawn care service, what would you be willing to pay per year for the following services?

	<\$100	\$101-\$249	\$250-\$999	>\$1,000	Not Interested
Mowing/edging/trimming	15%	15%	28%	6%	36%
Aeration	35%	15%	3%	1%	46%
Fertilization	32%	24%	4%	1%	39%
Insect control	29%	20%	3%	1%	47%
Weed control	28%	26%	5%	NR	44%
Disease control	32%	15%	1%	1%	51%
Organic weed/insect control	23%	13%	6%	1%	57%
Irrigation	13%	18%	6%	3%	60%
Design/renovation	6%	12%	20%	21%	41%
Lighting	11%	11%	7%	4%	67%
Tree service	13%	20%	15%	6%	46%
Ornamental service	14%	8%	1%	1%	76%
Flowers/seasonal color	20%	21%	7%	1%	51%
Snow/ice removal	10%	8%	3%	1%	78%
Spring/fall cleanup	29%	23%	4%	1%	43%

NR = No Response



THE ELECTRONIC FUEL INJECTED
KOHLER® COMMAND PRO®

26hp and 28hp vertical- and horizontal-shaft engines



"WHEN WE STARTED BUYING EFI ENGINES FOR OUR MOWERS THREE YEARS AGO, WE BOUGHT FOR POWER TO DRIVE OUR BIG DECKS," says Mike Devore, Vice President, Ed Castro Landscaping, Atlanta. "And we were looking for a quieter engine with lower emissions. But with the high gas prices, our savings on fuel have been another big plus. So if the power is there and we're saving gasoline at the same time, why not? We're clearly ahead across the board."

Kohler Engines product manager Cam Litt says that KOHLER® EFI engines like the 26hp and 28hp KOHLER Command PRO® horizontal- and vertical-shaft engines have changed the equipment-purchasing terrain for turf professionals.

"If you're mowing for a living, no question — electronic fuel injection engines are the way to go," says Litt. "The average homeowner doesn't want to pay more up front for his riding mower. Fuel savings and power aren't at the top of the list. But the real pros, the ones looking for productivity and up to 30% fuel savings that end up on their bottom line are going with KOHLER EFI engines."

WHEN KOHLER INTRODUCED THE FIRST CLOSED LOOP EFI ENGINES IN THE INDUSTRY IN 2000, fuel savings of about \$400-\$500 for each EFI engine per season meant that turf pros paid back higher up front costs in just two seasons of cutting. Or just one year for those who cut year-round. But with fuel prices rocketing up past \$2 a gallon over the last few summers, more and more landscape contractors are seeing even faster paybacks — and then savings in the operating expense column of their spreadsheet.

"It depends on how you work and how many hours you run each season, but in virtually every professional setting, KOHLER EFI engines will save you dollars in the long run," says Litt. "When you save 30% — 60¢ on each \$2 gallon of gas — over a carbureted engine, you're going to make out. And that's without even thinking about power and getting jobs done faster."

fuel savers\$



"WITH GAS AT \$2 A GALLON, BUYING
EFI ENGINES IS REALLY A NO-BRAINER."

says Mike Devore, turf professional

THE LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR BUSINESS IS ALL ABOUT PRODUCTIVITY. IT'S EASY TO BE BUSY, BUT IT'S HARD TO BE PROFITABLE. The little things add up: starting up and running smoother on a cold morning, less maintenance and putting more hours on the EFI engines.

"We've looked at the big numbers — like gross sales — and over the last few years we've scaled back, invested in the tools that will make us more productive, and gone after higher-profit jobs," says Artie Harton of Yarbusters, Inc. of Marietta, Georgia. "Down here in the south, we grow really tough warm-weather grasses. Most of the time it's Bermuda, and every spring we have to go in and scalp it — cut it right down almost to the dirt. So we've been buying for power for almost 15 years, starting with 16hp KOHLER engines and working our way up each year as mowers and engines have gotten bigger and better.

"We're sold on the letters E-F-I. We're running KOHLER EFI engines and they just power right through no problem. We're more productive, absolutely. EFI means more power — you sure won't see us going back to anything less."

MOST OTHER ENGINE MANUFACTURERS AREN'T EVEN BUILDING EFI ENGINES. WHY?

Because most want to concentrate on the higher-volume consumer market. They just aren't willing to invest R&D dollars that Kohler has to serve the smaller and more demanding turf pro market. Maybe that's why more professionals specify Kohler-powered equipment than any other.

"The migration by turf pros to more powerful and more sophisticated EFI engines is more than a trend," says Litt. "It's happening across the board. Every pro is going to buy EFI. It's just a matter of time.

"When crews are running longer on every tank of gas, the payback is pretty convincing. But it's more than that. It's like when cars went to fuel injection twenty years ago. All of a sudden, there was more horsepower under load, lower emissions and better gas mileage. What's not to like? What we're seeing is that when it's time to sell depreciated equipment and buy new, more and more pros are choosing KOHLER EFI engines."

KOHLER

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More power, less fuel



THE "CLOSED LOOP" ADVANTAGE

When an EFI engine is started, it operates in an "open loop" mode mapped by the Electronic Control Unit (ECU). Only KOHLER EFI engines include an oxygen sensor that analyzes the air/fuel mixture in the exhaust. If the oxygen level strays from the ideal air/fuel mixture, the sensor triggers adjustments in the ECU map to adjust the amount of fuel injected into the system.

Only KOHLER EFI engines then "close the loop" between the air/fuel intake and the exhaust output to provide a constant stream of critical feedback — and optimal power and fuel economy.

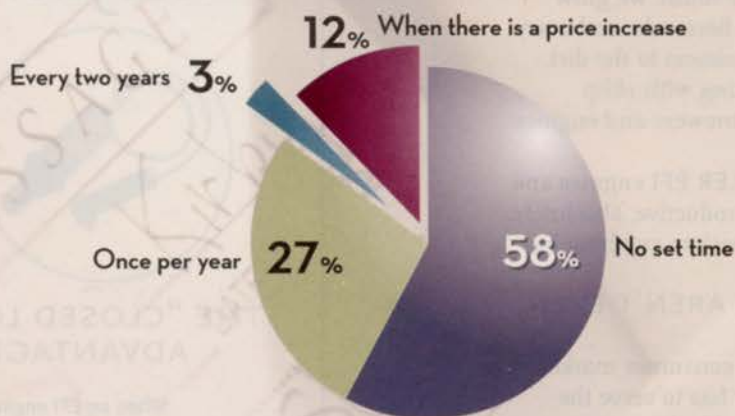
The closed loop advantage also means that only KOHLER EFI engines automatically adapt to air cleaner conditions and altitude changes.



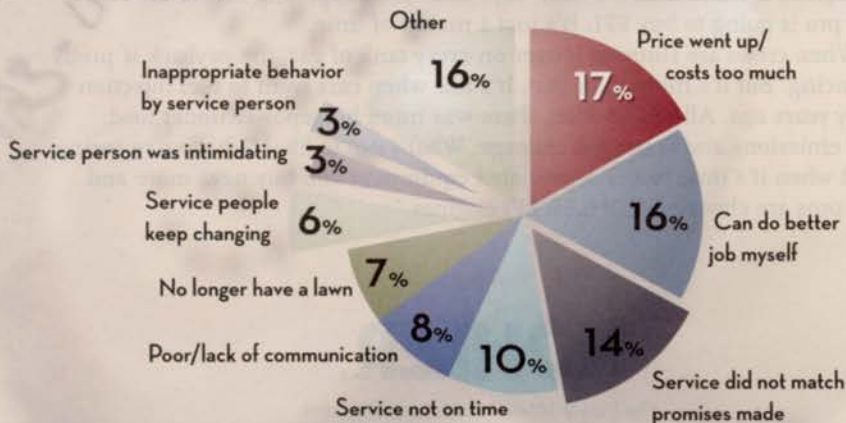
How satisfied are you with your current lawn care company?



How often do you evaluate your professional lawn care service?



If you recently dropped or switched your lawn care company, why did you do so?



Consumers who have a contract with a professional service company tend to be satisfied or very satisfied. Only 10 percent report they are not satisfied with their company, and 5 percent are now looking for a new company.

Given the satisfaction level, consumers say they do not change companies very often. One-third (35 percent) say they have not changed companies in the past five years and 38 percent say they have only changed once in that time period. One-fourth of the respondents say they have hired two to three companies in the past five years, 1 percent have hired four to five companies, and 1 percent have hired six or more companies in that time period.

Most also say they have no set time to evaluate their service and about one-third say it is done once per year, most likely when they are asked to sign a new contract.

Numerous reasons are given by those who do change companies, with price increases and service expectations not being met as the leading issues. If there is an issue, 64 percent say they would contact the company owner directly, 15 percent would contact the service technician, 11 percent would call the office receptionist, and 3 percent would complain to the salesperson. Seven percent said they would contact no one about a problem.



How can professional lawn service companies improve?

Marketing is one way, consumers say. When asked about important factors they consider when making a hiring decision, 94 percent of consumers said value was the most important or an important factor (value meaning "best service for the price"). Only 6 percent said value was not important.

Other important factors considered when hiring a contractor are value (52 percent), services offered (33 percent), recommendations from family and friends (32 percent), licensing/certification (32 percent), friendliness

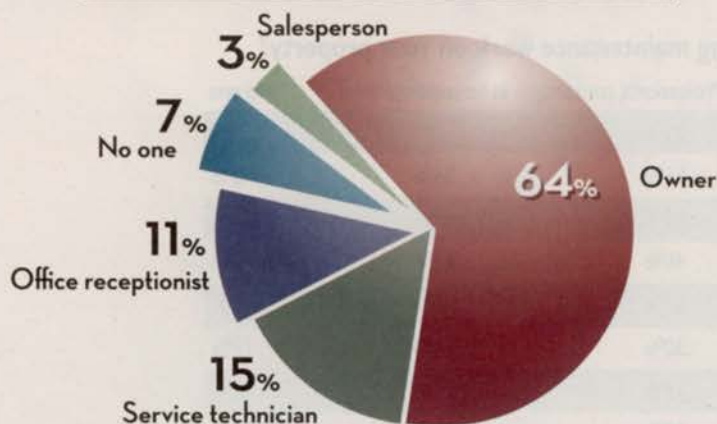
of staff (31 percent), references (31 percent) and lowest price (30 percent).

The top "very important" service improvement companies could make is to meet expectations (see chart below). Relating closely to that are two other of the top four improvements – coming on time and explaining services better. One-fourth of all respondents also want their landscape company to suggest ideas. Top additional service wants include gutter cleaning and fall/spring cleanup.

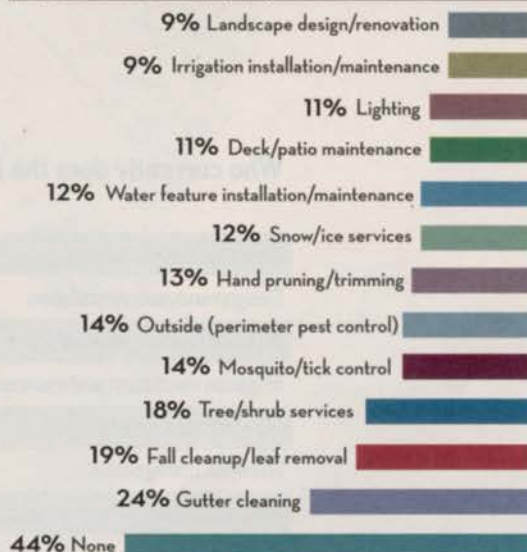
Which of the following service improvements could your lawn care company make?

	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Meet expectations	60%	23%	17%
Come on time	45%	29%	26%
Lower prices	36%	42%	22%
Explain services better	25%	52%	23%
Suggest ideas to me	25%	48%	27%
Call me back faster	26%	38%	36%
Keep same service person longer	22%	48%	30%
Offer payment program	20%	33%	47%
Better uniforms and vehicles	4%	20%	76%

If you had a complaint for your lawn care company, who would you contact?



What additional services do you wish your professional company would offer?





Commercial profile

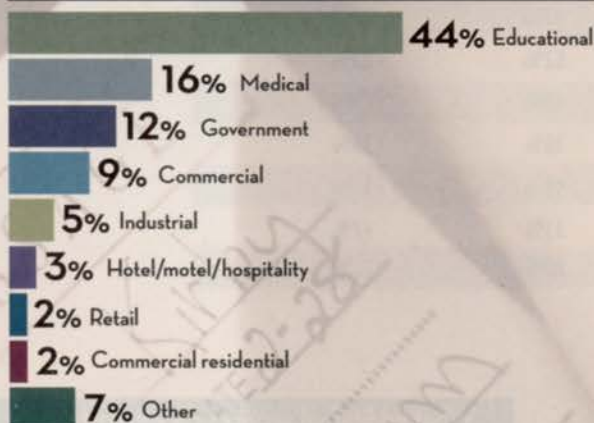
Commercial buyers surveyed were all individuals responsible for overseeing grounds maintenance at their medical, educational, government, industrial, retail or hospitality facilities. The leading job title among the 180 respondents was facility/building manager (76 percent), followed by property manager (3 percent), builder/developer (1 percent), owner/investor (1 percent), and other (19 percent—which included facility director, manager or superintendent; building and grounds superintendent, building maintenance superintendent or director of facilities maintenance).

Sixty-four percent of respondents manage their own

grounds maintenance crews, and 35 percent subcontract this work to a professional service company. One percent subcontracted their services through a broker. Survey respondents are industry veterans, with 70 percent having been with their companies more than five years.

The majority of commercial businesses hire professionals for pesticide and fertilizer applications, design and renovation, irrigation and pond/water feature services. Most handle mowing, seasonal color and snow/ice management internally. Tree and ornamental maintenance is split between in-house and subcontracted work.

What type of property are you primarily responsible for?



Area of property

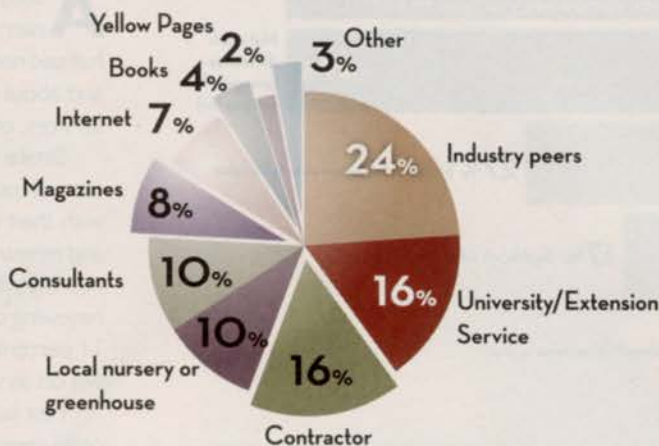


Who currently does the following maintenance work on your property?

	Professional company	In house/employees	No one
Chemical lawn care/fertilization	59%	37%	4%
Design/renovation/installation	51%	44%	5%
Tree/ornamental maintenance	49%	49%	2%
Irrigation installation and maintenance	46%	41%	13%
Mowing/maintenance	37%	63%	0%
Snow/ice management	30%	53%	17%
Pond/water feature maintenance	29%	27%	44%
Seasonal color	32%	45%	23%



What is the best information source about grounds care?

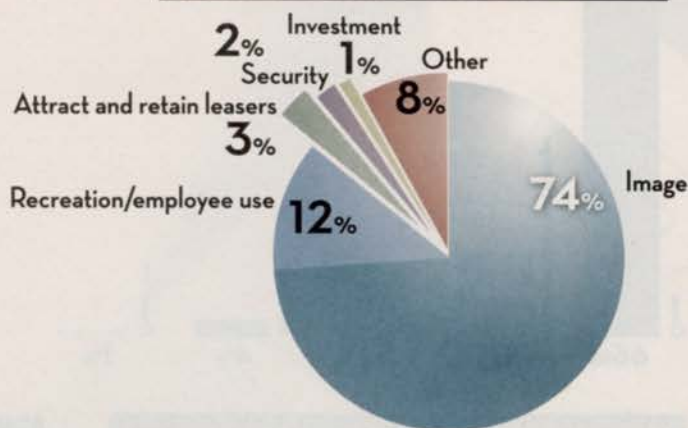


The dominant motivation for commercial property managers to tend to their greenspaces is corporate image (74 percent). To find the right company for this work, commercial facility managers rely on their peers, then technical experts – university staff, contractors, nurseries, greenhouses and consultants. Impersonal information sources all rank lower.

As would be expected, important factors in making a hiring decision include quality/reputation, value, relationship with contractor and referrals/recommendations. At the same time, practical matters like insurance coverage, certification and licensing and service offerings are major considerations.

Commercial buyers rank the performance of professional lawn care companies as having become more professional (72 percent) and more beneficial to the environment (43 percent) in contrast to 10 years ago. Only 10 percent were of the opinion that lawn care companies are less professional and only 3 percent said their services were less beneficial to the environment.

What is most important about your properties?

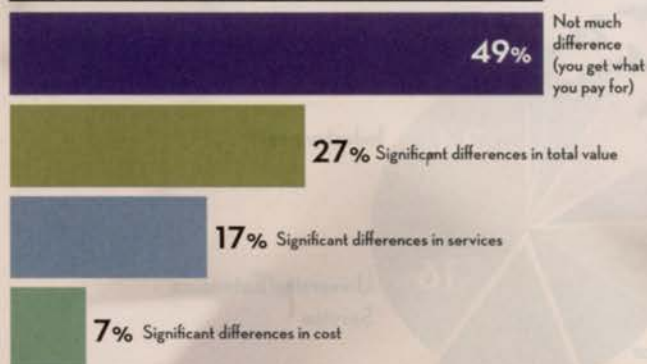


How important are the following factors in selecting a professional service firm?

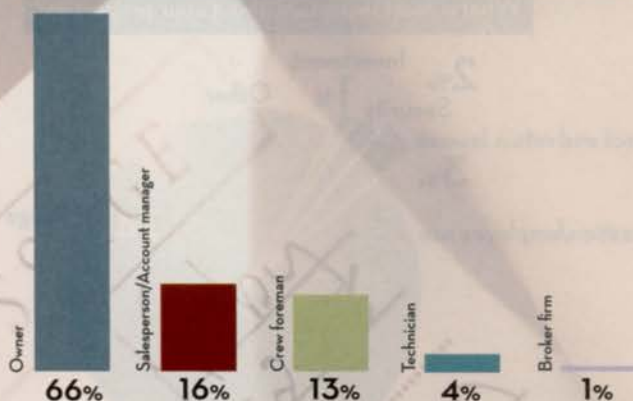
	Most Important	Important	Not Important
Quality/reputation	65%	34%	1%
Insurance coverage	55%	45%	0%
Value	47%	52%	1%
Certification/license	41%	50%	9%
Relationship with contractor	38%	57%	5%
Referrals/recommendations	35%	61%	4%
Service range/options	32%	61%	7%
Friendliness of staff	23%	72%	5%
Lowest price	18%	66%	16%
Better Business Bureau rating	8%	58%	34%
Other	10%	47%	43%



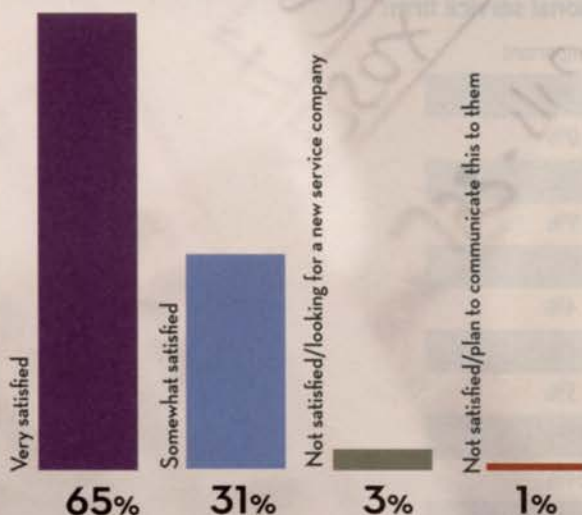
How much difference has there been between the grounds service companies you have hired?



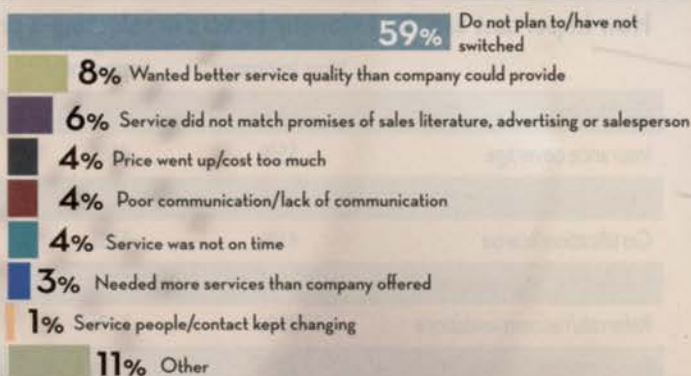
If you had a complaint for your grounds company, whom would you contact?



How satisfied are you with your current grounds maintenance company?



If you plan to/have recently switched professional grounds maintenance service companies, why?



Asked how much difference there is between companies hired, survey respondents were split. About half said not much difference ("you get what you pay for"), and about half said there were significant differences in services, cost and total value.

Similar to the residential survey results, most commercial customers say they are very or somewhat satisfied with their current company. Most (42 percent) review and renew their contract on an annual basis. Close to that number (32 percent) have no set time for reviewing or renewing contracts, 13 percent do so every three years, 11 percent every two years and only 2 percent say they will do so whenever there is a price increase.

Not surprisingly, if there is a problem most (66 percent) commercial clients will go straight to the owner of the company and 16 percent will contact the salesperson or account manager. The dominant reasons for switching are related to service issues.

Asked how often they switch firms, 39 percent say they have had two to three firms in the past five years, 30 percent have hired only one firm and 22 percent have not made a change in that time period. However, 5 percent say they have had four to five firms in the past five years, and 4 percent have hired more than six firms.

When hiring a new firm, 68 percent always check new references, 27 percent sometimes do and 5 percent never do.



Commercial clients were asked the maximum they would budget for seven service categories. The table to the right shows the average maximum budgets for all respondents as well as for three variations of grounds areas.

The challenge in reporting this information is that facility budgets may vary sharply. While clearly the exception and a sharp deviation from the norm, the maximum annual budgets reported for each category by respondents were: \$100,000 for mowing and maintenance; \$125,000 for chemical lawn care and fertilizations; \$100,000 for design, renovation and installation; \$100,000 for irrigation installation and maintenance; \$125,000 for pond and water feature maintenance; \$280,000 for tree and ornamental maintenance; \$50,000 for seasonal color; and \$200,000 for snow and ice removal.

The budget averages also indicate some differences for intensity of maintenance in certain service categories. For example, the maximum annual budget average for seasonal color is higher for those with 5 or fewer acres to maintain (\$1,061) than for those with 6-19 acres (\$532). Average budgets for mowing and maintenance show a similar pattern. What this might indicate is that some facilities with smaller acreages maintain them to a higher degree than facilities having larger areas.

Other service categories reflect a proportional increase in annual budget maximums that roughly correlates to the area to be maintained. That is the case for design/renovation/installation, tree and ornamental services and snow and ice removal.

Asked about what additional services a professional grounds service could provide, the survey respondents showed three interesting patterns. First, some respondents would like their grounds maintenance companies to expand their green and related services. Those include tree maintenance, ornamental maintenance, irrigation repair and maintenance, and perimeter pest, mosquito, tick, bird and wildlife control. Companies serving such clients should consider expanding into these specialty services or finding subcontractors to handle the work under their direction. Failing to do so may cause the commercial client to consider other options, which 3 percent of the respondents said was the reason they have recently switched companies or plan to do so.

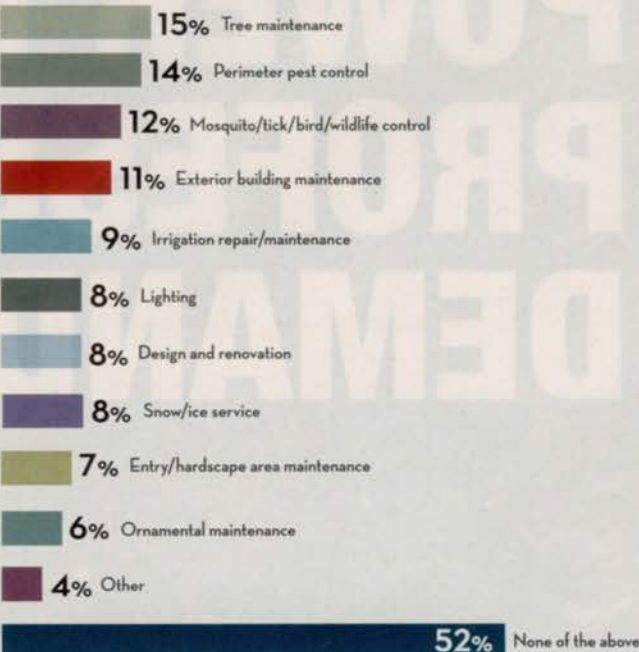
Second, half responded that there were no additional services they desired. That would be expected because many of the commercial buyers surveyed are in the maintenance business and they have contracted for exactly the services they needed.


Third, and a direct reversal of the second point above, some building and grounds maintenance clients are interested in services relating to the facility rather than the grounds. These include exterior building maintenance and entry/hardscape area maintenance. This indicates an interest by some commercial clients for a more turnkey services regarding their building exterior areas and grounds.

What is the maximum you would be willing to budget for the following services?

	Average (all)	Five acres or less	6-19 acres	20+ acres
Mowing and maintenance	\$13,943	\$7,308	\$4,876	\$13,793
Design/renovation/installation	\$9,133	\$1,133	\$4,515	\$9,034
Snow/ice removal	\$7,093	\$3,869	\$5,852	\$7,017
Irrigation installation/maintenance	\$6,789	\$1,147	\$1,146	\$6,715
Chemical lawn care/fertilization	\$4,411	\$2,739	\$2,608	\$4,363
Tree/ornamental service	\$3,402	\$1,041	\$2,494	\$3,365
Seasonal color	\$1,112	\$1,061	\$532	\$1,100
	183 responses	36 responses	37 responses	110 responses

What additional services do you wish your professional grounds service would provide?



A close-up, low-angle shot of tall grass blades in the foreground, slightly out of focus, against a bright, hazy sky. The grass is dark green and black, creating a silhouette effect.

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A Direct Hit

by jeffrey dobkin

Attract new clients and boost client retention with proven direct mail marketing techniques.

Direct marketing is a low cost way of reaching in with your message, piercing that gruff exterior customer shell and finding your way into their hearts, minds and wallets. It's also a non-intrusive way to thank current customers for their business. Despite the continual rising costs of postage, direct marketing is also still a great value. It's the lowest-cost type of marketing because of its precision and accuracy. With direct mail, you can send a message to a specific target audience without a lot of wasted expense. For example, you can mail just 100 letters to a list of your 100 best prospects to sell them new services, boost existing service sales or thank current customers for their business. And this only costs 37 cents in postage for each letter, plus the cost of 100 sheets of paper. With a surety of 95 percent or better, you can get a piece of paper with our own message and personal signature to land on the desk of almost anyone – now that's direct.

TYPES OF DIRECT MARKETING. The types of direct marketing you use can be post cards, brochures, or letters – all with or without envelopes. Each has its place in the marketing mix.

Post Cards. Post cards have exceptionally high readership – by the time your recipient gets it in his or her hands, it's already read. Other advantages: easy to address, cheaper to mail than letters and cheap to print. Post cards can be printed in four colors and purchased for about \$400 for 5,000. Post cards can also look nice printed in just one or two colors with striking copy.

Post cards work best as lead generation devices, especially for services that people are already familiar with. Cons: You can't tell a long story or offer a consultative selling proposition. Also, post cards are always impersonal and suffer from a reader's short attention span – if you don't capture the reader's attention in the

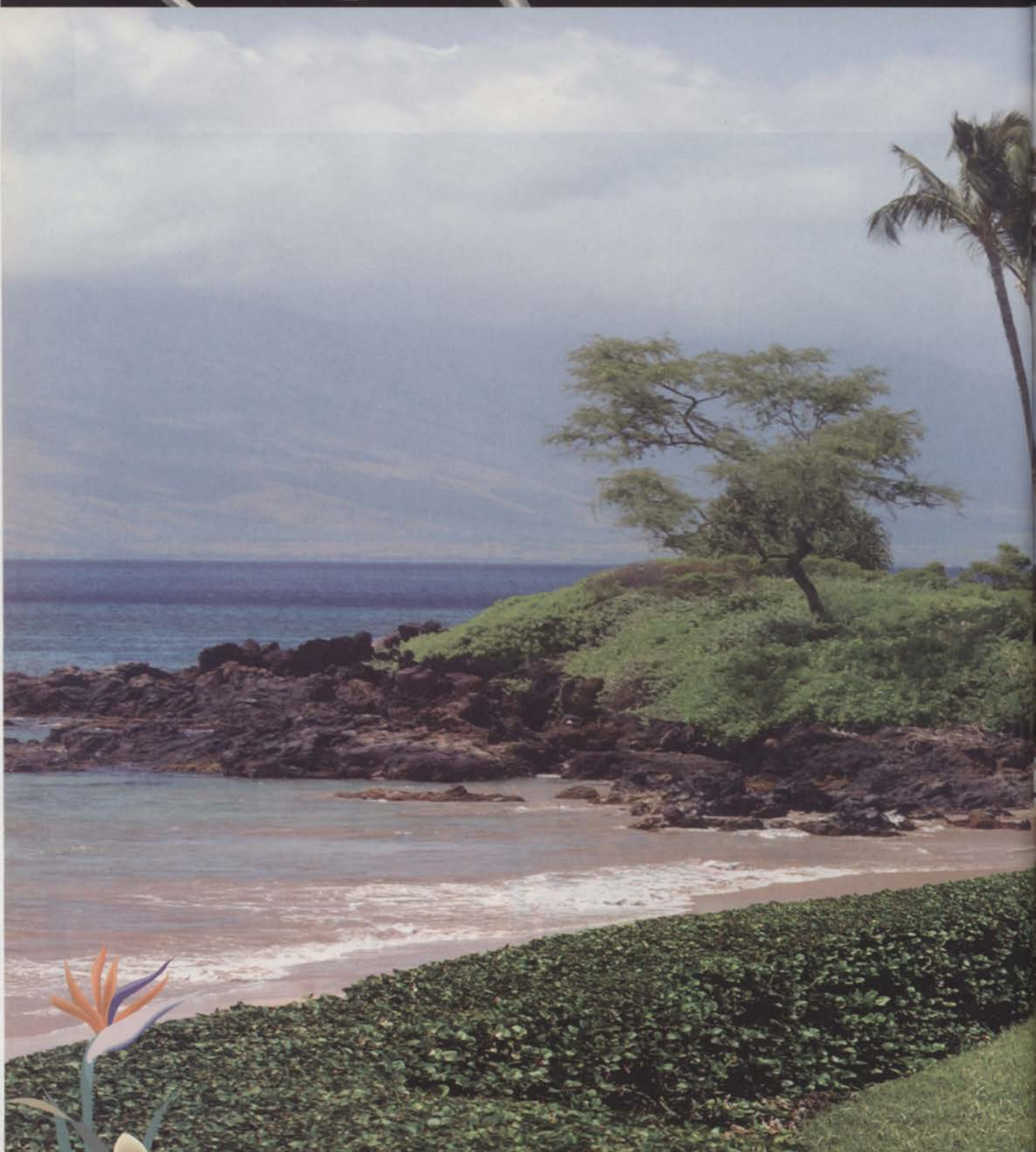
first three seconds, the card gets tossed. And in a commercial client's big office, there is a danger that the card may be thrown away early by a mail screener.

Use a strong headline on your post card – grab attention fast. Flaunt your biggest benefit to immediately capture the interest of your audience. This is no place to be subtle. Since there is little room for long sales copy, write copy to generate a phone call from a qualified prospect instead of trying to actually sell your service directly from the card. Print your phone number in a large, bold typeface.

Self Mailers. These can take on any of thousands of forms, shapes and folds; from a simple tri-fold to a 5-color, box-cut, pre-scored, 12-fold brochure with a handy self-addressed, reply card already filled out with the customer's name attached. Self-mailers allow you to

continued on page 80; sidebar on page 78

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USE READER SERVICE # 44



11 places to buy a mailing list

Looking for a good mailing list? Then you've come to the right place. Here are 11 places for you to access a mailing list to find your target customers.

1. **Magazine Subscribers'** lists are targeted to their audiences, and most publishers are prompt with their name and address corrections. Magazines can also break out their lists by region, state, etc. Call a magazine publisher and ask if their subscriber list is for sale, then ask for the name of their list broker, who can help you break down the list and give you the price. If you're not sure what magazines would be best, try these periodical directories found in most reference libraries: Burrelle's Directory of Magazines (800/USMEDIA), Bacons Magazine Directory (800/621-0561) and SRDS (800/851-SRDS).

2. **Catalog Houses** earn a good portion of their revenue from list sales. Call the catalog and ask for their business office, then ask who handles their list sales. Catalog houses can be found in the Catalog of Catalogs from Woodbine House Publications (www.woodbinehouse.com; 800/843-7323), and The Directory of Mail Order Catalogs from Grey House Publishing (www.greyhouse.com; 800/562-2139).

3. **Trade Associations** are excellent sources of mailing lists. Local associations like the Chamber of Commerce in your area are usually good for local business names. You can select by business size, number of employees, SIC code (the government's industry classification of each business), etc. Two great sources for finding associations are the State and Regional Associations Directory from Columbia Books (888/265-0600; www.columbiabooks.com, \$79) and The National Trade and Professional Associations of the United States (\$99). Association lists and data are also available in the Encyclopedia of Associations by The Gale Group (800/877-GALE, \$505).

3. **Trade Show Lists** of both attendees and exhibitors are also great marketing tools. Check out two Web sites: www.tscentral.com and www.tradeshowweek.com for trade show information. The Tradeshow Week Data Book (213/965-5300; \$355) is a tool published by the editors of *Tradeshow Week* magazine. Another great trade show directory is the Trade Shows and Exhibits Schedule from Bill Communications (800/266-4712, 856/619-5800) – indexed by industry, location, date and alphabetical order.

4. Two directories for investigating lists at the library are the **SRDS Direct Marketing List Source** (800/851-SRDS) and the **Oxbridge Communications National Directory of Mailing Lists** (800/955-0231). These reference tools contain nothing but list data: who owns what list, source of names, list pricing, etc.

5. **List Brokers** can be found in the phone book. Make sure you ask tons of questions before handing over any money. While you pay the broker, he actually works for the list owner – so take that into consideration when you ask questions and negotiate price.

6. **List Managers** can be found in these direct mail trade magazines: *Catalog Age & Direct* magazines, 203/358-9900; *Target Marketing*, 215/238-5300; *Direct Marketing*, 516/746-6700; and *DM News*: 212/741-2095.

7. Some list brokers sell through their own **Catalog of Mailing Lists**. These reference tools will give you an idea of just what's out there – what kind of lists are available and counts of how many records exist in the thousands of different list categories. If you need additional information, call any of these catalog houses and ask them to run a count: Hugo Dunhill at 800/223-6454, American Business Lists at 800/555-5335, Best Mailing Lists at 800/692-2378, CompilersPlus at 800/431-2914, and Edith Roman at 800/223-2194.

8. Several companies now offer lists of every business or every person in the U.S. on CD-ROM. **Mailing List CDs** are available from InfoUSA: 800/321-0869, and Global Business International: 407/568-5037.

9. The **Internet** is a great research tool, if you can filter out the good stuff from the bad stuff.

10. You'd be surprised how many of your **Competitors** will sell you their customers' names. If not competitors, ask other businesses who serve your market if you can purchase their mailing lists.

11. The best list is your own **House List** of current and past customers. These are the folks who know and trust you; they've experienced the service you offer and are now willing to buy something else from you if you would only let them know it's available.

Spend some extra time on list research before you send your mailing. Tighten your list criteria, do your homework and find the best lists you can. Then test several. It's worth the extra time and money to target your audience with precision and increase the chance you'll come up a winner at the post office.

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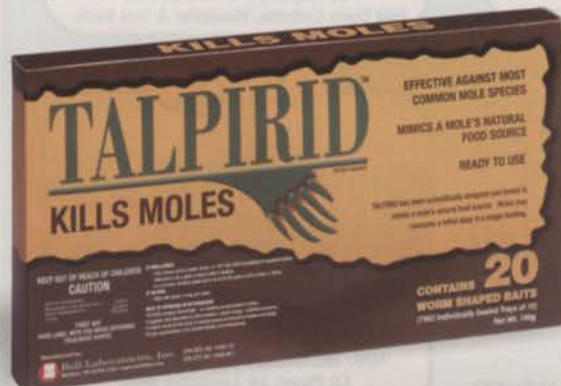
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USE READER SERVICE # 45

continued from page 74

show the most creativity and personality. Cons: Very short runs are impractical for complex pieces of 4-color. They usually aren't personal.

Use striking graphics and set a unique tone. Ask yourself, "If my client receives this in the mail again in four months, will he or she remember receiving it before?" if you answer, "No," redesign the piece to make it more memorable. Make your piece hard-selling – remember if your prospects don't call, your piece failed. The creative use of one or two colors can save you money on printing costs.

Letters. With a well-written and well-designed letter, you can generate a lead or make a person pick up the phone and call to order your service.

You can build loyalty and convince a person that they are the most important customer in the world. Cons: If you can't write a tight, memorable letter, your mailing can sink like a stone without a ripple.

Take your time when writing. It

best tightly-qualified prospects.

Letter and Brochure Combinations. An envelope containing a letter and a brochure is the workhorse of the direct mail industry. There is a reason: This format works well for a

continued on page 82



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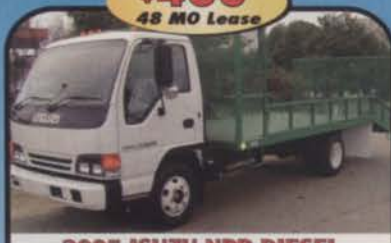
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USE READER SERVICE # 48



the 9 best lines in direct mail marketing

This arsenal of words should be center points in your direct mail marketing campaigns.

1. "Gift certificate enclosed." Gift certificates are inexpensive to print at one-third or one-quarter of a sheet of paper; ship flat and add little weight to your package; are more upscale than coupons; may be targeted to specific services; and are easy to track.
2. "Free offer inside" or "See what's new inside..." These work great on envelopes with a couple of bullet points listed to get the reader inside.
3. "Open Immediately." Tell the recipient exactly what you want him or her to do.
4. "Call us TOLL FREE" or "Just call and get..." Ask customers to call you at least three or four times.
5. "Dear colleague" or "Dear friend" and "Kindest regards." If the potential customer is in your neighborhood, say "Dear neighbor and friend" or if it's

relating to a specific service, try "Dear garden lover and friend."

6. "Thank you." You can never say "thank you" enough to your customers. Other ways to say it: "Thank you for your business and your trust," "Thank you for your kind referral," "Thank you for the opportunity and the privilege to be of service."
7. "New service offers benefit." Benefits sell the service and increase the response.
8. "Free booklet offers how-to information." This attracts readers with a free offer, but limits the attraction to the specific market segment. An example: "Free booklet shows you how to water your lawn properly."
9. "Satisfaction always guaranteed." You're going to get stuck dealing with customer complaints if they come in anyway, so why not be a nice business owner and say this right up front. It will increase your sales.

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USE READER SERVICE # 50

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USE READER SERVICE # 49

multitude of offers. The letter sells and the brochure tells. Design the letter to sell the benefits and generate the phone call. Design the brochure to add credibility to the letter. It's one thing to say in a letter what you do, but it's quite another to show it in a 12-inch by 18-inch photo pull-out. Cons: This format is overused, making it difficult to leave a unique impression.

SUCCESSFUL MAILINGS STEP-BY-STEP. First, design each piece to a specific objective. What are you actually trying to do with this piece? If the piece works perfectly as planned, what exactly will happen in the next step? Will you generate a sale, generate a lead, generate a phone call, make someone feel good about you and your firm, create an impression the recipient won't forget?

Whatever it is, write it down first, then draft each word, each piece of your mailing package to fulfill your objective. This gives you additional clarity when writing.

When writing a letter, first create a striking opening sentence. The objective of this first line is to arouse interest. Use the 100-to-1 rule – write 100 first sentences, then go back and pick out your best one.

Still stuck? Throw your biggest few benefits into the headline. Try this formula: "New service offers benefit, benefit, benefit!" Example: "New irrigation installation service provides a system that waters your lawn more thoroughly yet saves water, reaches a larger area and turns itself off when finished!"

Another formula for creating a great headline is to offer something for free, preferably free information. For example: "Free booklet lists lawn care tips, including how to repair your weed-ridden turf, stop weeds from germinating and produce a lush, envy-of-the-neighborhood lawn." Design tip: Whenever you use the word FREE in a letter or brochure, make sure it's in all capital letters.

Don't wait until the sixth page to show the free service or lawn checkup that comes with every signed contract – your readers will be long gone by page two. One overly long sales letter gets thrown out, but three short letters saying the same thing all get read.

Let readers express early interest by calling you and asking for your booklet. When the phone rings, first strike up a dialog and qualify them as a prospect. Then, ask for their name and address to send the booklet. When the phone rings, the letter or mailer worked.

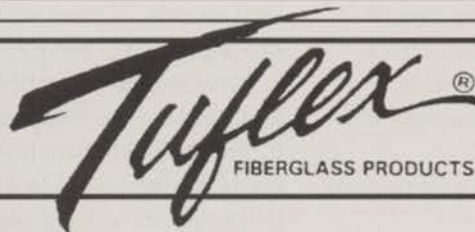
When designing your letter, create a bullet list of benefits and place that list in the middle of your page. Bullet lists have high readership and act to break up the copy and make the letter visually attractive and easy to read.

Ask for a phone call several times in a letter. And place your phone number in the last paragraph in the body copy, even though it's in the letterhead. It's a subtle suggestion to call again.

Make sure you sign your letter legibly. Your signature becomes a graphic hook – make sure they can read it.

Finally, restate your most powerful argument for calling in the "P.S." and list your phone number one more time,

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USE READER SERVICE # 46

even though you have it in other places.

When designing your brochure, you need to think differently than in your letter. Brochures need to be designed to be stand-alone pieces, so they can be mailed, left at a prospect's office or handed out. Never stick a brochure in an envelope and call it a direct mail campaign. Always include a letter. For the additional cent and a half for the sheet of paper that your letter costs to include, it can double, triple or quadruple the response you receive.

When designing your envelope, design everything in my mailing package for one fold (5½ inches by 8½ inches), which can be mailed in a 6-inch-by-9-inch envelope. More traditionally letters and brochures are designed to be folded in thirds to fit into more standard number 10 envelopes (9 inches by 4 inches).

Include a teaser on the envelope, such as "Gift Certificate Enclosed." Another trick is to type your name and business address (no business name) in the upper left hand envelope corner, then hand write the prospect's name and address directly on the envelope (no labels). This way, people will think it's a personal letter from you, so you'll enjoy higher than normal opening rates.

COVERING COSTS. First, find out what percent of people need to purchase your service to cover the cost of the mailing. For example, let's say your mailing costs 50 cents per package. If you mail it to 1,000 people, you'll need to cover \$500 in mailing expenses, then your cost of fulfillment (product cost plus shipping), plus some profit left over. If you need more than a 1½- to 2-percent response to cover your costs – and profit – to produce a successful mailing, you better rethink your mailing. If your service sells for \$25 and your profit is \$10 per customer, you need to sell 50 people to cover the cost of postage and break even. That's a 5-percent response rate, which is unrealistically high.

Most direct response rates for direct sales are less than 2 percent. But by giving away something free, your response can be as high as 25 percent. But your hard selling secondary package to this more qualified list must be able to draw enough response to cover all costs. Looking at these figures you can see why services that sell for less

than about \$50 don't work in solo direct mailings. Even at \$50, with a profit of \$25 per sale, you need to sell 20 services per thousand to break even – a 2 percent order rate.

These numbers show you why your list selection is so important. If you can find a highly focused group of people or market segment that all want your service and are most likely and are

willing to order your service from your direct mailer, you will find success. **LL**

The author is a marketing specialist, Danielle Adams Publishing Co., Merion, Pa.

www.lawnandlandscape.com

Check our February Online Extras for more information on how to test your direct mail campaign before sending it out.



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USE READER SERVICE #47



Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users discuss ways small to mid-sized lawn care companies can compete with larger operations for new clients.

Standing Out



by jonathan katz

In lawn care, everyone knows about the big boys. They're the massive operations with household names that everyone immediately recognizes when their trucks pass through the neighborhood. So what can smaller companies do to separate themselves from all the others? Robert Shauger, owner of Deerfield, N.Y.-based Advanced Applications, posed this question to fellow *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board participants.

Participant suggestions varied from advertising more to targeting more full-service clients. Others recommended offering personalized services that larger companies are unable to provide. Smaller lawn care companies should emphasize to their current customers the added value they can realize by purchasing lawn care services from their operations, says Ken Reis, owner, Turf & Shrub Management, Dartmouth, Mass. "Chances are your best source of new business is your existing accounts, so with that in mind what are the biggest complaints you hear folks telling you about the larger companies?" Reis says.

Reis points out that his clients say higher-revenue companies often don't return all phone calls in a timely fashion and that they tend to be less personable in writ-

ten and vocal communications. "Return all calls ASAP," he recommends. "Personalize — this could be as simple as a note on your invoice that says something specific to that property. For example, 'I really like that new planting bed you installed. Good Job!' People love being noticed. I believe those simple things will get you more referrals and help you keep existing customers for a long time."

MARKETING MANIA. It's tough to find work in lawn care if existing or potential new clients don't know you provide the service. An aggressive advertising campaign and competitive pricing can help smaller companies compete with the larger ones, says James Cormier, owner, Old Stone Lawn Care, West Boylston, Mass. "Let's face it, people usually go with the larger companies because they're cheaper or they get hammered with their postcards, mailers and phone calls," Cormier says. "So to stand out and separate yourself from the big-boy approach. I think the simple answer is just to advertise more than your competition and be price competitive. Now smaller companies like you and me can charge more because there is a

continued on page 93

"CLIP *Propelled My Business Into The* Top 10%"

Tony Bass, President Bass Custom Landscapes Bonaire, GA



"I firmly believe time is the single greatest asset we possess. Good stewardship of our time on this earth enables us to make profit and prosper. When I started my business I was full of energy and ideas, but I knew in order to succeed I had to maximize the use of my time. I knew I needed systems that would run independently of me. I wanted a system that was so simple and easy to learn that Bass Custom Landscapes could change personnel without missing a beat. That's where CLIP Software in.

In March of 1992 I purchased a computer to run my new CLIP program. I knew nothing about computers. My annual sales were \$300,000. CLIP saved me over \$13,000 in office personnel that first year. Today with \$3 million in sales we still use CLIP daily with only two office employees maintaining client history, scheduling, routing, and billing in CLIP.

CLIP's steadfast system requires very little maintenance. It's a tool that tells you exactly where you are and gives you the ability to monitor and plan for future growth. I track job profitability with CLIP. It's not good enough for me to track labor by the hour. I prefer to track it by the minute. CLIP gives me the ability to track my profitability on every job easily, quickly, and efficiently-by the minute! I learned years ago that just six minutes was standing between profitability and breaking even.

CLIP allows me to spend time focusing on long-term solutions. In January 1993 I went to my banker with a business plan requesting financing for what was to become my patented Super Lawn Truck system. The primary focus of my business plan was building efficiency with systems and CLIP Software. Today, thanks to CLIP, I have branched out from maintenance to include irrigation, landscaping, design, and installation services.

But, it's not just the software. As much as I love CLIP, the real value is the team behind the software. The team at CLIP Software were the "first kids on the block". They were there when nothing else was and they'll be there when nothing else is. I know they'll be there because they have their ears open. With so many changes resulting from the growth of my business, from technology and from the industry itself, CLIP has been there for me every step of the way, often anticipating enhancements to CLIP even before I asked!

I've come a long way since 1992 when I purchased CLIP. Without CLIP, growth would not have been so easy. I'm now at the top 10% of my industry. In CLIP I've got a user-friendly system that runs without me and helps ensure my profit. With CLIP I can honestly say, "All Systems Go!"

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Engine 26-hp Kawasaki® LC
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IS® 1500Z



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Engine	19, 21, 25-hp Kawasaki® V-twin
Cutting Width	44, 48, 52

HYDROCUT™ 36



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Cutting Width	36"

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ALL IN A DAY'S



"With the independent suspension, there's less wear and tear on the mowers, so my parts bill is down and the machines are able to stay in the field longer. That's where we want them to be — out on jobs making money."

— Robert Brake, Owner, Brake Landscaping, St. Louis, Mo.

What does "all in a day's work" mean to you? Do you sit back in your office chair waiting for something to do? Or, do you spend your days busy with clients, working with your employees, managing your business and wishing there were more hours in the day?

Chances are, you fall into the second category — working hard to build a successful, efficient company while keeping clients and employees satisfied. And even with a sea of business services and consultants available to you, you have yet to find the one product that will help push your business into high gear. Until now.

Ferris Industries has a keen understanding of what contractors need to make their businesses run smoothly. With a line of high-performance mowers that reinforces the Ferris's Declaration of Innovation, Ferris products provide the efficiency, quality of cut and operator comfort that directly influence contractors' opportunities to be profitable. With the debut of the new line of IS mowers, including the IS 4500Z, IS 3000ZL and IS 1500Z, you'll soon be able to redefine "all in a day's work" to say: "MORE in a day's work" for your company.

CHANGE FROM THE ORDINARY. When it comes to landscape maintenance, time is money. The more efficiently

a mower operator can complete a job, the sooner they can move onto the next, creating the ability for their companies to sell additional work. By using high-performance IS mowers, Ferris owners are able to take better advantage of that than their competitors.

"We've only been running Ferrises for about a year, but our productivity is up tremendously," says Kirk Waters, who tested a Ferris and instantly experienced a difference from the mowers already in his fleet. The owner of Waters Construction, Manhattan, Kan., says 90 percent of the company's work is mowing wide-open properties for government and municipal clients. "Our per-hour productivity has jumped 60 percent to six acres per hour, even on the properties where the grass is as high as 6 inches."

Roy "Dusty" Dust, product specialist for Ferris, says high ground speed is something all contractors look for in a mower, but the key is finding a machine that maintains a consistently high quality of cut, even at high speeds. "The biggest misnomer is asking how fast a machine is," Dusty says. "What you really want to ask is, 'How fast can the machine go and still leave the lawn looking good?' That's what keeps customers satisfied. On a Ferris, you can achieve a minimum 10-percent increase

Maintenance Miracle

Robert Brake learned about Ferris mowers through an inside tip from the staff at Scott's Power Equipment, St. Louis, Mo., where he traditionally bought his machines and brought them in for repairs.

The tip turned out great for Brake, owner of St. Louis-based Brake Landscaping, though the folks at Scott's Power Equipment may regret the advice. "My mechanic said, 'You have to demo a Ferris — I guarantee you'll love it,'" Brake says. "He was right. I went out, took a test drive, came back to the shop and said 'I'll take two.'"

Brake now has 20 Ferris mowers in his fleet and

because their superior Independent Suspension (IS) — an industry innovation unique to Ferris — Brake says he and his mechanic are losing touch. "They don't see us in the shop as much anymore," Brake says with a laugh. "With the

independent suspension, there's less wear and tear on the mowers, so my parts bill is down and the machines are able to stay out in the field longer. That's where we want them to be — out on jobs making money."

Roy "Dusty" Dust, Ferris product specialist, explains why IS mowers are able to stay on the job and out of the shop. "The suspension dramatically reduces the amount of vibration and impact the operator experiences while he's mowing," Dusty says. "Because the operator is more comfortable, he can take advantage of the higher ground speed offered by the IS models. With that, you can effectively increase productivity by at least 10 percent. But even though you're producing more, IS protects the machine from extra wear and tear. Even a good lawn has some rough areas, so we've developed the suspension to absorb the bumps and undulations over a lawn."

With all operator considerations accounted for, contractors can capitalize on the benefits of Ferris IS mowers — and make visits to their mechanics few and far between.



WORK

in ground speed, which can equate directly to your bottom line. For every 10 lawns your current machine and operator are producing, you can get an 11th for free with a Ferris."

INNOVATIVE INDEPENDENT SUSPENSION. The secret to this heightened productivity is one of Ferris's key innovations: Independent Suspension, or IS. To fine-tune its IS concept, Ferris teamed up with a company that handles racing suspensions to create suspensions that are suited to each mower in the IS line. In creating the ideal suspension, operators will notice that the shocks on IS machines vary from mower to mower. Ultimately, the result is a smoother ride and improved mowing experience across the board.

"The four-wheel independent suspension is excellent," Waters says. "The ride becomes much smoother compared to some of the other mowers we've used. Everyone's been on a machine that shakes you to death while you're mowing, but with Ferris, it's like you're driving a pick-up truck down the highway." With the amount of mowing his company performs — more than 640 acres per week — Walters says the improved ride increases operator comfort for his employees. "You're on the mower for eight to 10 hours a day, and the Ferrises really save your back," he says. "None of my operators want to get on a machine that's not a Ferris because the ride is so much better and they're actually enjoying the work."

Robert Brake agrees. "Our mowing crews really like these machines a lot," says the owner of Brake Landscaping, St. Louis, Mo. "Before we bought the Ferris mowers, we looked at other machines that were cheaper, but we had to listen to our employees. They wanted to Ferrises and it's really paid off. Every day, we're doing better."

After running several other mower brands, Brake now runs Ferris mowers exclusively and has 20 in his fleet. "Our productivity is up 20 percent between the better ride with the IS, as well as with operator comfort. The ease of handling with Ferris mowers overall is fantastic."

Brake and Waters have already discovered what so many other contractors can benefit from with Ferris IS mowers. With more comfortable and, therefore, more efficient operators, both are able to take advantage of their newfound productivity to help them boost their bottom lines.



"The four-wheel independent suspension is excellent," Waters says. "The ride becomes much smoother compared to some of the other mowers we've used. Everyone's been on a machine that just shakes you to death while you're mowing, but with Ferris, it's like you're driving a pick-up truck down the highway." — Kirk Waters, owner, Waters Construction, Manhattan, Kan.



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USE READER SERVICE # 52

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INDEPENDENT SUSPENSION
THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE!

IS® 4500Z



IS® 3000ZL



NO INTEREST UNTIL SEPTEMBER
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IS® 1500Z



HYDROCUT™ 36



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continued from page 84

customer base out there willing to do this for better results. But I think this way limits your growth. This is where it's harder to separate yourself from the competition simply because there really isn't much that separates the two."

But Reis says advertising can only do so much to increase revenue. "Sure you can add to your customer base that way," he says. "But as far as I'm concerned advertising is another word for gambling. You have no idea what return you will get. You also don't know how qualified the leads you get will be. Who has the time to waste on tire kickers? The large companies, well that's different. They have larger budgets and more manpower. They try to dominate a market, which helps us smaller guys. They do a pretty fine job of marketing, and they know they have to because they don't hold on to a customer for too long."

But Cormier points out that the

percent growth over the last season. We don't do much advertising. We did hire an outside telemarketing agency in spring 2004, which did very little for us except add to the cancellation rate. If you want to stand out from your competition, go the extra yard for existing customers. They will work as salespeople for you and send you referrals."

Larger companies have actually helped Danville, Ill.-based Emerald Landscape Management generate new business, according to company Owner Matthew Morgan. When a larger company's performance falls short of expectations, that's when Morgan steps in. "I am there to pick them up with personalized, quality service at a slightly higher price," he says. "My referrals justify the higher price, and after poor service from others, they start to get the feeling that they get what they pay for, so the higher price is of no concern to them. Once they instill the 'I want a

"Personalize - this could be as simple as a note on your invoice that says something specific to that property. People love being noticed. I believe those simple things will get you more referrals and help you keep existing customers for a long time." - Ken Reis

market leaders realize that if they mail thousands of brochures, they're bound to snag some profitable accounts. "I think in our business you can plan on a certain percentage sold by the number of pieces mailed or houses called or whatever advertising you're doing," he says. "I do think those numbers are true across the country."

But Reis stresses that quality service can act as an advertising avenue by developing referrals. "I run my business old school - free service calls, every phone call gets returned before anybody goes home for the night, follow-up phone calls for service calls performed seven to 10 days ago, personalized notes handwritten on every invoice," he says, adding that he used to work for a nationally recognized company that did the same thing.

"Hey, I'm not the king of lawn care," he continues. "As a matter of fact we currently have a 15.5 percent cancellation rate, but we still have 12.5

green, weed-free lawn' into the client' and then fall short, you should be there to pick up the pieces."

Morgan adds that smaller lawn care companies should find out where the larger companies are doing high volumes of work and then target those clients with specific mailers. "With this service, half the battle is creating a client," he says. "Let someone else with a large war chest do that. You just need to be able to provide the quality service that they deserve."

THE FULL DEAL. If increased marketing isn't cutting it, companies specialized in only lawn care may want to consider expanding their services, several Message Board participants recommend. "If you want to stand out, I suggest you expand your horizons to complete full-service, high-end residential and commercial grounds maintenance work," says Lawrence Stone, owner, Lawrence Stone, Wilkes

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best of web

Barre, Pa. "Fertilization customers are just too low end and will cancel just to save \$1. You will have very little, if any, turnover with estate maintenance, and great referrals and very low advertising costs with direct mail."

Shauger has actually considered changing to full service to increase business but he thinks most of his clients already hire maintenance companies. Stone responds by suggesting that Shauger submit a full-service proposal to his current clients. He also offers Shauger advice on how to get started. Contractors should have one truck set up for lawn care applications and an enclosed trailer for maintenance equipment so they can mow and make applications at the same time, Stone says. "A four-wheel drive pickup with a plow and dump insert makes a good crew truck for mowing and light landscaping," he says. "Try to build enough work over winter to add one employee next April to run the mowing route. So instead of making \$500 a year per customer you will make \$5,000."

But Cormier disagrees, saying he also considered offering full-service landscape and lawn care but thinks lawn care alone is more profitable. "Stone, you say it's better to make \$5,000 per customer than \$500, but you can only do so many \$5,000 customers in a year," he says. "Right now, I average \$542 per year for my customers. I have 348 customers. Now that's one guy doing \$180,000 a year with a pickup truck, trailer and a ride-on spreader."

Another Message Board participant suggested that Shauger connect with maintenance contractors who would subcontract lawn care services to his company. But some maintenance operations don't pay in a timely fashion and will request that lawn care companies perform the services at a discounted rate, Cormier says. "I really think there are far too many people out there who just want a fertilization company," he says. "Plus, it's how you sell yourself. When I meet with a new client who's thinking of hiring one company to do it all, I always point out that most companies out there mowing either don't have a license to apply and do it anyways or sub out someone like me to do it. And why have a middle-man? Just hire me; it's all I do."

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Play it Safe

by leslie stroope

Even in a business where time is money, mower manufacturers and contractors stress the importance of spending some of that time on boosting field safety.

It was a disabled operator presence control switch that nearly caused an employee to lose a hand several years ago, says David Schafer, president, Landscape Enterprises, Wilsonville, Ore. "It was a wet, rainy day and he got tired of starting the mower every time he went to dump the bag, so he disabled the dead man switch," recalls Schafer. "He reached down in the grass chute to unplug it while the mower was running and managed to catch his fingertips."

Schafer says the injuries were minor, but that incident got the young man's attention and made him a better employee for the experience — he now leads the company's training on safe walk-behind mower operation.

Most landscape contractors say safety is one of the top considerations when they're buying mowers. "Price is also a consideration, but if the equipment won't do the job or the operator can't operate it or operate it safely,

then it's of no use to us," Schafer explains.

Even when built-in mower safety devices are kept intact, things can still go wrong. William Wright, president and chief executive officer, Wright Manufacturing Co., Frederick, Md., was reminded of this fact several years ago when he was mowing and the machine launched a tennis ball-sized rock through the wall of a client's house and onto their living room sofa.

"The mower had a chute deflector, but it was pointing uphill, so when it hit the rock, it flung it straight into the house," he says, nobody was home at the time.

The saying goes that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." In the rush to get the job done it can seem tough to squeeze in time to foster safe operations,

continued on page 100; sidebar on page 98

Safe machine exit strategies are a vital part of a contractor's safety program.

Photos: Wright Manufacturing

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safety tips

When it comes to mowing, safety needs to be a constant companion, from before the blades start spinning to when the mower is parked at the end of the day.

Mowing safety goes beyond merely making sure the safety manuals have been read and the manufacturer-installed safety guards are intact. Debris is dangerous when mowing, and William Wright, president and chief executive officer, Wright Manufacturing, Frederick, Md., suggests that if it's your first time on the property, you should walk around and look for hazards that might not be visible from up on the mower. "If you hit something, it could be thrown pretty far, maybe 50 to 100 feet and you never know what it might hit or break," he says.

Morin's Landscaping has found bagging grass clippings on 95 percent of their properties to be an effective way to cut down on debris, says Marty Goguen, operations manager of the Hollis, N.H.-based operation. "The bagger attachment prevents debris from flying all over the place and causing accidents," he explains.

After identifying and/or eliminating debris hazards, the next step is to make sure you've got the right machine for the job, says Gilbert Peña, brand marketing manager, commercial mowing, John Deere, Moline, Ill. He also warns that a lawn is not a race-track. If you're using a walk-behind mower, you need to make sure your speed is appropriate for the terrain, Peña adds. "You need to operate at a speed at which you're comfortable maintaining control, whether you're walking or riding," he stresses.

Manufacturers and contractors agree that slopes are one of the major danger zones for mowing crews and should be tackled with caution. Roy Dust, product specialist, Ferris Industries, Munnsville, N.Y., says when mowing on slopes, it is best to start from the bottom up and concentrate on being smooth. However, operators need to make sure that while they're concentrating on the job that they need to stay alert to the rest of their surroundings. "I've seen injuries where crewmembers have banged their heads on trees or open casement windows because they were so focused on the ground," Wright says.

It's important not to get burned once the job is done. Wright says crews need to make sure they're not parking a hot mower on a pile of leaves or other debris where it could start a fire. He also stresses the key needs to be removed, because an unattended mower can draw a child like a moth to a flame. "Operators of lawn mowers also ought to keep a constant eye out for potential fuel leaks coming from hoses, carburetors or fuel tanks," he adds. "And never put gasoline into a hot lawn mower."

"Not Enough Information"

Dear sir:

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Gunther Sawgrass

19 Elm Street, by the fire hydrant

On second thought, "Too Much Information"

Hey, Chowderhead. What's with all the Green Guardian articles? Are you nuts, giving away all that information on our covert operatives? Do you know what EverRide could do knowing that Bermuda's favorite color is green? And what's with all the scare tactics on EverRide anyway? If everyone knows about its awesome cutting ability, its bagging system, and the fact that there are two — two! — options of the EverRide, there will be mass hysteria. Think before you go to print next time. But thanks for that great picture of Zoysia on the Hornet.

Simon Ryegrass

293 Lamar Avenue, in the old flowerbed

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Daily Fescue
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mowers/power equipment >

continued from page 96

but it's a small investment compared to lost time, money and, sometimes, life when accidents occur.

BUILDING A SAFER

GRASSTRAP. When Wright got into the manufacturing business, he says the 15 years he spent running a lawn service company gave him a big respect for what mowers and those operating them go through out in the field. "With a blade spinning at a tip speed of about 200 miles per hour, there's a lot going on under that mower, and you're riding on it," he says.

There are three steps engineers go through in trying to design a safer machine, Wright explains. "The first one is to design a risk out of the product or design danger completely out of the product itself," he says. "If that is impossible, then you guard the risk and put on a roll bar, for example. There are shields and guards to cover up the risky thing, like the hood on your car covers the spinning fan. Then if you can't guard it, the third thing you can do is warn against it. And that would be the least powerful way to boost safety on the field, but it is the last one you can use, and it is certainly worth it."

Despite a manufacturer's best intentions, there's no guarantee that the safety features will be kept intact once the mower is out in the field. "There's a continuous battle between suppliers and what they do to make the machine safe and how contractors will support the supplier and insist to their operators that they maintain these safety features," says Gilbert Peña, brand marketing manager, commercial mowing, John Deere, Moline, Ill.

"The biggest challenge is to offer features that will be looked at as an advantage rather than a liability in actual use," points out Roy Dust, product specialist, Ferris Industries, Munnsville, N.Y.

ROPS AND ROLL. In addition to standard safety features, such as warning decals and deflector chutes, some mowers come with a Roll Over Protection System or ROPS. "The two features of the system are the roll bar itself and the second one that's not often noticed by laymen is the seat

continued on page 102

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continued from page 100

belt, and they always should be used together," Wright says. "The seat belt keeps the operator suspended inside the protected area of the roll bar if the lawn mower were to flip over. But without the seat belt, the bar could make the injury worse."

American National Standards Institute (ANSI) regulations require ROPS to be on all mowers weighing more than 1,200 pounds, but as of September 2003, some mower manufacturers began voluntarily putting them on mowers that weigh less, according to Wright. A ROPS structure adds about \$350 to the cost of a mower, according to Dust.

However, there are drawbacks to ROPS. A mower with a low center of gravity is more stable, and the ROPS roll bar raises the center of gravity, Wright says.

"It's not a perfect world where you put your roll bar on and now all of your

troubles are gone," Wright says.

"ROPS can actually create a hazard if the operator is mowing around wires, low branches or anything else that could catch the roll bar and create an unstable situation," Dust adds. For this reason, many operators will take off the structure, which defeats its purpose.

Also, some manufacturers have designed roll bars that can be folded to accommodate mowing around obstacles on which it might otherwise snag. "Foldable ROPS are desirable because it gives them more reason to leave it on as opposed to trying to take it off," Peña says. However, these features are built into machines to provide maximum protection against injuries in a situation

continued on page 104



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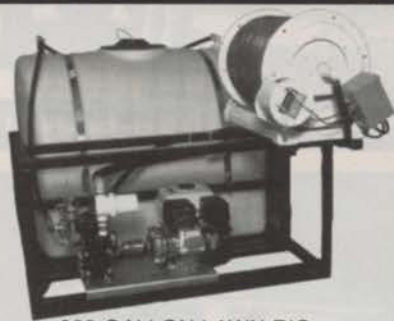
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continued from page 102

where the operator has taken it upon himself to go beyond the capabilities of the machine or his own skill level, Dust says.

Another common mower safety feature is an operator presence control switch. This is a series of controls on ride-on or walk-behind mowers that sense, through pressure on handles or the seat, whether an operator is present. If an operator lets go or gets off of the machine, the blades immediately stop and on some units the engine cuts off, Peña explains, adding that many contractors find such features a nuisance. "A contractor would prefer that everything would stay on so he doesn't have to re-do the functions when he stops to pick up trash," Peña says.

DANGER ZONES. When a crew got too close to the edge of a pond and slid a mower in earlier this year, it was because they were in a hurry, says Stepha-

nie Hale, maintenance manager, The Lawn Maintenance Co., Boise, Idaho. "A lot of them say 'I know I shouldn't have done that,'" she says. "We train them, but they learn a lot from experience, even a bad experience."

Hale says she took pictures of the scene and reminds the crews of it frequently during safety meetings. "I guarantee you the employee and crew that went into the pond have not come close again," she says.

Hale's crew fell victim to what Dust calls the biggest danger zone when mowing — a slope with no run out area. "Slopes are an accident waiting to happen, and the worst case is one that leads to a drop-off, highway or body of water," he says.


The routine nature of mowing can foster a lax attitude toward safety, which is why safety reminders are important, Peña says. He says the most common safety device he sees overridden is the

mower deck chute, which can have serious consequences when mowing in populated places. "It's assumed that there's never going to be anybody in the direction of the thrown object, but you never know who's going to be walking by if you're mowing residential areas," he says. He also says public places, such as restaurant parking lots are dangerous because of the debris dropped from people's cars that the mower might throw.

TAILGATE TRAINING. "A great training program will cut down on accidents, worker's compensation claims and will save the owner from lots of headaches," Hale says.

Schafer says his company conducts training days as well as about 18 tailgate safety meetings per year. He says he thinks the 15- to 20-minute meetings during the busy season are most

continued on page 106



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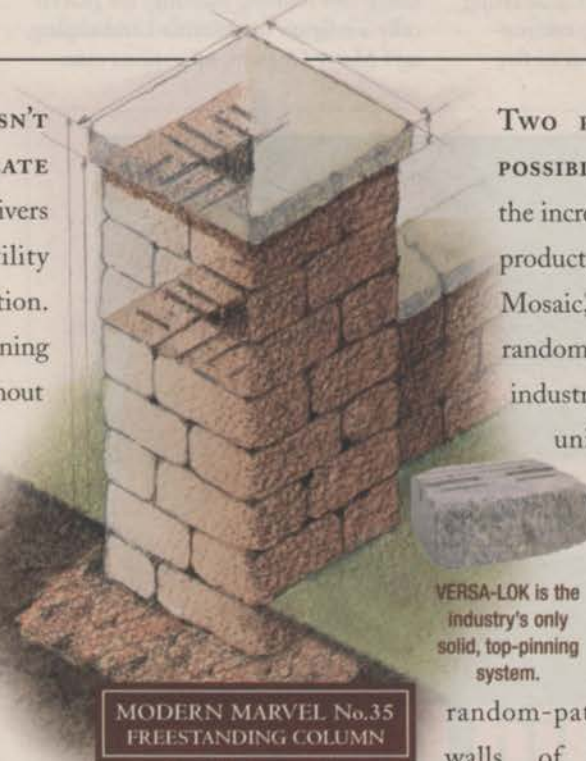
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continued from page 104

effective because the boss is present, it's during the busy season and it's fresh in their minds as they're headed out the door. They also make employees watch bilingual videos from mower manufacturers, industry associations and in-house produced ones illustrating unsafe situations crews have encountered. "Most of those are four or five

minutes long, but from there we can discuss the fact that it's important to get the job done, but it's also important to recognize how can we make our operation safer?" Schafer says.


Wednesday morning 30-minute safety and training meetings are practically a religion for Morin's Landscaping, says Marty Goguen, operations man-

ager, Hollis, N.H. At the end of each meeting, the crews are reminded not to forget their safety glasses and hearing protection. Reminders are posted everywhere, including on truck maintenance logs. If operators are caught without their safety glasses, they are sent home. Every payday, the company's employees also receive inserts in their paychecks educating them on safety issues.

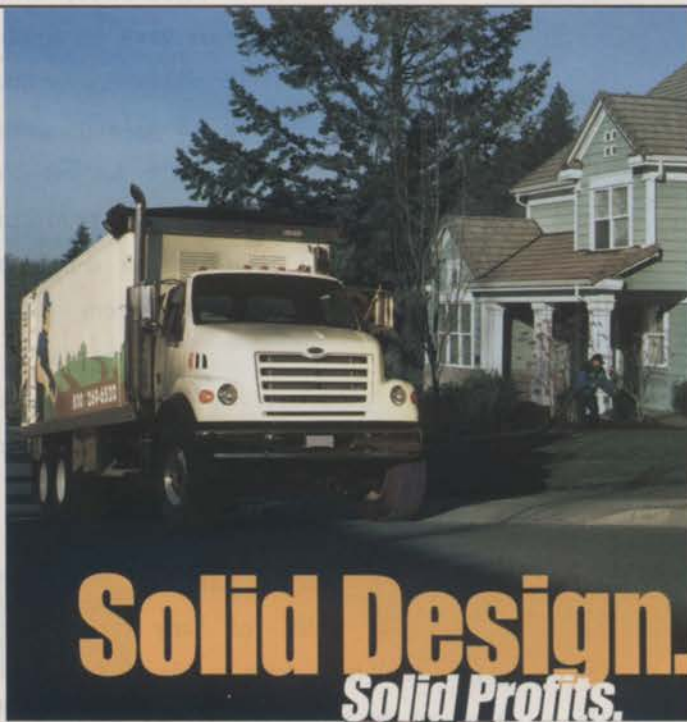
Many companies also stress letting mechanics service equipment instead of crews trying to do tailgate surgery as a way to boost safety. Schafer says he encourages crews to notify him immediately of a problem mower and recognizes them at the safety meetings for this. "We recognize them for anything they do that helps the safety and efficiency of the crew," he says.

Other contractors choose equipment that they feel is safer to operate for the type of work they perform daily. Goguen says his company uses strictly walk-behind mowers, both for their versatility and to streamline training. He says when a new crewmember comes on board, they start him out on small power equipment and gradually work him up to the larger walk-behinds.

Contractors agree that when they see unsafe mower operation, it needs to be brought to the employee's attention immediately. "We ask them why they are doing this when they know it's not safe," says Hale. Contractors say their disciplinary measures range from verbal to written warnings, which then go into the record and can affect raises and eligibility for safety awards, says Schafer. "If we have an operator who isn't operating equipment safely after about three warnings, he's invited not to return to work," he says.

Landscape Enterprises, has an incentive program where if the companies go one year without a lost time or expensive accident, they receive 2 percent of their payroll back. "We give all of that to employees through credit cards that they can take to the video store or buy groceries with," Schafer says. The average amount on each gift card is \$25 and every employee without a lost time accident receives one. There are also drawings to give out additional gift cards during the year, Schafer says. Other company safety incentives include t-shirt giveaways and special recognition at safety meetings. 

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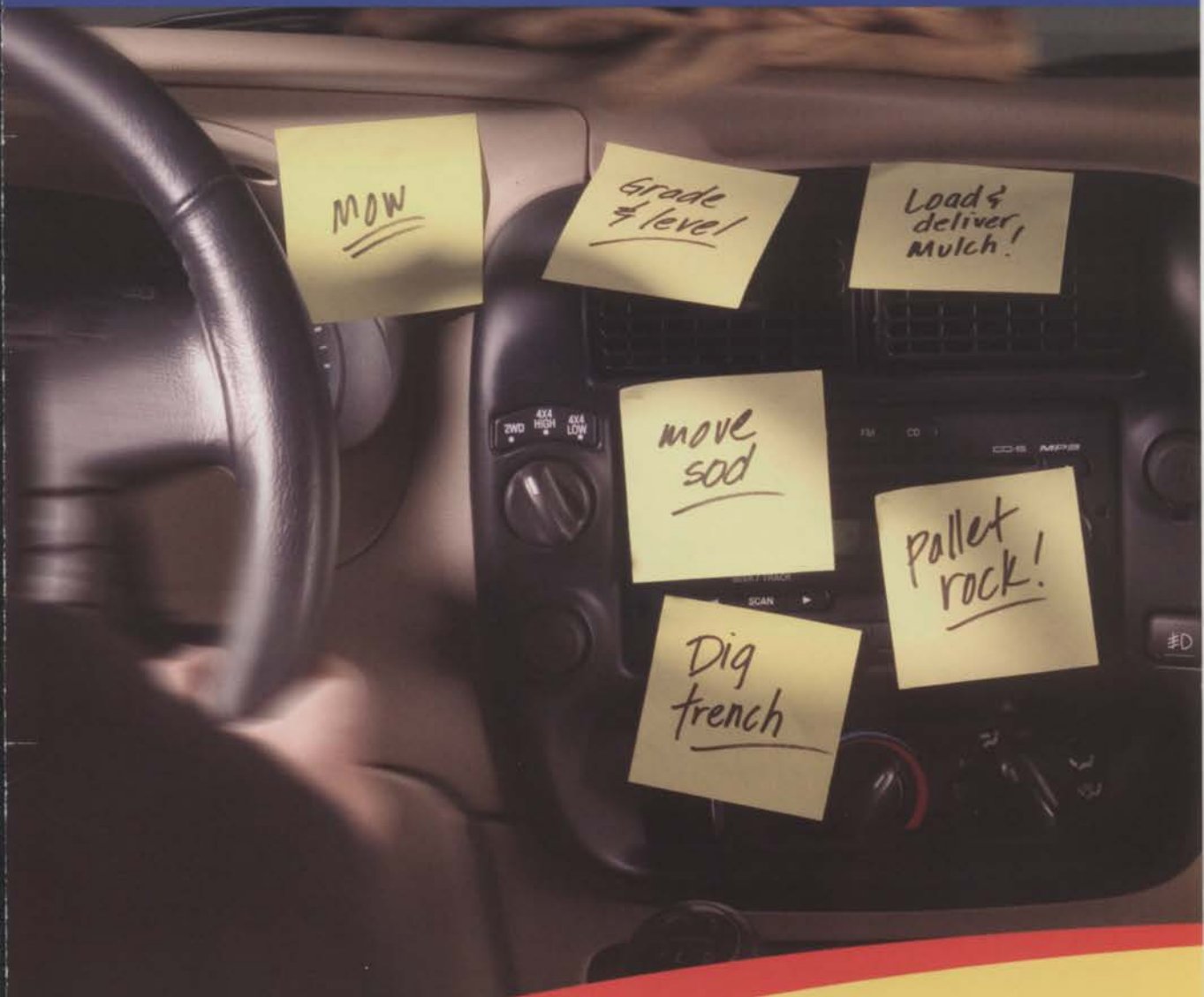


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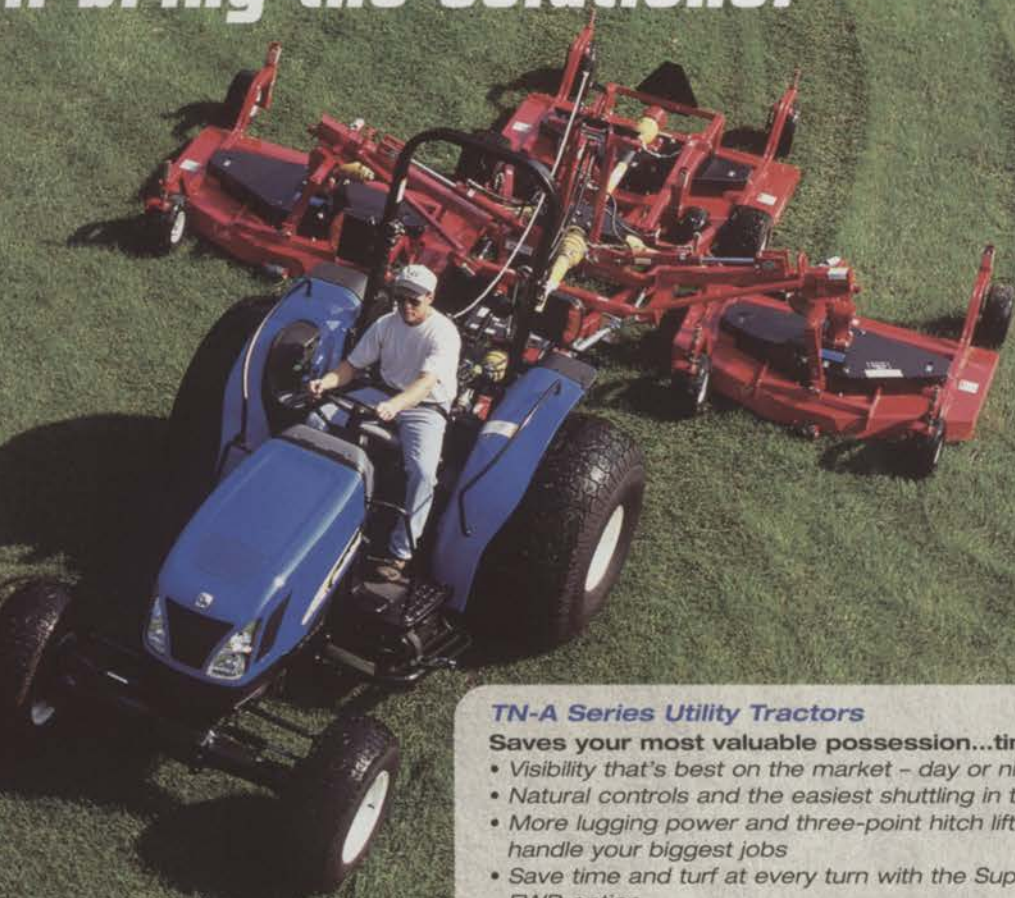
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Nip it Before the Bud

by jonathan katz

Effective
preemergent
herbicide
programs can
raise customer
satisfaction
and reduce
labor costs
later in the
season by
targeting
weeds early.

Weeds don't always have to be seen before they're eliminated. A comprehensive preemergent herbicide program can destroy crabgrass and some broadleaf weeds before they meet the customer's eye. Lawn care operators (LCOs) usually develop these programs based on regional climate, experience and customer demand.

And by being attuned to weather patterns, product developments and application procedures, many LCOs are discovering high success rates with their programs, resulting in less use of postemergent controls later in the year and happier customers. "To me, going with a postemergent service means you have to spray something when it's 100 degrees outside, so you can't spray a lot," says Todd Graus, president, Green Turf Lawns, Worland, Wyo. The opportunity to make money on a postemergent service isn't there, and any company worth their weight isn't going to allow their company to have these problems in the first place."

PERFECT TIMING. Green Turf Lawns usually applies its preemergent herbicides in the spring but exactly when can vary depending on soil temperatures. When controlling crabgrass, Graus tries to hit the seeds before the soil temperature reaches 50 degrees, which in Wyoming is usually mid-March or April, to prevent the seeds from germinating, Graus says. Crabgrass typically germinates in a 60- to 65-degree soil range, according to Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist for BASF's Turf and Ornamental Products Group, Research Triangle Park, N.C. LCOs can check soil temperatures through weather, agriculture and university extension Web sites. They can also find soil temperatures by checking with product distributors or by using a soil temperature probe, Miller says.

But knowing the proper soil temperature isn't the only timing factor LCOs must take into consideration. LCOs have the option of applying pre-

emergent herbicides at different times of the year. Green Turf Lawnscares provides customers with two application options. The first is a one-time application spread at a normal rate and the other is a split application at a higher rate. The split-rate application allows Green Turf to spread two applications six weeks apart for longer control. Weed Man, Lee's Summit, Mo., also

provides split-rate programs, with the first occurring in February or March and the second one six to seven weeks later, according to company President Jon Cundiff.

Green Turf Lawnscares conducts fall applications only as a last resort because they can be more difficult to market. "It's kind of a hard sell to get somebody to buy something in the

fall that's not going to be utilized in the spring, so I think some people just don't want to invest the money until the next year," Graus says. "There have been occasions where we have had a particular lawn that was just infested when we took it over, so we went ahead and put a late fall application of pre-emergent down and then did it again in the spring, and that was to make sure we didn't miss any windows on the soil temperatures."

Different parts of a property can vary in soil temperature, so a fall application can sometimes be beneficial for areas where in the spring the temperature was too high for preemergents to be effective. But, in general, fall applications are made less frequently, according to Miller. "I think lawn care operators are a little hesitant to do that because they want to do it more in real time and charge the customer for what they're doing at that time and not from what they're going to benefit from next year," Miller says. "The other thing you have to consider is that in cool-season parts of the country they're trying to sell overseeding services in the fall, so obviously you don't want to use pre-emergent on a juvenile lawn, and that's a fairly common treatment through the middle part of the country."

But in warmer climates fall applications are more common. "In the south, we're putting preemergents down in the spring and the fall because it stays warmer, and all the winter seeds come up here," says Gary LaScalea, owner, GroGreen, Plano, Texas. GroGreen applies preemergents to its residential accounts eight times per year. For its commercial accounts, GroGreen conducts one application in the spring and another in the fall. Commercial accounts typically get fewer treatments because they have lower budgets, LaScalea says.

Birmingham, Ala.-based Classic Gardens applies preemergent herbicides throughout the growing season because outbreaks can continue year-round in warmer climates, says Classic Gardens Owner Mike Pender. Classic Gardens begins the first of its six preemergent applications in January and follows up with another application every other month for the year, Pender says. "There are times when people say that when

continued on page 118; sidebar on page 116

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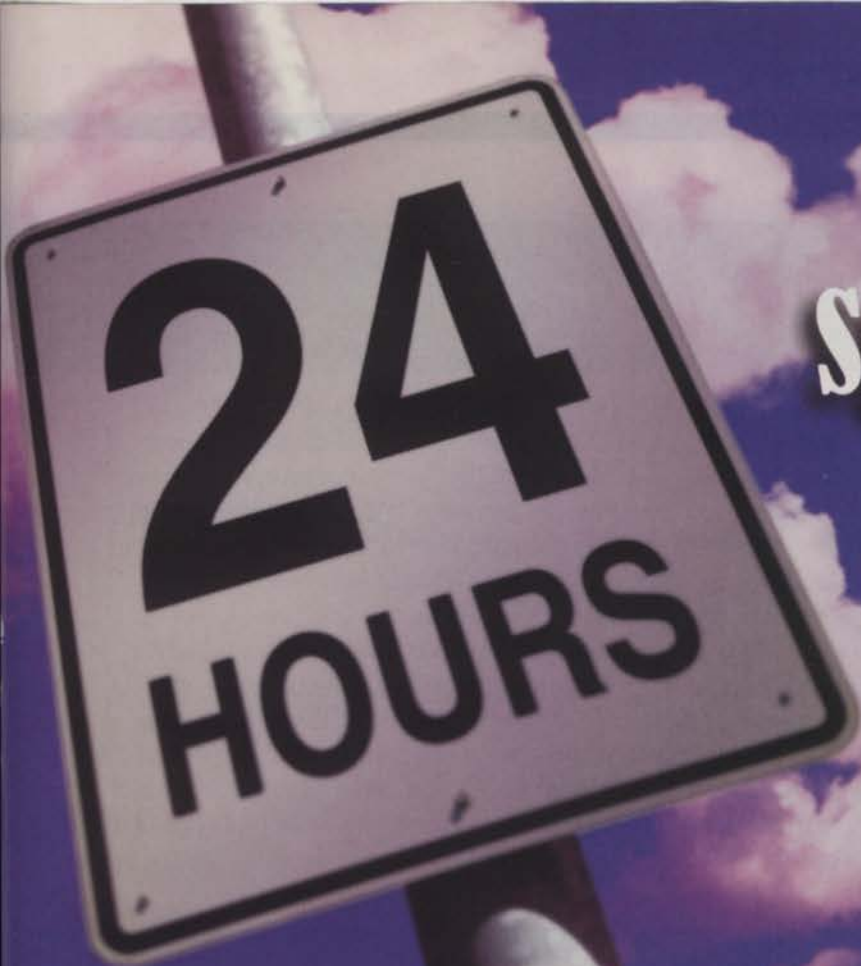
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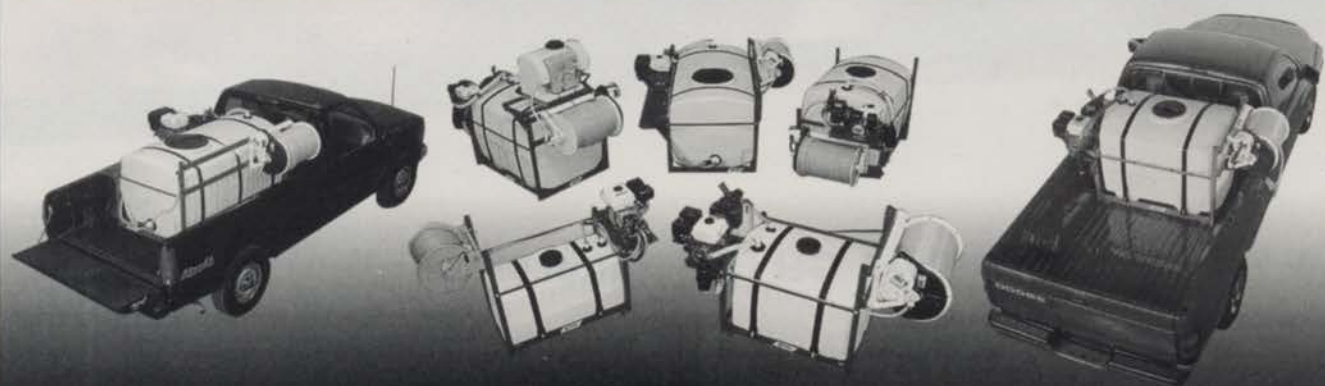
USE READER SERVICE # 74

picking preemergents

Manufacturer patents are beginning to expire on preemergent herbicides, meaning lawn care operators (LCOs) can expect more product options in the near future. With such a variety available, LCOs will have more factors to consider when purchasing preemergents. Generic products are expected to lower product price but may also result in less customer-service support, says Ben Cicora, business manager, herbicides, Bayer Environmental Science, Montvale, N.J. "If there is a breakthrough come July or August, it's going to be hard to contact somebody whereas if you're going with the original-branded manufacturer you're more apt to get some service and support — with your business and the products you use," Cicora says.

Jon Cundiff, president of Lee's Summit, Mo.-based Weed Man, agrees that LCOs need to look at quality in addition to price when considering preemergent products. "We want a product that does the best job, and that's when you have to tap into suppliers and go to universities and do your homework," Cundiff says.

Cundiff suggests LCOs consider application timing, days of control, leeching potential, efficacy rates and necessary irrigation levels when shopping for preemergent products. "Do you need 150 days of control?" Cundiff says. "If so, what product gives you the best opportunity to do that? And, if it does, what's the cost? Then you can weigh that out with the bottom line."



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Todd Graus, president of Worland, Wyo.-based Green Turf Lawns, says when judging product quality he considers several factors before making a switch. "I think one of the biggest challenges is being tempted to move to different preemergents because the marketing looks nice," he says. "I have essentially used the same preemergent for 20 years, and some years I see better results than others."

Variations in efficacy from one year to the next often result from environmental changes rather than product failures, Graus says. "It could have been the applicator or how people watered — there's a lot of things that come into play."

Green Turf Lawns has been achieving 98 percent control with one of the lowest-priced

preemergent products on the market, according to Graus. "It's not worth paying extra money for the extra 2 percent," Graus says. "If I have 2 percent breakthrough, that means I have 20 lawns that I have a problem with, and they're probably lawns we knew we were going to have problems with in the first place, so the client was informed. Otherwise, we can go in there and do a postemergent control of those 20 lawns, and the client won't even know we were there."

Even if preemergent prices lower or remain constant, LCOs who combine their preemergents with fertilizer could still be forced to raise prices because of rising fertilizer costs, according to Gary LaScalea, owner, GroGreen, Plano, Texas. "Some of our fertilizer costs have doubled in the last few years," he says.

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USE READER SERVICE # 78

pesticides/fertilizers > > >

the soil temperature reaches 65 degrees, crabgrass germinates," Pender says. "Well sure it does, but it continues to germinate all summer long. We don't like people getting weeds in their yard and having to come back to spray a postemergent. Customers find crabgrass very unacceptable, they find *poa annua* very unacceptable, they find any weed very unacceptable."

PRICING PROCEDURES. Experience plays a large role in determining the ideal time to use a preemergent herbicide. Pricing formulations often work the same way. Green Turf Lawnscares doesn't have an exact science for setting its rates. Instead, the company looks at trends and after each season considers any changes that need to be made in its pricing structure, Graus says.

Graus figures his charge per 1,000 square feet by using a basic formula that includes product and labor costs plus a markup. Graus estimates the industry pricing range for pre-

continued on page 120

> all mixed up

Lawn care operators (LCOs) often combine preemergent herbicides with fertilizer to avoid making two separate applications. Some companies purchase these products premixed, but Worland, Wyo.-based Green Turf Lawnscares has realized savings by developing its own preemergent/fertilizer formula, says company President Todd Graus.

When Graus began experimenting with the combination, he realized that by using a fertilizer with a lower nitrogen content, he could mix more of the dry product with the liquid to avoid over-saturation.

For instance, if a LCO wants to spread 1 ton of fertilizer that contains 1 pound of nitrogen over 10 acres, the application rate for the preemergent may be so high that it saturates the dry product. In such a case, the LCO would need to use a fertilizer with a lower nitrogen rate, according to Graus. "Let's say you use urea, which is 46 percent nitrogen vs. ammonium sulfate, which is 21 percent," he says. "It takes twice as much ammonium sulfate to give you the same nitrogen as urea, so you have twice as much fertilizer to absorb the 10 gallons of preemergent."

Other times, a drying agent, such as cat litter or talcum powder, can be pored on top of the wet fertilizer to dry the product. The fertilizer that Graus purchases costs \$40 for a 2,000-pound bulk bag, and he says he's saved 30 to 40 percent in costs by combining the two products. "If you buy a bag of fertilizer or preemergent, each costs you \$40," he says. "But if you buy the two combined, it costs you only \$40."




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Customers typically aren't very receptive to things they don't understand. If clients don't know what a preemergent herbicide is, they're probably less likely to ask for the service. That's why part of marketing any lawn care service is communicating to clients the details of the professional products used in each application and how they'll benefit from them.

Mike Pender, owner of Birmingham, Ala.-based Classic Gardens, employs a variety of marketing tactics to educate potential customers about his services. One of the more effective methods has been a two-hour radio program that airs every Saturday morning at 7 a.m. on Birmingham's 960 AM WERC. The company used to pay approximately \$400 per hour to air the show but no longer has to pay because of its continued success, according to Pender. "The radio show is helpful," Pender says. "When I'm talking on the radio I don't want to sound like a Harvard law professor. I try to

sound very down to earth. I don't want answer questions too technical because that doesn't do anybody any good."

Pender estimates that half of Classic Gardens' business comes from the radio show and radio advertising. The company advertises on its own radio show and other radio stations, Pender says. The company tracks the success of each marketing method by asking customers how they heard about Classic Gardens and then entering that information into a database.

The company also invests in direct marketing, newspaper ads and the *Yellow Pages*. The *Yellow Pages* ads produce the smallest number of sales, according to Pender. "I think most people who look in the *Yellow Pages* are price shoppers," Pender says. "I like people who know our name without having to look in the *Yellow Pages*."

continued from page 118

emergent applications at \$8 to \$14 per 1,000 square feet depending on lawn size. Green Turf tries to keep labor costs down to between 17 and 21 percent for the year, according to Graus. "We're always trying to cut back on labor to get more efficient, so there's more profit spread out across everybody," he says.

In the winter, Graus meets with his managers, and they determine whether any changes need to be made in the company's programs. For instance, the company may not need to treat a certain weed that it addressed the previous year because there wasn't an outbreak, he says. When deciding a markup amount, each factor, such as product or labor costs, is marked up differently.

Markup can also vary depending on lawn size. Smaller lawns can actually cost more to manage than larger lawns, according to Graus. Ten 5,000-square-foot properties could be less profitable than one 100,000-square-foot property because the technician can complete the larger property in less than a day compared with the smaller jobs that require more driving time and fuel costs.

In such a case, the LCO may consider slightly raising prices for the smaller properties, Graus says.

Most LCOs don't price preemergent applications separately from other services. The applications are usually part of a more comprehensive program that may include fertilization, insect control and postemergent applications. Typically each total bill will remain the same even if a preemergent wasn't applied that particular month as part of an annual contract, Graus says.

Classic Gardens charges \$43 per month for 5,000 square feet, plus \$2 for each additional 500 square feet for its treatments, according to Pender. The company applies 12 annual treatments, six of which include preemergent herbicides. Even though each treatment can vary in cost, Pender averages them out and comes up with a fixed monthly rate. "Like other lawn care companies, we charge the same rate every time we come out — we don't fluctuate the price, despite whether or not preemergents cost more," Pender says. "The customers wouldn't want that — that would just

be too confusing for them."

Lawn care companies, especially startups, are lucky to break even at the beginning of the year because the monthly charge may not cover all the costs of applying multiple treatments that could include a combination of fertilizers, preemergents, postemergents and insect and disease controls, Graus says. But as the season winds down, LCOs should realize some profits because most of the weed, insect and disease problems should be gone. As a result, they're applying less treatments while receiving the same monthly rate.

If customers cancel their contracts early, LCOs can require that the client pay a prorated amount. For instance, a customer may have received \$200 worth of lawn care services, but the contract requires a \$120 monthly payment. In this instance, Graus says he would bill the client for an additional \$80. "We put a lot of effort and expense up front for that client to stay with us through the year," he says, "but there are ways to recover any losses in a written contract." ■

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The Pipeline Partnership

by jonathan katz

Irrigation contractors can get the most out of dealers by forming solid relationships and knowing their inventory requirements.

In today's business world, manufacturers and distributors are continually forging relationships with suppliers that help streamline their supply chains, resulting in faster service and lower prices.

But these partnerships aren't limited to just high-volume industries. Irrigation contractors can also realize the benefits of partnering with their equipment dealers. Irrigation dealers can significantly impact a contractor's profits – for better or worse, according to industry professionals. "You've got to buy right from your suppliers because if you look at it industrywide, the material cost of most businesses is about 33 percent of your company dollar – so if you think about it, your supplier is about one-third owner of your business," says Gus Collier, president, Collier Cos., Powhatan, Va.

Forming these relationships requires work on both sides. Dealers must supply the right inventory types and quantities along with technical support and timely service so contractors can remain produc-

tive. At the same time, contractors are responsible for communicating to dealers what their needs are and should provide reasonable lead times for service requests.

Dealers and contractors agree there are steps they both can take to foster effective relationships. "Sometimes the vendor/contractor relationship is viewed as us vs. them," says David Scattergood, operations manager for the landscape division of Signature Landscape Services, Redmond, Wash. "When we can act as a team with the goal of servicing the end customer, it becomes much more workable. The way we achieve that is to grant importance to anyone who we're working with at the supplier level, even the person working at the desk. Then that person is going to want to give you much better service in the future."

THE ONE AND ONLY. Everyone wants to feel like they're No. 1 – especially when there's money involved. Irrigation dealers are no exception. Many contractors say they get the best value for their service

continued on page 124



BIG NEWS

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continued from page 122

when sticking with one primary dealer.

Dwight Elliott, president of Birmingham, Ala.-based Elliott Irrigation, knows firsthand the benefits of having a main dealer. Elliott estimates that he saved \$28,000 in 2004 after switching to a new dealer because the dealer offered Elliott discounts for maintaining a high volume of business, which Elliott says is about \$300,000 a year. "When I go there, these people jump through hoops for me, and I get better pricing," he says. "If they know I'm going to do \$300,000 worth of business, it helps the bottom line. They'll give me something they won't give somebody else because they know the volume of business we're going to do."

Collier uses two dealers but does 90 percent of his business with one, and the difference is noticeable, he says. When Collier was searching for fertigation, he bought 100 from his secondary supplier because he thought they had a better product than his primary

dealer, he says. Collier then asked this dealer for a price on a bulk shipment and didn't hear back until several weeks later. The delay put Collier two weeks behind on mass mailings he was sending to customers promoting his new fertigation service. "These things cost me \$19,000 to buy, and I'm telling this other guy we need support, and it's just not happening," Collier says. "So I feel like they should have jumped all over that, and they didn't."

Irrigation contractors should consider the long-term benefits of having a primary dealer, says Johnny Sims, president, Sims Irrigation, Tampa, Fla. A dealer might be slightly more expensive on some one-time purchases but may offer better prices if he knows a contractor will buy in high volumes. Sims says he spends approximately \$500,000 to \$750,000 annually at his dealer. "When I first started in the business, we struggled — not only because we were small, but because I didn't have

the ability to buy in high volumes until I got a little bigger," Sims says. "But the reason I got a little bigger is because I started using one dealer. That relationship with that partner gives me the best prices over a longer period of time."

Some dealers will offer loyal contractors "program pricing," which is when dealers set prices for certain items for an entire year, says Tom Childers, director of marketing, John Deere Landscapes, Alpharetta, Ga. This can help irrigation contractors, particularly on volatile products such as pipe and wire. Buying from just one dealer also consolidates paperwork for contractors because they'll be receiving only one billing statement and writing one check every month, which can help save contractors administrative time.

Jeff Partridge, president of Carrollton, Texas-based Wickham Supply/Water Zone agrees that buying from one dealer can benefit contractors. "I think

continued on page 126

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continued from page 124

there's an advantage to having a primary distributor," he says. "And the reason that becomes important is because both come to know one another's needs, and a store manager is an extension of that contractor's crew. It ensures that we will have the products they need on hand."

But there are some advantages to utilizing multiple dealers. Scattergood buys from several dealers based on their proximity to job sites, he says. Signature Landscape Services' crews stop at dealers who are closest to where they're working. The company also purchases from these dealers because they treat its employees the same as higher-volume customers, Scattergood says. "When I walk in the door, my suppliers call me by name, they know who I am and they treat me well," he explains. "I may be picking up three pop-up heads and a dozen nozzles — and it may not be worth writing up the invoice for — but I'm treated the same as the guy who's buying 1,000 heads."

Smaller companies like Scattergood's can still realize the benefits of a primary-dealer relationship even though they're purchasing much less than larger contractors by signing a program-pricing agreement with their dealers, Childers says. But when contractors like Scattergood do use multiple dealers, they may lose some perks associated with one-on-one relationships. "Obviously having multiple dealers affects them from the standpoint that they're not always going to get the best program opportunities," Childers says. "They're not going to get the best program rewards, so they are hurting themselves. And from a purely business standpoint as a distributor with a formal program, it hurts."

JUST IN TIME. Irrigation contractors are always looking for ways to reduce downtime. Procuring the right supplies in a timely fashion sustains productivity and boosts profits. But contractors and

dealers know without clear communication contractors won't get the right parts when they need them.

Contractors should first outline for their dealers their expectations and needs. When Elliott starts working with dealers, he invites them to his facility and shows them his trucks and how they're outfitted so the dealers can offer suggestions on how Elliott can better stock inventory, he says. "I want them to have a finger on our pulse because when I talk to them about things or ask them a question or their advice on something, I expect them to be knowledgeable about their end, but also I don't want to be just another voice on the other end of the line," he says.

By familiarizing dealers with his company, Elliott says not only are they more knowledgeable about his inventory requirements, but the dealers also refer potential irrigation clients to him. "If they know I don't do commer-

continued on page 135; sidebar on page 128

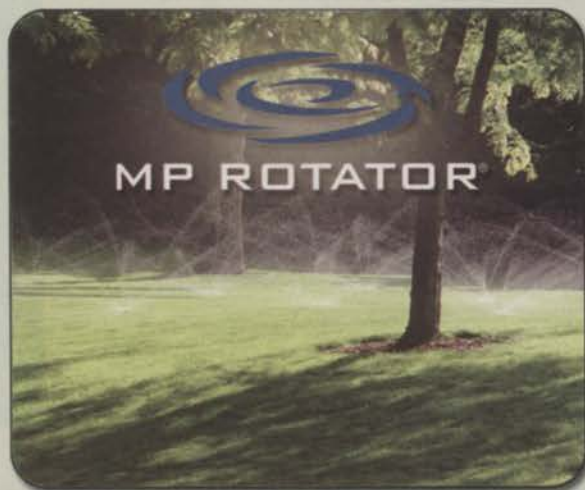


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When irrigation contractors need parts or supplies, typically the dealer will retrieve the items from a warehouse that isn't accessible to the contractor. "Most dealers don't want contractors' hands on most products," says Dwight Elliott, president, Elliott Irrigation, Birmingham, Ala. "They like to bring it out to the contractor."

But Elliott says one of his dealers has taken an innovative approach to marketing its products. This particular dealer stocks its parts on open shelves inside the store, which provides contractors with opportunities to replenish their inventory while they wait. "They've got aisles of stuff that you can check out while you're waiting on your order," Elliott says. "I don't know any other dealer that does it. They've tried to make it

a hands-on operation."

Contractors should also be mindful of add-on products their dealers may offer, says Gus Collier, president, Collier Cos., Powhatan, Va. More irrigation dealers are now selling landscape lighting and water features, such as ponds and waterfalls, which irrigation professionals can use to expand their businesses. Some dealers will even offer training sessions for contractors who are branching out into these areas.

"Landscape lighting is an up-and-coming thing, and suppliers will bring in the manufacturers and representatives and hold classes," Collier says. "Sometimes they charge a nominal fee, but they want to make sure you have a good working knowledge of the products they have."

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Since the early 1990's, PRO Landscape software has been a crucial tool for landscape contractors, designers, and architects across the country and around the globe, helping them save time and make more money.

As we release our 11th version, there are a number of new features and functions in PRO Landscape that have us all very excited. New features such as seasonal changing, time lapse views, automatic edging tools, symbol shadowing and new bid presentation options are just a few of the features and functions added to the newest version of PRO Landscape design software. These new features affirm our commitment to our existing customer base as well as to new customers by constantly improving the product and providing the innovative functionality that our customers require.

It has always been our mission to provide the best landscape design package possible, and to integrate that with the finest technical support and training tools in the industry. We will continue to provide our customers with the landscape design tools they need to take their businesses to the next level. Your success is our number one goal!

Sincerely,

Peter H. Lord
President, Drafix Software



Seeing is Believing

Would you buy a car without taking a test drive? Go on vacation without perusing a few travel brochures? Probably not. But how many of your landscape design/build clients invest in your services without getting a full picture of how their finished landscapes will look?

"We used to hand-draw designs with circles representing different plants," says Chris Walter, owner, Computerized Landscape Design, Kansas City, Mo. "If I told the customer 'These circles represent burning bushes,' I'd still have to go through a horticulture book or visit a nursery with the client to show them exactly what a burning bush is. Even then, the customer still might not have a solid concept of how their landscape would look. The PRO Landscape software takes away all of that guesswork."

Walter has been using PRO Landscape from Drafix Software, Kansas City, Mo., since it debuted in 1992. Though he used other design software before that, Walter says PRO Landscape sent his business through the roof. "That year, I doubled my sales," he says. "We added \$100,000 worth of business in

one year and it's all in the pictures — people love to see what they're buying."

Drafix Software President Pete Lord agrees. "There is an old cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words," he says. "When you can show someone what their landscape design will look like, the new cliché is, 'A picture is worth a thousand dollars,' — at least!"

Mike McQuay, landscape manager, Stark Brothers Nursery & Orchards, Louisiana, Mo., says his company used to close 50 percent of its jobs before using PRO Landscape. "Once we learned about this software, started using it our business and implemented our own photos in addition to what Drafix already offers, we started making more sales," he says. "The last two years, we closed 95 percent of our jobs and I credit that to customers being able to visualize the project."



With tools refined over the last 10 editions, PRO Landscape's 11th and newest version is easier to use than ever before. Simply upload a digital image of a client's house or building and use fully customizable image libraries to place realistic images of trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials in the virtual landscape. Image libraries and software features also allow designers to incorporate everything from groundcovers to hardscaping to night and holiday lighting. In a fraction of the time it takes to hand-draw a design, PRO Landscape users can design and sell landscapes before clients' very eyes.

"I'm much more productive with this software," says Brett Seltz, chief landscape designer, Grasshopper Landscape, Franklin, Tenn. "Typically, it would take me twice as long to hand-draw one of these CAD designs if I weren't using PRO Landscape. With a hand drawing, if you decide to change part of the design, you either have to erase and redraw or completely start over. This software eliminates all that and it frees up my time to do more designs."

Seltz also says PRO Landscape's CAD and design imaging tools are easy to personalize. "I love the flexibility the program offers," he says. "I've customized the symbol libraries and also imported a number of plant images for the design imaging side. When we print a proposal or show the client our finished CAD design, those plant images become a really good visual feature and a great selling point for our customers."



New Features

Beyond the ability to import design symbols and plant images, the 11th version of PRO Landscape offers new features that will make designers' jobs even more impressive. Here are a few exciting additions to the program:

- Dashboard: A single launch point for PRO Landscape makes it even easier to use
- Slope Tool: Automatically curve the bottom of a wall to fit on a slope
- Time Lapse Views: View time-lapse growth of entire project or layer by layer
- Picture Callouts: Add real plant photos to your CAD drawings
- Symbol Shadowing: Enhance the look of your CAD symbols with shadowing
- Automatic Edging: Automatically draw any color edging around a landscape bed

Top-Notch Tech Support

Computers...they're only human. Or, at least they're subject to human error. Whether an operator clicks too fast and makes the wrong selection or has trouble importing an image, the tech support team at Kansas City, Mo.-based Drafix Software has answers for all of its PRO Landscape customers' technical questions.

"Just like any software, it takes some time to learn how the bells and whistles of PRO Landscape's design imaging and computer-aided design (CAD) tools work and how you can get the most out of them," says Brett Seltz, chief landscape designer, Grasshopper Landscape, Franklin, Tenn. "I've been using the software for 10 years and I'm very comfortable with it now, but there are still times when I have questions. One of the things Drafix has going for it is that the company has unbelievable technical support."

Drafix President Pete Lord notes that PRO Landscape includes video tutorials, and a comprehensive user manual to help customers learn the software. "If for some reason those tools don't get them where they need to be, we offer free lifetime technical support," he adds. "That's rare since many software companies have gone

to charging \$25 to \$100 just to talk to a real person."

Seltz says he's given the Drafix tech support team a call when working on collaborative projects with builders and architects. "I'll sometimes work with building contractors who are required to submit a full set of plans for a proposed property to a neighbor-

hood architectural review committee," Seltz explains. "There have been instances where I've been asked to have landscape designs for these projects turned around in one day. If I get to a sticking point, I can email the plan I'm working on to the tech support team at Drafix and they'll either physically call me on the phone and walk me through the mistake I'm making or they'll instant

message me and we'll clear it up over the Internet."

Even with a tight timeframe, Seltz says the Drafix tech support team has never let him down. "I've never had a experience where they weren't able to get back to me on time or were unable to fix the problem," he says. "It's really unbelievable."

Mike McQuay agrees. "The whole Drafix staff has bent over backwards to make sure we're happy and make things easy for us," says the landscape manager for Stark Brothers Nursery & Orchards, Louisiana, Mo. "They have a great deal of product knowledge and make every effort to help us get to know our software better. Plus, they use customers' problems and suggestions to incorporate updates and better tools in subsequent editions of the software."

Lord says features in PRO Landscape's 11th edition, such as seasonal

changes and shadows on CAD symbols, have come from user suggestions. "We pride ourselves on having innovative features in every new version of PRO Landscape," he says. "The majority of those new feature ideas come directly from our customers or the questions they ask that spawn an idea on how we can make the software even more useful to them."



Using PRO Landscape, a designer can spend just one hour on a typical job site and end up with a signed contract, while the traditional approach might require multiple meetings and a few hours at the drawing table.

hood architectural review committee," Seltz explains. "There have been instances where I've been asked to have landscape designs for these projects turned around in one day. If I get to a sticking point, I can email the plan I'm working on to the tech support team at Drafix and they'll either physically call me on the phone and walk me through the mistake I'm making or they'll instant

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Drafix Software is happy to provide new customers with a free demo CD of PRO Landscape software. Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/prolandscape or call 800/231-8574 today for a demo CD and remember that Drafix offers a 60-day money back guarantee for risk-free purchasing!

Design Mobility

Landscape designers who have invested in PRO Landscape regularly share stories about their increased productivity and impressive number of closed sales as a result of using the versatile software. But imagine the success a company could see by combining PRO Landscape's ease of use and seeing-is-believing characteristics. Landscape designer Chris Walter has done just that.

DESIGN ON-THE-FLY. "The design imaging, the computer-aided design feature, the landscape lighting – all of the PRO Landscape features help me close deals and design more landscapes," says Walter, the owner of Computerized Landscape Design, Kansas City, Mo. "But I've taken that one step further." Walter explains that before PRO Landscape, his sales process included several steps:

1. Take a call from a potential client and set up a time to meet.
2. Visit the property.
3. Go back to the office and hand draw a design – a multiple-hour process.
4. Set up another appointment to discuss the design.
5. Meet with the client again to – hopefully – sell the design.

Needless to say, it's a lengthy process. And, Walter adds that many of his Midwestern clients don't install their landscapes all at once, which calls for him to go through those steps again and again for multi-phase projects.

Now, Walter says he's eliminated many of the scheduling hassles and the time-consuming design process simply by loading his PRO Landscape software onto a laptop computer. "In the preliminary phone call, I let the

By loading PRO Landscape software onto laptop computers, landscape designers can make their work mobile, allowing them to flesh out potential designs while standing with the client on a job site. Plus, additional services, such as night or holiday lighting, can be added to the plan and sold in minutes.

client know that I want them to be truly involved in the design process and I find out where they want to put their main emphasis for the project – probably the front of house with some trees, shrubs and annuals or perennials," he explains. "I set up an appointment to meet with the client and I make sure to arrive a little early. Then I just snap two or three digital pictures of the front of the house and load them onto my laptop. When the appointment time rolls around, the clients and I sit on their front porch and design their landscape together right on the spot."

With the software's features, Walter says he can easily work with the client to change the types of plants used in the design, their placement, etc. When clients see their landscapes – and their ideas – come to life right on the screen, "I don't even have to sell the job," Walter says. "They sell it to themselves."


EASY ACCESS. So, by designing landscapes with clients on the spot, Walter has taken his productivity and percent of closed sales to even higher levels, noting that he doubled his sales

the year he began using PRO Landscape software. He credits this success partly to the seeing-is-believing aspect, but also notes the impression of professionalism this process provides. "When someone's going to invest thousands of dollars in anything, they're going to do a little research," he explains. "If I'm one of three contractors a customer calls and the other two say, 'We'll be out in a week to see your property,' That could be fine – until I show up within a few days and design their landscape on the spot. Who would you go with?"

But Walter's success with mobile design doesn't end there. He notes that if a client is late for a design appointment, he can use that time to develop preliminary designs or work on other design projects without ever having to be at his desk or a drafting table. And his ability to multitask on the road goes even further. "I've had instances where a client has called my cell phone while I was driving down the road and said, 'You did some landscaping for me last spring and I have a question,' or 'I'd like you to create a design for another part of my property,'" he says. "A designer



Shine a Light on Upselling



who did a hand drawing would have to go all the way back to the office, look up the design and delay getting back to the client, whereas I can pull over to the side of the road for a minute, bring up their file on my laptop and answer their questions as soon as they call."

When landscape clients know that their designers and crew are easily accessible, Walter says their level of customer satisfaction rises.

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING. Compared to the number of landscape designs Walters says he used to be able to hand draw over the course of a year, he now completes hundreds annually using the PRO Landscape software. And some of his designs aren't even requested.

"In late fall or early spring when business is usually slower, I use the PRO Landscape software on my laptop to generate new business," Walter says. "For instance, I'll go to a new subdivision and shoot some digital pictures of different houses on the block. I keep a printer in my van, so I'll create a quick landscape design for these houses, print them out and leave the design and our company's contact information on their doors."

Using this technique, Walter says he usually gets three or four calls for new work, which helps him get a head start for the season. "Not only has the PRO Landscape software helped me build my business by becoming more productive, but it's a great tool to get your foot in the door," he says. "I'm an excitable guy and if I can use my skills and these tools to get my potential clients, it's great — people just love to see what they're buying."

For contractors using PRO Landscape, brightening up a sale is as easy as turning off the lights.

In addition to creating upselling opportunities with features like the ability to add hardscaping, many users report earning thousands of dollars more on individual landscape design sales with the addition of a landscape lighting package.

"A lot of lighting sales have historically been made with generators and test lights at night after a full day in the field," says Pete Lord, president, Drafix Software, Kansas City, Mo. "The PRO Landscape software lets you create the lighting design simultaneously as you prepare the landscape design."

Brett Seltz, chief landscape designer, Grasshopper Landscape, Franklin, Tenn., says he creates night lighting packages for the majority of landscapes he designs. "Because our designs are very custom, we use the computer-aided design (CAD) program more often than the design imaging," Seltz says. "But lighting is something a blueprint can't portray and that part of the program is unsurpassable when it comes to showing the customer the possibilities."

Though Seltz focuses on PRO Landscape's CAD features, for each design he'll also use the imaging tools to create a realistic rendering of the client's future landscaping by incorporating a digital image of the client's house and importing images of the plants and trees the crews will be installing. When all that's done, Seltz says he adds the lighting fixtures and then turns out the lights.

"We add the lamps and light fixtures in last and then essentially turn the lights out on the PRO Landscape program itself," he says. "You can portray night in the program, which illuminates the lighting features so the client can see exactly what their prop-



erty will look like when it's all lit up. You can manipulate the angle of the light and the flood to make sure it's covering the area it needs to, not to mention representing different levels of darkness — evening lighting or dark night, for instance — to enhance the effect."

Chris Walter, owner of Kansas City, Mo.-based Computerized Landscape Design says that even clients who hadn't originally considered landscape lighting end up adding several thousand dollars worth of value to their properties after viewing their options. "Most people don't ask me about lighting, but if I create a design for a property, I always show them lighting options," he says. "That can add \$2,000 to \$3,000 to the job and it's a great tool to close a deal."

Walter says 50 percent of his clients buy into night lighting after seeing his PRO Landscape presentations. "Landscaping is a lucrative business and the visual aspect of the PRO Landscape software has allowed us to take advantage of that," Walter notes. "Whether it's landscape lighting, or adding boulder or a perennial border, or any of the other upselling tools I have at my disposal with the program, we can bring in a lot of additional sales. Some customers may think they know exactly what they want, but I can show them a picture of their house with a border of blooming coreopsis, or a few light fixtures and create a landscape that they'll really love."

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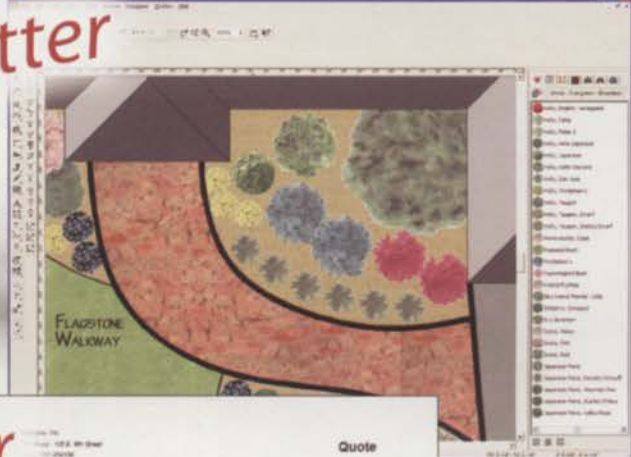
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Quote

Customer: 123456789
Address: 1234 Main St
City: Anytown, IL 60001
Phone: (555) 123-4567

Customer Number: 12345
Quote Date: November 10, 2003
Sales Person: J.P.
Expiration Date: December 10, 2003
Sales: 12345
Proposed Name: Green Thumb
Project Name: Backyard Makeover
Project #: 123456789

Item	Qty	Description	Unit Price	Extended Price
PL001	1	1" Oak	\$50.00	\$50.00
PL002	2	2" Oak	\$75.00	\$150.00
PL003	3	3" Oak	\$100.00	\$300.00
PL004	4	4" Oak	\$125.00	\$500.00
PL005	5	5" Oak	\$150.00	\$750.00
PL006	6	6" Oak	\$175.00	\$1050.00
PL007	7	7" Oak	\$200.00	\$1400.00
PL008	8	8" Oak	\$225.00	\$1800.00
PL009	9	9" Oak	\$250.00	\$2250.00
PL010	10	10" Oak	\$275.00	\$2750.00
PL011	11	11" Oak	\$300.00	\$3300.00
PL012	12	12" Oak	\$325.00	\$3900.00
PL013	13	13" Oak	\$350.00	\$4550.00
PL014	14	14" Oak	\$375.00	\$5250.00
PL015	15	15" Oak	\$400.00	\$6000.00
PL016	16	16" Oak	\$425.00	\$6800.00
PL017	17	17" Oak	\$450.00	\$7650.00
PL018	18	18" Oak	\$475.00	\$8550.00
PL019	19	19" Oak	\$500.00	\$9500.00
PL020	20	20" Oak	\$525.00	\$10500.00
PL021	21	21" Oak	\$550.00	\$11550.00
PL022	22	22" Oak	\$575.00	\$12650.00
PL023	23	23" Oak	\$600.00	\$13800.00
PL024	24	24" Oak	\$625.00	\$15000.00
PL025	25	25" Oak	\$650.00	\$16250.00
PL026	26	26" Oak	\$675.00	\$17550.00
PL027	27	27" Oak	\$700.00	\$18900.00
PL028	28	28" Oak	\$725.00	\$20300.00
PL029	29	29" Oak	\$750.00	\$21750.00
PL030	30	30" Oak	\$775.00	\$23250.00
PL031	31	31" Oak	\$800.00	\$24800.00
PL032	32	32" Oak	\$825.00	\$26400.00
PL033	33	33" Oak	\$850.00	\$28050.00
PL034	34	34" Oak	\$875.00	\$29750.00
PL035	35	35" Oak	\$900.00	\$31500.00
PL036	36	36" Oak	\$925.00	\$33300.00
PL037	37	37" Oak	\$950.00	\$35150.00
PL038	38	38" Oak	\$975.00	\$37050.00
PL039	39	39" Oak	\$1000.00	\$39000.00
PL040	40	40" Oak	\$1025.00	\$41000.00
PL041	41	41" Oak	\$1050.00	\$43050.00
PL042	42	42" Oak	\$1075.00	\$45150.00
PL043	43	43" Oak	\$1100.00	\$47300.00
PL044	44	44" Oak	\$1125.00	\$49500.00
PL045	45	45" Oak	\$1150.00	\$51750.00
PL046	46	46" Oak	\$1175.00	\$54050.00
PL047	47	47" Oak	\$1200.00	\$56400.00
PL048	48	48" Oak	\$1225.00	\$58800.00
PL049	49	49" Oak	\$1250.00	\$61250.00
PL050	50	50" Oak	\$1275.00	\$63750.00
PL051	51	51" Oak	\$1300.00	\$66300.00
PL052	52	52" Oak	\$1325.00	\$68900.00
PL053	53	53" Oak	\$1350.00	\$71550.00
PL054	54	54" Oak	\$1375.00	\$74250.00
PL055	55	55" Oak	\$1400.00	\$77000.00
PL056	56	56" Oak	\$1425.00	\$79800.00
PL057	57	57" Oak	\$1450.00	\$82650.00
PL058	58	58" Oak	\$1475.00	\$85550.00
PL059	59	59" Oak	\$1500.00	\$88500.00
PL060	60	60" Oak	\$1525.00	\$91500.00
PL061	61	61" Oak	\$1550.00	\$94550.00
PL062	62	62" Oak	\$1575.00	\$97650.00
PL063	63	63" Oak	\$1600.00	\$100800.00
PL064	64	64" Oak	\$1625.00	\$104000.00
PL065	65	65" Oak	\$1650.00	\$107250.00
PL066	66	66" Oak	\$1675.00	\$110550.00
PL067	67	67" Oak	\$1700.00	\$113900.00
PL068	68	68" Oak	\$1725.00	\$117300.00
PL069	69	69" Oak	\$1750.00	\$120750.00
PL070	70	70" Oak	\$1775.00	\$124250.00
PL071	71	71" Oak	\$1800.00	\$127800.00
PL072	72	72" Oak	\$1825.00	\$131400.00
PL073	73	73" Oak	\$1850.00	\$135050.00
PL074	74	74" Oak	\$1875.00	\$138750.00
PL075	75	75" Oak	\$1900.00	\$142500.00
PL076	76	76" Oak	\$1925.00	\$146300.00
PL077	77	77" Oak	\$1950.00	\$150150.00
PL078	78	78" Oak	\$1975.00	\$154050.00
PL079	79	79" Oak	\$2000.00	\$158000.00
PL080	80	80" Oak	\$2025.00	\$162000.00
PL081	81	81" Oak	\$2050.00	\$166050.00
PL082	82	82" Oak	\$2075.00	\$170150.00
PL083	83	83" Oak	\$2100.00	\$174300.00
PL084	84	84" Oak	\$2125.00	\$178500.00
PL085	85	85" Oak	\$2150.00	\$182750.00
PL086	86	86" Oak	\$2175.00	\$187050.00
PL087	87	87" Oak	\$2200.00	\$191400.00
PL088	88	88" Oak	\$2225.00	\$195800.00
PL089	89	89" Oak	\$2250.00	\$200250.00
PL090	90	90" Oak	\$2275.00	\$204750.00
PL091	91	91" Oak	\$2300.00	\$209300.00
PL092	92	92" Oak	\$2325.00	\$213900.00
PL093	93	93" Oak	\$2350.00	\$218550.00
PL094	94	94" Oak	\$2375.00	\$223250.00
PL095	95	95" Oak	\$2400.00	\$228000.00
PL096	96	96" Oak	\$2425.00	\$232800.00
PL097	97	97" Oak	\$2450.00	\$237650.00
PL098	98	98" Oak	\$2475.00	\$242550.00
PL099	99	99" Oak	\$2500.00	\$247500.00
PL100	100	100" Oak	\$2525.00	\$252500.00
PL101	101	101" Oak	\$2550.00	\$257550.00
PL102	102	102" Oak	\$2575.00	\$262650.00
PL103	103	103" Oak	\$2600.00	\$267800.00
PL104	104	104" Oak	\$2625.00	\$273000.00
PL105	105	105" Oak	\$2650.00	\$278250.00
PL106	106	106" Oak	\$2675.00	\$283550.00
PL107	107	107" Oak	\$2700.00	\$288900.00
PL108	108	108" Oak	\$2725.00	\$294300.00
PL109	109	109" Oak	\$2750.00	\$299750.00
PL110	110	110" Oak	\$2775.00	\$305250.00
PL111	111	111" Oak	\$2800.00	\$310800.00
PL112	112	112" Oak	\$2825.00	\$316400.00
PL113	113	113" Oak	\$2850.00	\$322050.00
PL114	114	114" Oak	\$2875.00	\$327750.00
PL115	115	115" Oak	\$2900.00	\$333500.00
PL116	116	116" Oak	\$2925.00	\$339300.00
PL117	117	117" Oak	\$2950.00	\$345150.00
PL118	118	118" Oak	\$2975.00	\$351050.00
PL119	119	119" Oak	\$3000.00	\$357000.00
PL120	120	120" Oak	\$3025.00	\$363000.00
PL121	121	121" Oak	\$3050.00	\$369050.00
PL122	122	122" Oak	\$3075.00	\$375150.00
PL123	123	123" Oak	\$3100.00	\$381300.00
PL124	124	124" Oak	\$3125.00	\$387500.00
PL125	125	125" Oak	\$3150.00	\$393750.00
PL126	126	126" Oak	\$3175.00	\$400050.00
PL127	127	127" Oak	\$3200.00	\$406400.00
PL128	128	128" Oak	\$3225.00	\$412800.00
PL129	129	129" Oak	\$3250.00	\$419250.00
PL130	130	130" Oak	\$3275.00	\$425750.00
PL131	131	131" Oak	\$3300.00	\$432300.00
PL132	132	132" Oak	\$3325.00	\$438900.00
PL133	133	133" Oak	\$3350.00	\$445550.00
PL134	134	134" Oak	\$3375.00	\$452250.00
PL135	135	135" Oak	\$3400.00	\$459000.00
PL136	136	136" Oak	\$3425.00	\$465800.00
PL137	137	137" Oak	\$3450.00	\$472650.00
PL138	138	138" Oak	\$3475.00	\$479550.00
PL139	139	139" Oak	\$3500.00	\$486500.00
PL140	140	140" Oak	\$3525.00	\$493500.00
PL141	141	141" Oak	\$3550.00	\$500550.00
PL142	142	142" Oak	\$3575.00	\$507650.00
PL143	143	143" Oak	\$3600.00	\$514800.00
PL144	144	144" Oak	\$3625.00	\$521950.00
PL145	145	145" Oak	\$3650.00	\$529150.00
PL146	146	146" Oak	\$3675.00	\$536400.00
PL147	147	147" Oak	\$3700.00	\$543700.00
PL148	148	148" Oak	\$3725.00	\$551050.00
PL149	149	149" Oak	\$3750.00	\$558450.00
PL150	150	150" Oak	\$3775.00	\$565900.00
PL151	151	151" Oak	\$3800.00	\$573400.00
PL152	152	152" Oak	\$3825.00	\$580950.00
PL153	153	153" Oak	\$3850.00	\$588550.00
PL154	154	154" Oak	\$3875.00	\$596200.00
PL155	155	155" Oak	\$3900.00	\$603900.00
PL156	156	156" Oak	\$3925.00	\$611650.00
PL157	157	157" Oak	\$3950.00	\$619450.00
PL158	158	158" Oak	\$3975.00	\$627300.00
PL159	159	159" Oak	\$4000.00	\$635200.00
PL160	160	160" Oak	\$4025.00	\$643150.00
PL161	161	161" Oak	\$4050.00	\$651150.00
PL162	162	162" Oak	\$4075.00	\$659200.00
PL163	163	163" Oak	\$4100.00	\$667300.00
PL164	164	164" Oak	\$4125.00	\$675450.00
PL165	165	165" Oak	\$4150.00	\$683650.00
PL166	166	166" Oak	\$4175.00	\$691900.00
PL167	167	167" Oak	\$4200.00	\$700200.00
PL168	168	168" Oak	\$4225.00	\$708550.00
PL169	169	169" Oak	\$4250.00	\$716950.00
PL170	170	170" Oak	\$4275.00	\$725400.00
PL171	171	171" Oak	\$4300.00	\$733900.00
PL172	172	172" Oak	\$4325.00	\$742450.00
PL173	173	173" Oak	\$4350.00	\$751050.00
PL174	174	174" Oak	\$4375.00	\$759700.00
PL175	175	175" Oak	\$4400.00	\$768400.00
PL176	176	176" Oak	\$4425.00	\$777150.00
PL177	177	177" Oak	\$4450.00	\$785950.00
PL178	178	178" Oak	\$4475.00	\$794800.00
PL179	179	179" Oak	\$4500.00	\$803700.00
PL180	180	180" Oak	\$4525.00	\$812650.00
PL181	181	181" Oak	\$4550.00	\$821650.00
PL182	182	182" Oak		

continued from page 128

cial work they won't bother sending commercial people my way," Elliott says. "But if they know I have the best repair service in town, they will say, 'Call Elliott first because I've seen their operations, and they're really geared up to do service work.' And they don't know that unless they come in here and actually see what we do."

Childers agrees that dealers can respond to contractors more efficiently if they know contractors' needs. "Anytime an issue arises typically it's because there's been an unmatched expectation, so let the dealer know up front what you expect and quantify it whenever possible," he says. "If you need a 100-percent fill rate or same-day delivery, tell them up front."

Through these initial consultations, dealers can help contractors optimize their inventory levels. When contractors purchase new trucks or add crews, Partridge will review with them their inventory requirements and help them stock their trucks with necessary equipment. But when contractors don't initially outline their inventory requirements, that's when the dealer's job becomes more challenging, Partridge says.

Contractors should also provide reasonable lead time when requesting supplies, especially on commercial projects that require larger-sized equipment, such as 8-inch diameter pipe. Ideally, contractors should give dealers seven to 10 days notice on these larger-sized jobs, Partridge says. "Dealers usually will have everyday residential products, such as heads or valves in stock," he explains. "But central control jobs, for instance, often require some advanced notice because dealers don't stock large volumes of central control packages."

Another way contractors can decrease order time is by faxing supply requests. Elliott has discovered too often that phone orders often result in mistakes. Now, when Elliott places an order he faxes it by 7 a.m., and his dealer will usually have it ready no later than 8:30 a.m.

Elliott estimates that 20 percent of phone orders result in errors. Faxes also offer an opportunity to make notes about special preferences, such as expected delivery time, Elliott says.

continued on page 138

stocking up

Whether it's sprinkler heads, valves, pipe or wire, irrigation contractors have a long list of inventory to track. By keeping a close eye on their supply levels and selecting the right dealers, irrigation contractors can ensure they have the right parts at the right time.

Elliott Irrigation, Birmingham, Ala., has its own supply warehouse where the company stocks its parts and keeps a detailed inventory of everything that is coming and going from its supply house. The company tries to maintain two-weeks worth of stock so it's adequately prepared for upcoming jobs, says company President Dwight Elliott.

Elliott Irrigation's warehouse contains a fenced-in area where the company stocks all its supplies on shelving units. The company provides crew chiefs with sheets they must fill out each time they remove any items, according to Elliott. On the sheet is a line where the employees can write down the date and time they took the item and what part they removed – plus a line for suggestions on any inventory needs.

For maintenance jobs, Elliott keeps a little of everything in stock and for installation work, the company posts a bulletin board with all the installation jobs and a list of everything the company will need on each site, Elliott says.

"Ninety-Nine percent of the time each installation job uses the same equipment, just in different numbers, so I know most of the time what I need on those shelves," Elliott says. "With service work you can't keep everything you need – you can keep a lot of it – but things change. Dealers need to stock that for us. It's too much to have in inventory."

But ideally contractors shouldn't have to keep inventory on hand, says Tom Childers, director of marketing, John Deere Landscapes, Alpharetta, Ga. "There's absolutely no reason an irrigation contractor should incur the cost of carrying inventory," he says. "In irrigation, distributors must be able to perform, and the contractors should demand it because when a contractor carries product on the back of his truck, it eats into his profits and impedes his cash flow."

"If your supplier is encouraging you to buy loads of product at a time and is using anything along the lines of 'you better get them while we have them,' you are not dealing with the right supplier," Childers says. "Because irrigation is such a predictable supply pattern, the distributor needs to be held up to a higher standard."



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continued from page 135

Noting expected delivery time helps reduce downtime for crews. "A lot of times you have a crew chief that makes \$55,000 or \$60,000 a year and he's got four guys in the truck with him," he says. "If supplies aren't sitting out for him to just throw in the truck and sign and they have to wait 30 or 45 minutes for it — and you do that 20 times a year — that's a lot of money."

SUPPORTING CAST. Once a partnership is established, some irrigation contractors expect dealers to provide technical assistance and training for high-tech systems and at the very least, some input on designs. Sims says his dealer will draw an irrigation design free of charge that details what supplies are needed and where they must go.

Collier's dealer also provides free de-

signs, which allows him to pursue larger accounts because his staff is too small to handle design work, he says. "Without the support of my supplier, I wouldn't be going after this big job," Collier says. "But because my supplier has some expertise and he's supplying support, we've got enough confidence to do the job."


Collier also depends on his dealer for technical training. His dealer will travel to job sites with a computer technician who will make sure Collier's employees are coding decoders properly for two-wire systems, he says.

Contractors should expect their dealers to provide technical and design support, Childers says. "If the contractor needs that, the distributor, without a doubt, is the best place to start," he says. "Distributors today will be able to help contractors, not just technically, but also from a business management standpoint, and contractors should be looking for that because that's a cost they don't necessarily want to incur."

In addition to technical support, some dealers will provide classes that educate contractors on job bidding, estimating and collection. With these programs, dealers can help contractors pinpoint their actual costs so they don't underbid projects, Partridge says.

Locally held courses are typically free while contractors may have to pay for some more in-depth nationally held seminars, which cost about \$300 per session, says Childers, adding that about 25 percent of his contractor clients take advantage of these classes. Some dealers also will provide their clients who have a contractual relationship with them points for purchases that may be used to pay for the nationally held courses, Childers says.

And while dealers are providing contractors with more classroom and technical assistance, Scattergood says dealers could help even more if they would provide brief on-site training modules in Spanish.

"It would also help if they had a mock-up — a machine where you can see how a product works and guys can practice on it," Scattergood says, adding that he would be willing to pay up to \$200 for a 45-minute demonstration. 

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Check our February Online Extras for more information on how irrigation dealers can help contractors with their inventory levels.

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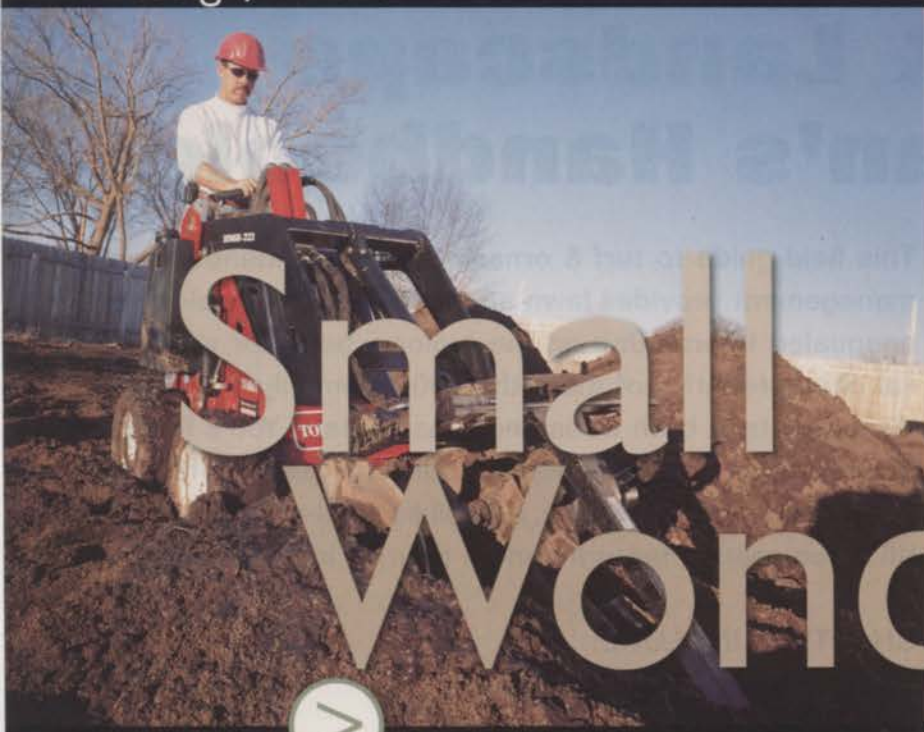
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By using the right attachments for compact skid steers and loaders, a daunting task can turn into a dream.



by leslie stroope

Sometimes it takes a small guy to save the day. In the world of movies, this is often illustrated in a scene where the scrawny underdog is the only fellow nimble enough to extricate his cohorts from a jam. In the world of mini skid steers and compact utility loaders, the growing popularity of pint-sized versions proves they're powerful enough to compete with their big brothers while still being small enough to maneuver around the limitations imposed by modern landscapes. But in order to save the day, it's crucial to have the right attachments for the job. By buying the right attachments, contractors can ensure they get the most out of what their compact skid-steer or loader can offer.

HONEY, I SHRUNK THE SKID STEER.

As houses have grown closer together, the demand for equipment that can fit through existing gates and lawns has increased, says Rob Otterson, marketing manager, Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D.

While full-size skid steers have been standard landscape equipment for years, smaller versions are relatively new tools for contractors.

Andy McMurtry, president, Southern Shade Tree Co., Charlotte, N.C., says when he began using compact loaders 10 years ago, he was impressed with how much strength and versatility was contained in such a small package. "It has made landscaping a whole lot easier logistically because you don't have to use much bigger trailers to haul around the equipment," he says. "It's kind of a win all the way around."

With each successive generation, compact skid steers and loaders continue to shrink in size without sacrificing power. "The exciting part of that is that we're able to make them smaller without giving up the hydraulic power, so we're able to deploy small stand-on machines that provide as much hydraulic power to the attachment and sometimes more hydraulic power to the attachment than the larger sit-in machines have traditionally done," explains Roger Braswell, chief executive officer, Compact Power, Charlotte, N.C.

The fact that machines are getting smaller reflects just one end of the growing spectrum of size options in the skid-steer

continued on page 142



Photos: Bobcat, Toro (above)

Have It All

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continued from page 140

market, says Sarah Bemowski, sales and marketing specialist, CE Attachments, Cedarburg, Wis. "Smaller machines have become smaller and large machines have become larger — up to 100 horsepower," she says. With such power inside a small package, there's a veritable plethora of specialized attachments contractors can choose from to get the job done.



Photo: Bobcat

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE.

Braswell says when it comes to compact equipment attachments, it helps to think of the drive unit as a ratchet and the attachments as different sockets. "The tools allow you to perform various functions on a

construction site that you might typically do either by hand or with a larger machine that would damage the terrain or damage the fixtures like the curbs and sidewalks and irrigation systems," Braswell explains.

For contractors using manual labor on the job, having the right attachment can save time and money. "You alleviate the worry of having to find three or four more workers for a project with an attachment doing the work instead of a shovel," Otterson says. The amount of time a contractor can save by using the right attachment on compact skid-steers or loaders varies dramatically depending on the task. For example, digging a hole with a posthole auger vs. an auger attachment could result in "astronomical" timesavings, says Brad Lemke, director

continued on page 146; sidebar on page 144

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rent or own?

With the cost of a compact skid-steer or loader ranging from \$12,000 to \$20,000 and attachments from \$300 to \$8,000 each, many contractors choose to try out a potential purchase by renting the equipment first to make sure it will meet their needs.

Manufacturers estimate that renting an attachment for a compact machine can range from \$10 to \$100 per day depending on whether the part is hydraulic or non-hydraulic and if it has wearable parts. "If you're renting a grapple bucket, it might be an extra \$10 to \$20 per day, but if you're renting a \$6,000 backhoe then of course it's going to be more expensive," says Brad Lemke, director of product development, ASV, Grand Rapids, Minn. "There are some attachments that require more maintenance, so the rental store has to charge more."

Roger Braswell, chief executive officer, Com-

pact Power, Charlotte, N.C., says that if contractors find they are renting a particular attachment once per week, they might want to look into purchasing it. "If I'm renting it once a week, then I could own it through a finance or lease since one month's payment would be equal to about one day's rental," he says, adding that it takes just one incidence of the attachment not being in stock at the rental house to cost a company extra money in the additional labor needed to complete the job by hand.

When contractors do decide to purchase a compact equipment attachment, they need to realize that with an increase in the complexity of the part comes an increase on the price tag. Braswell says a non-hydraulic attachment like a bucket can range from \$300 to \$1,000, and a hydraulic attachment, such as an auger, is typically in the \$1,500 to \$5,000 range.

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continued from page 142

of product development, ASV, Grand Rapids, Minn.

POPULARITY CONTEST. So what are the best attachments for mini skid-steers and compact loaders? Well, Bemowski says that depends on what business the contractor is in. "For instance, a landscape contractor may be smart to purchase a stump grinder,

brush mower and power landscape rake," she explains. "A building or utility contractor's smart attachments may be completely different – a trencher, backhoe and breaker, for example."

Manufacturers say their five top-selling attachments are buckets, augers, forks, trenchers and breakers. In the last few years, compact backhoes have also been gaining popularity, says Lemke.

"I think people are finding that a lot of time you can do just as much with a small backhoe as you could by owning or renting a mini-excavator and it's a lot cheaper to have just a backhoe attachment if you don't need a real mini excavator," he explains.

Otterson stresses that contractors need to keep in mind that the top five sellers in compact equipment attachments aren't necessarily indicative of the best choices for an individual contractor's needs. "These mini loaders are really getting a lot of their own dedicated attachments now that weren't there five or six years ago," he says.

McMurry says the first two attachments he bought were a simple bucket and a trencher for installing irrigation systems. Bruce Moore, owner, Eastern Land Management, Stamford, Conn., says he purchased a trailer full of attachments for his compact skid steer, but says his company relies most often on attachments, including a broom, blade and v-plow for winter snow removal. "The rest of the year we use the auger most often, but we also use the trencher for drainage work," he says.

SMART SHOPPING. So what is the best route to ensure the perfect match between equipment and attachment? Two words: Buy smart. "You need to evaluate your needs and what you're going to be using the machine for," Moore advises.

Though it may seem like common sense, making sure the attachment is compatible with the compact skid steer or loader is essential. Lemke says he often sees contractors try to use attachments designed for use with large skid steers on compact skid steers. Not only does this result in decreased performance, he warns, but it also can pose a safety hazard. "If you put on a bucket that's too big for a small machine, it's going to be tippy when you load it," he says. "You need to look at the manufacturer's recommendations for what size attachments go on the machine."

It's also a good idea to watch for which services are becoming popular in contractors' specific markets that, with the addition of a particular attachment, could become profitable to add to the mix. "Smart attachment buying is choosing something that you can do

continued on page 148

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continued from page 146

more than one task with or be able to bid more than one job and also keep your eyes out for the jobs that are increasing or growing so you can capture some of that growth just by adding an attachment," Otterson advises.

Bemowski says to check with dealers to find out what's available as well as researching attachments on the Internet. "There are probably a lot of attachments out there that even the dealers don't know about," she says.

For contractors who want to get the most versatility for their dollar, manufacturers suggest looking for an attachment that will serve more than one purpose, such as a four-in-one bucket, which can also be used as a blade, a backdragger or to grab items such as rocks and logs. "If I could only get one attachment, that's the one I'd get," Lemke says.

Once a contractor thinks he has found the right attachment, it's important to ask a few final questions

before making the purchase. Bemowski advises going back to the dealer and asking about attachment setup and maintenance, which need to be taken into the cost consideration of the attachment. Otterson adds that buying from a reputable company is important, as well. "In terms of smart purchasing, your warranty, dealer support and the product's performance are going to be a lot stronger with a more reputable company," he says. "You could buy something that works well from someone, but if it falls apart, then you end up buying it all over again."

THE FUTURE. Manufacturers say the future of compact equipment attachments involves a wider variety of tools targeted to meet landscape contractors' specific needs.

"What we see in the future is just a broader range," Otterson says. "An attachment's main goal is to be good at one thing, whereas the reason a

machine is good at a ton of different things is because it can take attachments. So the attachments are where the dedicated performance comes from."

Lemke estimates that 70 to 80 percent of the attachments available for full-size loaders and skid-steers are available for their compact counterparts, and he imagines that number will continue to increase over the next few years. "It may never be 100 percent because there are some attachments that need lots of power to run, like a coal planer, which is for grinding asphalt," he explains. "You're not going to put that on a tiny machine. But there may be more attachments that are only useful on small machines that aren't useful on big machines."

Otterson says that ultimately it's the contractor who drives what new attachments appear on the market. He says, "If the contractor has a request, we will build it." **LL**

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Green Side Up

by angela dyer



Sod installation sounds easy enough, right? But to lay sod there are a few tricks of the trade that allow any contractor a smooth and profitable service.

It's no wonder sod installation is on the rise. It's been compared to getting somewhere by bus where seeding is the equivalent of walking. You will eventually get to the same destination but it's simply a matter of how quickly you want to get there and if you can pay the extra money up front for the fastest option.

This form of an instant lawn is beneficial for all parties involved. It cuts down on call-back problems for the contractor and is much easier to maintain for the homeowner.

"I have a saying: 'Sod is now and seed is later,'" says Ben Copeland Sr., president, Pat-ten Seed/Super Sod, Lakeland, Ga. "They will both get you to the same place but it depends on how fast you need to get there. It's a matter of economics and time. Sodding will get you a lawn instantly."

Of course the quick solution is usually the more costly and in this situation that is no

different. However, looking at the whole picture is necessary before determining if sod is too expensive.

"The initial cost of sodding is three to four times greater than seeding," says Tom Keeven Jr., manager of sales and marketing, Emerald View Turf Farms, Columbia, Ill. "Remember that is the initial cost, and seeding takes more money to grow it in. In the end, those who seed will seed two or three times to get the lawn full. A lot of times the cost may actually even out in the end."

Other industry experts agree with the idea of paying now and saving later by having fewer headaches. In general, if there is a failure and the contractor needs to seed it twice, that could equal out to the cost of sod. Sodding from the start would have saved the work involved in multiple seed-

continued on page 154; sidebar on page 152

Photos: Turfgrass Producers International



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Knowing what not to do can often be the most helpful advice. Here are the most common mistakes made during a sod installation:

1. Poor soil preparation is often the biggest mistake that comes back to haunt contractors. "I compare it to making up a bed. If you don't straighten the sheets, when you're finished it looks lumpy and bumpy," says Ben Copeland Sr., president, Patten Seed/Super Sod, Lakeland, Ga.
2. Inadequate watering is often a source of dead grass down the road.
3. Stretching pieces to make them fit and not having good seams will show up as problem areas.
4. Not installing the sod quickly enough and leaving it on the pallet will cause it to dry and turn yellow.
5. Having to diagnose problems later can lead to trouble. Knowing the acidity of the soil up front is beneficial in the long run.



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continued from page 152

ings, according to Doug Barberry, vice president, Aldino Sod Farms, Churchville, Md.

Other than multiple seedings, there is also the issue of establishing the grass if seed is used. Additional costs include watering, fertilizer and even repair of erosion damage.

With these benefits it's not a surprise that customer demand is driving the sod industry upward. According to Doug Fender, the past executive director of Turfgrass Producers International, who resides in Inverness, Ill., customers want the immediate solution. Contractors are close behind in the popularity push for sod as the method allows for an easier installation.

THE VALUE OF SIMPLICITY.

Although the main benefit to sod seems to be its instant effect, there are a myriad of other advantages to the homeowner, contractor and even the environment.

The greatest advantage of sod is its simplicity. "There are no problems. That is the prime sales point of sod," Fender points out. "It takes any questions and worries out of play."

Copeland agrees that the major benefit of sod is the ability to jump over installation steps and save time on the job. "With sodding you have a ready-made product and it's just a matter of transplanting that from the field to the lawn."

This immediate form of lawn offers a host of other features as well that catch the attention of many homeowners checking into this option.

"It stops erosion, and you won't have a weed problem," Fender says. "You don't worry about germination; you don't worry about a big rain washout because it's good for the sod."

Erosion control is such an important benefit that some ordinances are now requiring front lawns of homes to be sodded. Recently it has become more of a standard feature in new home building.

"Erosion control is almost a non-issue with sod. Contractors lay is across the slope and it doesn't allow any channels for water to eat

continued on page 156



Adequate soil preparation is the first step in proper sod installation.



pricing particulars

The benefits of sod are apparent and the installation is straightforward. But the contractor needs to know how to make a profit on the job.

Conrad Gagnon, construction division manager, Ivy Hill Nursery, Hartford County, Md., discusses his pricing strategies. "The key is knowing what your overhead costs are and what production capabilities are. Then hopefully you can determine what your price per square foot is depending on what the market will bear."

Gagnon uses a square foot pricing method by first determining the type of job and then looking at the amount of time spent. He deduces his costs – in terms of materials – per hour and then adds in the profit he plans to make. Through experience he determines how much sod a crew could lay in a day, then using those numbers he figures how many square feet can be completed in a day. After that, he adds in labor, overhead and profit per day and creates a square foot price.

Just having some previous experience can be a factor in determining the price as well. A contractor may want to look at site conditions or accessibility and adjust the price accordingly. "For example, if it's flat with good access, we can bid more competitively and possibly go below our normal price," Gagnon says. "It can go the other way as well if there is a hill and rocky soil on the site, then pricing might be higher because of the nature of the job."

These pricing strategies are the same concepts used in any type of landscape construction. Gagnon stressed to simply know the costs involved and the capabilities. Then the job can be successfully based on a unit price.

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continued from page 154

out the soil. It holds and roots down in a couple of weeks. After that everything is held in place," Keeven adds.

PROPER PROCEDURES. In order to take advantage of these features, the sod has to first be installed correctly. A good installation starts far before the contractor steps foot on the client's property. It actually begins the moment

they go to the turf farm.

Industry experts were unanimous in stressing the importance of contractors knowing their sod provider. Copeland says that it is imperative to know the supplier and their reputation for quality. Secondly, know their reputation for service.

A couple key questions for the supplier can go a long way in knowing

the type of product the contractor is receiving. Be sure to ask: "When and how it will be delivered? What issues could the farmer see coming up such as weather that could delay a delivery or change product quality? When was the sod last fertilized? What is being used for weed control and when was it last treated?"

Also, let the farmer know the conditions that the contractor will be working in, such as shade, sun or water restrictions. Often the farm has more than one type of grass available and they can help find one that will be a good fit for the specific project.

Fender agrees, the "No. 1 priority should be to visit the farm and see the product. Contractors need to look for uniformity in the field. Also, make sure there is consistent quality and spend time with the producer to talk about their service."

When looking at the product, notice color, density and then confirm an absence of weeds. Another point to check is the construction of the sod. It should hold together well and be able to be handled easily. Lastly, look for a slight thatch layer to the sod because too much can make the grass spongy and hard to handle. An abundance of thatch can also mean there might not be enough soil.

Quality of the sod is obviously the major factor for the turf farmer, but where does it rank for contractors? According to Fender and surveys done by TPI, quality is the No. 1 issue for contractors and he adds that is where it should be.

With sod, like any other product, the buyer gets what they pay for. "My advice is to rank price further down the list," Copeland notes. "If you expect high quality sod and service then expect to pay a reasonable price for it."

Once the contractor has done all of this homework and now has the quality material in hand, the job is far from finished. Before pulling anything off the pallet, experts agree that the first step is good soil preparation. Barberry says that knowing the soil fertility analysis is extremely important and is often missed.

"Know how acidic the soil is," he says. "We look for a pH of 6.5 to 7.0. Those are the optimal growing condi-

continued on page 158

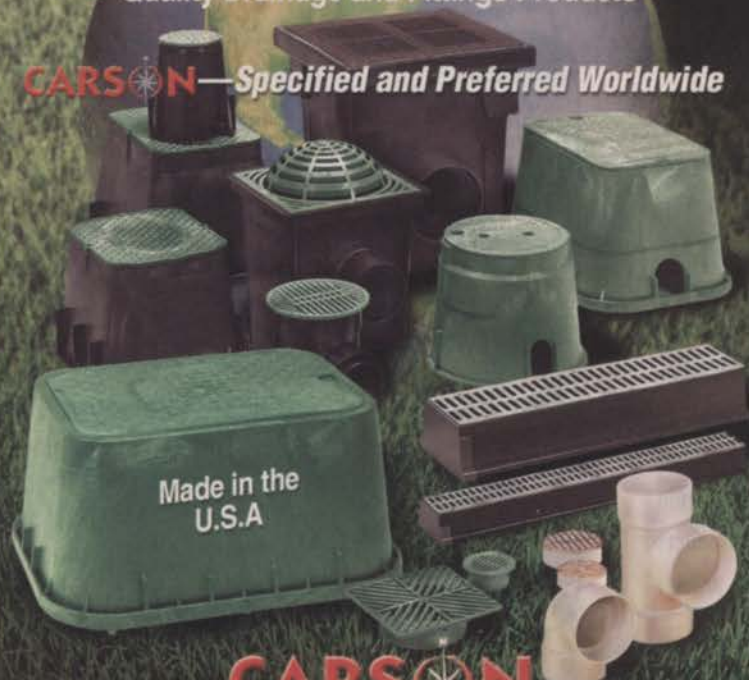
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"Overachiever"



continued from page 156

tions for cool season grasses."

Smooth soil ranked next, which includes making sure the ground is free of debris and rock. Also, if there are a lot of pockets and divots, the contractor will leave the sod with air pockets in it as well, which leaves dead spots in the grass.

Fender recommends that contractors water the area they are going to

sod very well two days in advance of the installation. This allows there to be moisture in the ground but the surface will be dry enough to walk on.

Now the contractor is ready for the product. "You should insist on prompt delivery, and then lay it within eight hours of delivery," stresses Copeland.

Keeven agrees that it should be put down the same day the sod arrives and

begin watering during the installation. Watering during and after installation is often quoted as the most important element to a successful sod installation. Barberry recommends up to 4 inches of deep watering each day during the first week.

"You are dealing with a transplanted plant without a root system so you have to have immediate and adequate water," Copeland says. "Pick up a piece and look to make sure the ground underneath is wet."

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ROLL OUT. With few or no tools required and a straightforward installation process, there have not been a great deal of changes in the industry. However, one innovation is making a dent in labor issues. "The biggest development is the advent of the big roll because it is less labor intense and easier on the workers," Keeven says.

The standard sod size varies but, in general, palletized sod is 9 square feet or rolls are available, which are 1 square foot. Fender explains that the size changes depending on the area of the country it is grown and used. For example, the southeast portion of the United States deals in slabs that are usually 18 inches wide and 18 to 24 inches long, whereas the rest of the country deals in rolls.

According to Barberry, the new big roll can come in sizes up to 400 square feet. These might be used for athletic fields or a larger jobs where labor could be reduced.

It may make for a nicer looking outcome because of the lack of seams with one large piece. It also allows for less stretching and less potential for weed infestation.

Contractors trying out big rolls will discover that a mechanism to transport the material is needed. Most farms will rent out a motor-driven installer for contractors looking to try out this newer method.

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Battling Back



Tree care companies are using newer methods to combat an old enemy. Here, contractors and pesticide manufacturers share some more recent developments in pest control.

by jonathan katz

Mr. and Mrs. Homeowner are in a state of panic. They just watched the evening news and are convinced that the pesticides the tree care technician is spraying nearby will kill them. Their reaction may be unwarranted, but perception means everything in the tree care business. Environmental concerns have changed the way tree care specialists treat insect problems. Some traditional application procedures and products are now giving way to more targeted treatments, including trunk injections, soil applications and horticultural oils.

Of course, traditional treatments are still necessary for many insect infestations, but pressure from regulators and consumers have tree care specialists rethinking their approaches. For instance, Bartlett Tree Expert's Midwest division in Northbrook, Ill. has cut back its use of traditional treatments by 70

to 80 percent, according to division Manager Michael Robinson.

SOIL SOAKER. The sight of a technician spraying pesticides toward an infested tree can cause concerns about spray drift in some neighborhoods. Systemic treatments have proved effective in controlling certain insect problems without using spray tanks. Systemics work by traveling through the tree's vascular system and into the plant tissue. The two main types of systemic treatments are soil injections and trunk injections.

Soil injections are performed using a pressurized hose with a 3-inch soil probe or nozzle, which appears similar to a hypodermic needle, connected to a 250- to 300-psi pressurized pump. The nozzle has four holes that spray four streams of water to the north, south, east and west. Tree care technicians insert the nozzle 4 to 8 inches into the tree's



Photos: Bartlett Tree Experts

root zone and inject 1 quart to 1.5 gallons of fluid into the soil, according to Douglas Airhart, professor of horticulture at Tennessee Technological University's School of Agriculture.

The water then fills the pores of the soil until it overflows to the surface. The process is repeated every 2.5 feet around the base of the tree. Technicians will usually use an insecticide treatment for soil injections to control sap-sucking insects such as soft scales, leafhoppers, aphids, adelgids or certain types of boring insects. Many arborists' clients view soil injection as an environmentally sound approach, and its residual effect can be much longer than foliar sprays, sometimes lasting one to three seasons, says Rex Bastian, vice president of field education and development for The Care of Trees' Chicago branch.

"The soil injection is more thorough because it's a system that after you've got an annual treatment, by the second round you have a good supply of the material in the plant's sap stream," says George Markarian, special services manager, Tree Tech, Foxboro, Mass.

But technicians must know the type of insects they're trying to control or the treatment won't work. "We used to just go out and spray anything that had leaves on it," Robinson says. "Now we're more cognizant of the plant material we're looking at and the insects that bother that plant. Soil injection is very targeted to certain pests, so if you go out and apply it and don't know what you're applying it for, that's not very environmentally friendly either."

Bastian agrees that technicians must familiarize themselves with how

the material works and what insects it attacks. "You have to, as with any pest application, know what your target is and how that target responds to different materials as well as what its biology is and how it attacks the tree because the systemic materials only move in certain plant tissues, so not all parts of the tree are vulnerable," he says.

Technicians should also note that pine trees don't always absorb certain insecticides, according to Bastian. In this case, spraying may be the only viable option if it is permitted in that area, Bastian says. If not, technicians may have no other choice to offer customers, Bastian says. "People keep thinking there's always another option, but sooner or later you're going to run out of options," Bastian says.

Another factor to consider is cost.

Soil injections can be two to three times more expensive to apply than traditional methods, Robinson says. Tree Tech pays \$2,300 for an 8.8-pound mini-drum of its soil injection product, Markarian says. Equipment costs can range from \$2,700 to \$4,500 to haul a 300-gallon tank, a pump with an engine and a hose, Airhart says. Once Tree Tech factors in all these costs plus

profit it charges \$7 per diameter inch of the tree for the service, Markarian says.

SHOOT 'EM UP. Trunk injections work in a similar fashion to soil injections but involve actually drilling a hole into the root flares of the tree. Most microinjection applications require drilling an $1\frac{1}{64}$ -inch hole into the ridges of the trunk flare about halfway up

from the soil line to where the straight portion of the trunk is located, Airhart says. A technician treating trees with microinjection will first drill through the outer bark, which is usually a dark-brown, puffy material, and then the inner bark, which may change and become more moist and dense. At that point, the technician will reach the cambium where there's typically a change in color from dark brown to light brown then to a yellowish or white shade before entering the xylem. Tree care workers should then drill one-quarter to three-eighths of an inch past the xylem, according to Airhart.

Technicians can tell how close they are to the cambium by gradually inserting and removing the drill bit. The injection tube is beveled on the injection end so it fits into this hole and makes a tight seal. The tube has a flange with a notch that should be vertical. "If you look at the injection end of the tube, the opening is slightly beveled at about a 45-degree angle that allows the fluid to be injected from the side rather than directly from the top, and it increases the flow rate slightly," Airhart says.

Airhart then attaches the capsule to the injection tube. There are two types of capsules available — an older version that is shaped like the piston of an engine and a newer model that has a slightly flattened outer side, which makes it easier to tap in with a hammer. "The newer capsule also fits on the injection tube more securely by its construction, so I normally turn the capsule upside down and place it," he says.

But technicians don't always need to place the newer capsules upside down. This is more critical with the older, rounder capsules so the applicator can ensure the capsule is securely attached to the tube, Airhart says. Technicians can pressurize the capsule by pushing it down, and then turn it upright and tap it into place. Technicians should space one capsule for every 5 or 6 circumference inches, Airhart says.

Capsules cost \$3 to \$5 each and tree care specialists can purchase them in packages of 25 or 100. Arborists will typically double or triple that cost for their application price depending on the amount they're using and what their supplier is offering, Airhart says.

Tree care companies will some-

continued on page 166; sidebar on page 164

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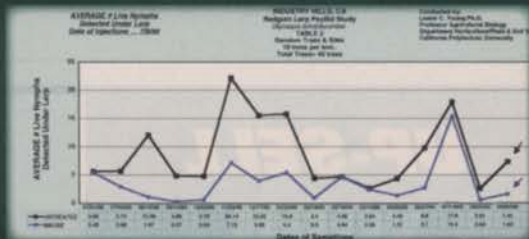
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read all about it

If customers don't know their trees appear sickly because of an insect problem, they may not do anything about it. Last season, Foxboro, Mass.-based Tree Tech began publishing a newsletter to inform customers about industry developments, including information about tree insect infestations in the area.

Tree Tech Special Services Manager George Markarian is the author of *Tree Tech News*, which the company delivers to about 15,000 customers each season. Tree Tech pays \$6,500 for each distribution round, according to Markarian, who says he spends six to eight hours writing each issue. For example, a customer who read the fall

2004 issue would know that caterpillars ravaged many trees in Massachusetts and that another infestation is likely in 2005. The story concludes by telling customers to "let us know if you have any questions or would like any of your plant material evaluated."

These types of suggestions have helped create additional business opportunities from the company's existing clients. "We know for sure that there were not so many leads but interest generated and the ball was in our court to follow up and make recommendations and follow up with people based on their interest," Markarian explains.

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continued from page 162

times opt for trunk injections rather than soil treatments because not all pesticides can be absorbed by the tree through the soil, Airhart says. But some contractors prefer to use soil injections first. "I only look at trunk injections if other treatments are not available," Bastian says. "You do cause a wound to the trees, and repeated treatments can

be counterproductive. We use injection technology, but you have to temper it with the idea that you are causing some damage. It's like a side effect of a medicinal drug – sometimes the disadvantages outweigh the advantages."

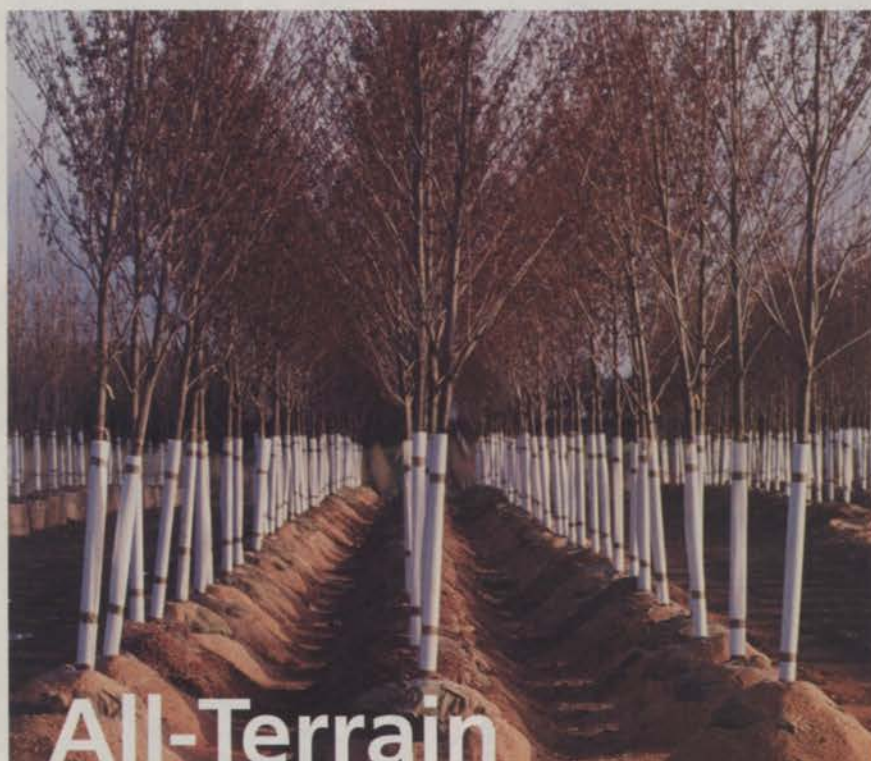
OIL SLICK. Some insects just won't go down without a fight. Armored scales

can shrug off many pesticide sprays because of their protective covering. During the 2004 season in Northeast Ohio, the oystershell scale made its presence known, feeding on a variety of host plants including ash, lilac, beech, maple and birch trees, according to Anand Persad, regional technical advisor, The Davey Institute, Kent, Ohio. To combat these tough creatures, contractors can apply horticultural oils, which work by suffocating the insects. Horticultural oils generally have a 60 to 70 percent efficacy rate, according to Persad. Contractors can use dormant or summer oils depending on the time of year. In northern regions, dormant oils should be applied after there has been at least 48 hours of accumulated freezing, which would be late fall or early spring in northern regions, so the oil doesn't damage the tree, Persad says. To calculate accumulated freezing time, a contractor would add up all of the hours after the temperature first hits the freezing mark until it hits between 24 and 48 hours.

Technicians can further reduce scale populations that have survived the dormant oil treatment by applying a contact pesticide shortly after the egg hatch, Persad says. At this stage, the scales are known as "crawlers" and have not yet developed their protec-

"We used to just go out and just spray anything that had leaves on it. Now we're more cognizant of the plant material that we're looking at and the insects that bother that plant. Soil injection is very targeted to certain pests, so if you go out and apply it and don't know what you're applying it for, that's not very environmentally friendly either." –

Michael Robinson



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2. What services does your business offer?

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- ☐ 3. Turf & Ornamental Installation
- ☐ 4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation
- ☐ 5. Irrigation Installation

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- ☐ 7. Hardscape Installation
- ☐ 8. Water Features

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- ☐ 9. Landscape Renovation
- ☐ 10. Turf Fertilization
- ☐ 11. Turf Aeration
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- ☐ 14. Irrigation Maintenance
- ☐ 15. Erosion Control

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- ☐ 16. Turf Disease Control
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- ☐ 18. Turf Weed Control
- ☐ 19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application

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- ☐ 20. Mowing
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- ☐ 23. Interior Landscape Services
- ☐ 24. Structural Pest Control
- ☐ 25. Holiday Lighting
- ☐ 26. Other

3. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

4. What are your company's approximate annual gross revenues?

- ____ 1. Less than \$50,000
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tive coating, making them vulnerable to traditional pesticides. When the temperature heats up, contractors can turn to summer oils. These pesticides are thinner oils or solutions mixed at lower rates to prevent phytotoxicity or burning of the plants.

Summer oils, which are thinner than dormant oils, can be effective in controlling spider mites, hemlock beetles and scale insects, Persad says. Davey Tree uses thinner oil for its summer treatment and mixes it at the same rate as the dormant treatments. Summer oils can be used in dormant periods or in summer, but they are more effective in summer, Persad says, adding that these oils should not be used when the temperature reaches 85 degrees or higher or when there is low soil moisture.

Davey Tree mixes 2.5 ounces of solution per gallon of water. "You have to make sure the solution is mixed well because it's oil and oil settles, so make sure it's mixed well enough to get those little globules out to the plant," Persad says. "If you let it stand without agitation it's going to surface and if you spray it, you're going to get only oil on one part of the plant and only water on the other part, and that may cause a burn."

Tree Tech applies its dormant oil at 2 percent solution and the summer application at a 1 percent solution, Markarian says, adding that the summer solution rate is still effective against a number of insects, including the hemlock woolly adelgid.

The company pays \$8 per 100 gallons of the oil. Tree Tech prices all its spray solutions the same way. The minimum charge is \$75 for five minutes, and the price increases from there in five-minute increments. The rate is measured from the time the technician starts spraying to when the hose is reeled up. The price decreases as the length of the job increases. After 20 to 30 minutes, Markarian starts backing off in price from that \$75 per five minutes. For example, 30 minutes would be \$450 if it were charged at \$75 per five minutes, but Markarian charges closer to \$350 for a job that takes that long. Markarian says, "I do this to be competitive and because it's only fair to the client since I'm making more money off of a larger job." 

mighty mites

Not all bugs are bad. Some can help control destructive insect infestations. The Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories, Charlotte, N.C., has been experimenting with predatory mites that the company uses to combat spider mite problems on conifers, according to Donald Booth, an entomologist with the company's research division.

The company began exploring the use of predatory mites about 10 years ago as an alternative to traditional pesticides. The results have been mixed but promising, Booth says. "It's been all over the board," he says. "We've had spectacular successes and failures, which depends on everything from what you're using the mites against to what sort of conditions you have."

The mites are usually shipped in a small bottle, similar to a saltshaker, and mixed with shredded corncob, according to Booth. The typical application rate is 25 mites for a small- to medium-sized shrub and 50 mites for bigger shrubs or small trees, Booth says. Tree care technicians apply the mites by shaking them out of the container and onto the plant. The mites should then migrate to the infested areas and consume the destructive pests, Booth says. "These mites are highly mobile," he explains. "If you put them at the bottom of a redwood tree – if there's food waiting for them, within a few days they'll be at the top of the tree."

However, there are drawbacks to using predatory mites. The mites cost about \$14 per 1,000, which translates into less than \$1 for a 25-mite application, according to Booth. But the labor cost can be double a traditional application. "The problems come from the intensive handling involved and the difficulties resulting from the fact that they're not always going to work, and the client is not always understanding of that," he shares.

Bartlett Tree uses a mite species called *Neoseiulus fallacies*, which needs to be released immediately upon receipt because they have a lifespan of about 48 hours, Booth says. They also don't respond well to high temperatures and low humidity, so ideally technicians should apply the mites in temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees and when humidity is above 50 percent, he explains.

After releasing the mites, Bartlett Tree technicians tie a tag to one of the plant's branches to let customers know what biological control has been released and where it was applied, Booth says (see photo on page 160). This also reminds technicians not to spray pesticides at the location so they don't kill the living organism.

Contractors shouldn't worry about the predatory mites becoming a nuisance because they only attack certain spider mite species and are so small that most people are not aware of their existence, Booth says. "If you were walking through a garden where there are a lot of these, you might get some on your bare legs if you were wearing shorts, but you wouldn't be aware of them because they don't bite and have no desire to come into your house and be a pest."

Paradise Restored

by lauren spiers

When a hurricane ravaged Bermuda in 2003, Jeff Sousa and his crew picked up the pieces to restore the Fairmont Southampton to its full glory.

A 28-year veteran of the green industry, Jeff Sousa takes enormous pride in both his company and his country. That's why the owner of Sousa's Landscape Management, Southampton, Bermuda, personally invested in rebuilding efforts following the island's catastrophic run-in with Hurricane Fabian in September 2003.

"For someone like me who's been in the industry for so long, going around the island and removing trees that you've admired since they were planted is horrible," Sousa says. "It was depressing to see my homeland devastated like that. But if you come to Bermuda today, you wouldn't know we had the worst hurricane in 50 years here less than two years ago."

In addition to the rebuilding throughout the island, current visitors to Bermuda's largest resort, the Fairmont Southampton, are likely

to notice a fresh look to the landscaping on the property. After sustaining a reported \$10 million worth of damage as a result of the storm, the Fairmont saw the aftermath as an opportunity to reconstruct its grounds. Sousa's Landscape Management took on the job, which proved to be a logistical challenge albeit highly rewarding.

DAMAGE CONTROL. At the island's highest point – about ½ mile above sea level – the Fairmont Southampton had little protection against Hurricane Fabian's Category 3 torrents. To properly and safely manage the resulting wreckage, including roof and guest room damage, flooding and landscaping torn to shreds, the resort closed its doors for six months. Ordinarily, having so much work time uninterrupted by hotel-guest traffic would be a blessing for a maintenance crew. Unfortunately, pa-





Before (left) and after project photos: Sousa's Landscape

project specs

Project: The Fairmont Southampton Resort, Southampton, Bermuda

Time Frame: Six weeks

Site Size: 18 individual landscape areas around the Fairmont's 100-acre property

Plants Installed: Croton, daylilies, Cordyline, Umbrella Tree, Coconut Palm, Washingtonian Palm, Sago palm, viburnum trees, bottlebrush, albizia, ferns, common and giant bird of paradise, fountaingrass, Fiji palm

Goals: Refresh landscaping to a lush, subtropical paradise; install an irrigation system; install landscape lighting

Total Project Cost: \$475,000

Project Cost Breakdown:

Plant Materials: \$225,000

Irrigation: \$100,000

Labor: \$150,000

perwork delays gave Sousa's team only about half the time they anticipated to renovate the site.

"Right after Fabian, we started talking with the hotel about how they wanted to approach the redesign of their landscaping," says Vice President of Operations Mohammad Farooqui who supervised the Fairmont project. "During the clean-up process, another designer and I prepared a design for the new landscape in just two weeks. Usually, big commercial contracts take a while to finalize, but because of third parties involved in the aftermath, such as the insurance agency, there were delays in the paperwork and we ended up with just six weeks for the job."

To offset a challenging work schedule, Farooqui and his team worked with

the hotel to set priorities and proactively manage the project. "During the design phase, we had identified 18 specific areas where the resort wanted to focus on redesigning the landscape," Farooqui says. "Before we started the project, we sat down with the resort managers and mapped out the areas that were of the highest priority to them. On our design, we numbered the areas in order of importance so our crews were able to follow the map and complete each section in the proper order."

The Fairmont's priorities began with the front entrance of the hotel, followed by the indoor and outdoor pool areas and the beachside area, which is farther down on the property. Moreover, because hurricane-size storm clouds bring an equally large silver

lining, the resort used the rebuilding opportunity to refresh its outdated Mediterranean-style landscaping with lush subtropical foliage and a new irrigation system. With these grand goals, however, came significant hurdles for the Sousa team to jump.

NURSERY STUCK. Rebuilding the Fairmont into the picturesque, subtropical haven visitors crave required lush broad-leaved foliage plants like croton, bird of paradise and Viburnum trees, as well as more delicate textures from trees like Albizia and bottlebrush, along with ornamental grasses like fountaingrass.

With their vivid colors and dense growing habits, the plants called for in Farooqui's design were sure to create the tropical rainforest feeling the resort desired. However, both Farooqui and Sousa note that acquiring these plants was a major challenge. "Because this was a very bad hurricane, a lot of the goods that we would have on the island were out of stock," Sousa explains. "Plant material was especially difficult to find because it wasn't just this hotel

that was damaged — it was properties island-wide, so we were competing with about 60 other landscapers on the island who were also doing clean-up and new landscape design/build."

Farooqui adds that severe damage to much of the island's nursery stock further hampered the team's plant-acquisition efforts. "We were buying a lot of plants that were only in 1-gallon pots or smaller, and the largest plant we can import from nurseries in the United States or elsewhere is a 4-inch pot," he says. "A lot of the plant material we were using was very small, but we had to have something in the ground to complete the design."

Again, being proactive helped the company meet the resort's needs for plant material. While the installation team waited approval from the Fairmont to begin work, Sousa obtained management approval to purchase plant material pending finalization of the hotel's insurance claim. "We knew the resort wanted to go ahead with the project, but we had to be careful," he says. "They gave us the go-ahead to se-

cure the plant material, which we did. If we had waited any longer, we wouldn't have had anything to work with."

Sousa purchased some of the plant material from nurseries in Florida, California and elsewhere, and also tried to acquire as much as possible from sources on the island. Though much of Bermuda's nursery stock was damaged, Farooqui placed a newspaper ad requesting mature plant material from other island properties that could salvage it, and also utilized a company database of island residents who would allow the company to cultivate mature plants from their properties. Farooqui says some of the residents who offered their plant material were compensated in cash, while others traded the plants for services or equipment.

Another plant procurement issue the company faced involved dozens of palms required to complete the landscape design. Because Bermuda cannot import palms at all, Sousa and his team tried to salvage as many as possible on the property and relocated some to

continued on page 172



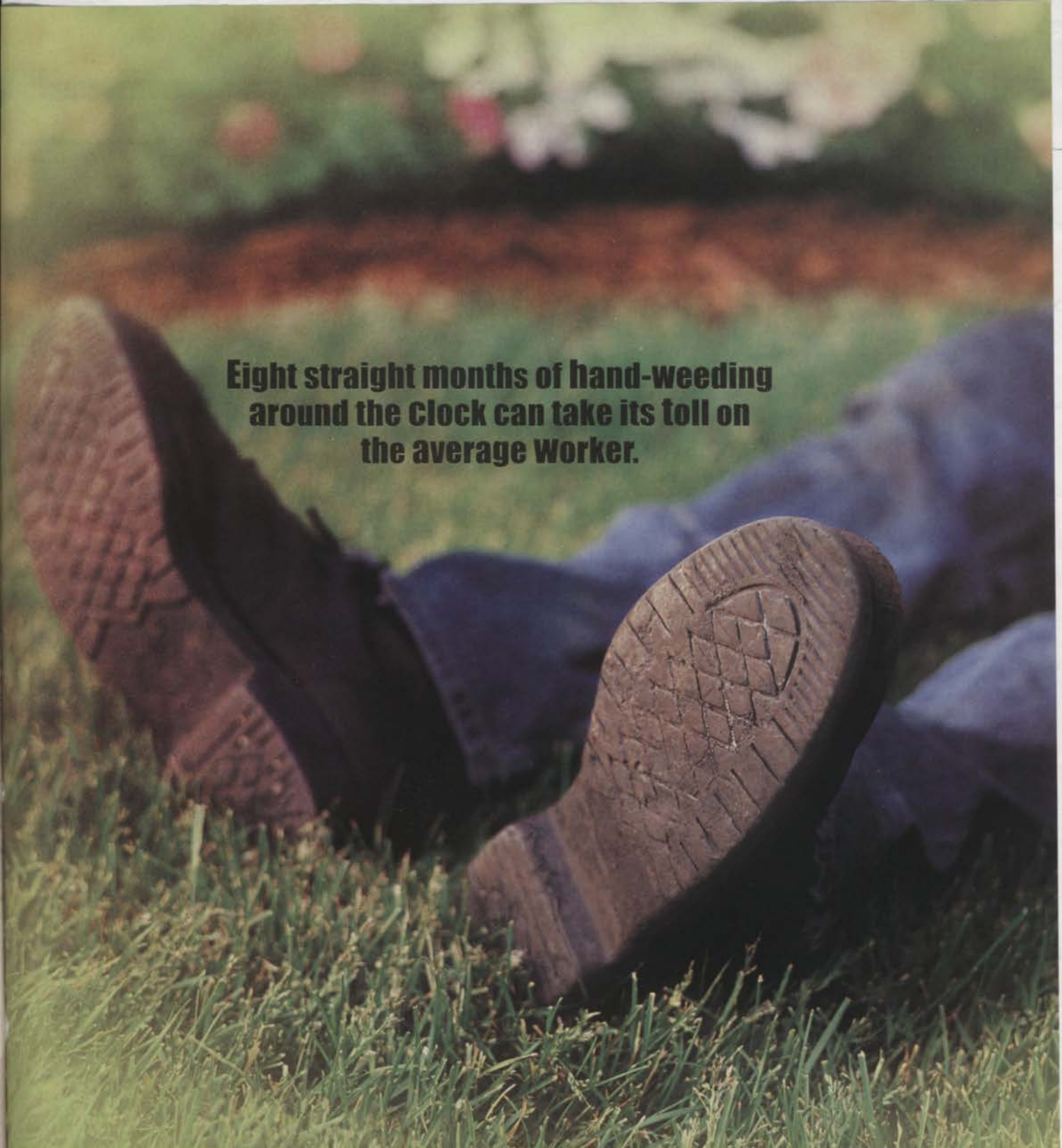
stocking up & battening down

When Hurricane Emily crashed into Bermuda in 1987, Sousa's Landscape Management Owner Jeff Sousa says he was caught unprepared. So, when Hurricane Fabian made its way to the small island from the west coast of Africa 17 years later, he used the advanced warning to his advantage and stocked up on necessary supplies.

"I monitor the weather on my computer and once I knew the hurricane was heading this way and felt it was going to be a direct hit, I advised the staff to get ready," Sousa says. "When a storm like this threatens your area, you have to get organized ahead of it so you're ready to move into action for yourself and your customers as soon as possible after the storm passes."

With a five-day head start on the Category 3 hurricane, Sousa and his staff ensured that all of the company's trucks and applicable equipment were gassed up, key tools like chainsaws and chippers were in good condition for the cleanup work ahead, and generators were in place to handle power outages. Additionally, the staff took stock of safety equipment and contacted equipment suppliers to stock up on essential tools.

"We're a Stihl agent for the island, so we placed significant orders with Stihl Southeast for chainsaws and other equipment and had them rushed in," Sousa says. "We were able to make sure our own employees had the proper equipment for the cleanup effort, and also ended up making sales to the Bermuda regiment and government, as well."



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continued from page 170

areas where they were better suited to the landscape.

"There were cases where large palms would have to come down, and I had to use my experience to decide whether it was worthwhile to save them," Sousa says. "If the head of the palm wasn't damaged and 50 percent of the roots remained in the ground, we would make an effort to brace up the palm and save it. There were some areas down by the beach where the amount of damage to the structures required that we move some palms. We were able to salvage some of the coconut and Washingtonian palms and use them by the front lobby of the hotel and in other areas on the property."

To handle the removal and replacement of these palms – 20 to 40 feet tall in some cases – Sousa's team rented a crane for \$150 per hour from the general contractor on the site. The rental company provided a crane operator who was guided by Sousa's crewmembers as the large palms were transported to their new homes.



PUTTING THE RAIN IN RAIN-FOREST. After Hurricane Fabian brought as much as 10 inches of rainfall and 10 feet of storm surge flooding in some areas, there was no shortage

of water around Bermuda. Still, the Fairmont's landscape redesign included installing an irrigation system – a rarity on the island.

continued on page 174



labor of love

Perched atop Bermuda's highest point, approximately 1/2 mile above sea level, The Fairmont Southampton took the brunt of Hurricane Fabian's wrath (see *hurricane damage in photo above*). Unlike its sister property the Fairmont Hamilton Princess, which operated at limited capacity following the storm, the Fairmont Southampton's 539 guest rooms were closed for six months to accommodate the clean-up and renovation. Though costly for the hotel, the closure provided Sousa's crew with a workforce able to power through the initial clean-up around the grounds.

"Under most circumstances, the entire staff of the resort would have been let go until they opened for business again, but because the Fairmont had such a fantastic insurance package, they could keep most of their staff on at reduced hours," Sousa explains. "Because there weren't any guests to serve, we were able to benefit from these extra pairs of hands during the cleanup phase. There were probably close to 200 people who assisted in the initial cleanup. They purchased grass rakes and chainsaws from us for the meticulous tasks like cleaning up debris from the grounds, and they offered the brawn we needed for larger jobs like pulling damaged plant material through the chip-pers. On our own, our company would not have had enough personnel to deal with a task that large, so they helped us out a lot."

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property makeover

continued from page 172

"Irrigation is almost nonexistent in Bermuda because we have such consistent rain," Farooqui says, noting the 50 to 60 inches of annual rainfall the island receives. "Also, we don't have the same type of city water system as in the United States, so freshwater for irrigation can be scarce. However, Bermuda does get dry spells of two to three weeks, which can put a lot of stress on the plant material – especially the turf areas. In order to protect the new landscape from that stress, the Fairmont chose to install an irrigation system."

To install the irrigation system as well as the necessary plant material on the property, Farooqui says the team trenched for the irrigation lines and installed laterals, mainline and cabling first, and then began installing plants before the full irrigation system was operational. "The important part was to get the plant material in," he says.

"Once that was finished we went back and installed the proper sprayheads."

Overall, the irrigation system accounted for \$100,000 of the company's \$475,000 landscaping budget for the Fairmont Southampton project. The remaining funds went toward plant material, softscaping and labor. Farooqui points out that because of the high cost of plant material on the island, 60 percent of the remaining budget went toward plant costs, while 40 percent went toward labor. "A 25-gallon palm, for instance, can cost \$400 or \$500, or up to \$750 to \$1,000 for a 45-gallon palm," he says. "On the East Coast, a palm may only cost \$200 or \$300," he says. Thankfully, Farooqui says plant prices did not increase due to the low supply and high demand Fabian caused.

Overall, Sousa's Landscape Management maintained a 24-percent profit margin on the Fairmont project, though high labor hours kept the profit from being higher. "Because we had a shorter window for the installation than we anticipated, our crews really pushed to complete the project," Sousa says. "We had 10 crewmembers working 12- and sometimes 16-hour days, six or seven days a week, and toward the end of the project we still outsourced some of the work to another company because we didn't think we'd be able to finish on time."

Farooqui says Sousa hired six crewmembers from another company on the island for the last two weeks of the project, noting that the 15-percent premium they paid for the extra crew was worth it. "If we didn't have those extra hands, we probably wouldn't have finished the job on time," he says. "We had groups of three or four crewmem-



bers working on different areas of the property throughout the project. When the subcontracted crew joined us, they continued with the same work we were doing and our site supervisor directed them on how to get the job done."

Though the project was stressful and challenging, when the six-week timeframe came to an end, both Farooqui and Sousa say they were proud of the project and their crews, and also note a strengthened relationship with the resort. "The day after the hurricane, I went up to the Fairmont and the place was just demolished," Sousa remembers. "I told the management staff, 'I know you have your hands full, but don't worry about the exterior – we've got it.' They were sincerely thankful and that helps a lot when it comes time to sign contracts and work with the property on future jobs."

Farooqui agrees. "We were really proud that our team could live up to its reputation and deliver the design the hotel wanted in such a short period of time," he says. "The Fairmont management is very happy with how the project turned out and now they're talking about incorporating more areas and more upgrades every year for the next five years. They see the value of their landscaping now that it's been restored and we're happy to be partners with them on these projects." ■

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compiled by lauren spiers

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continued on page 180

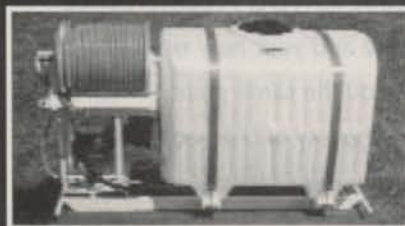


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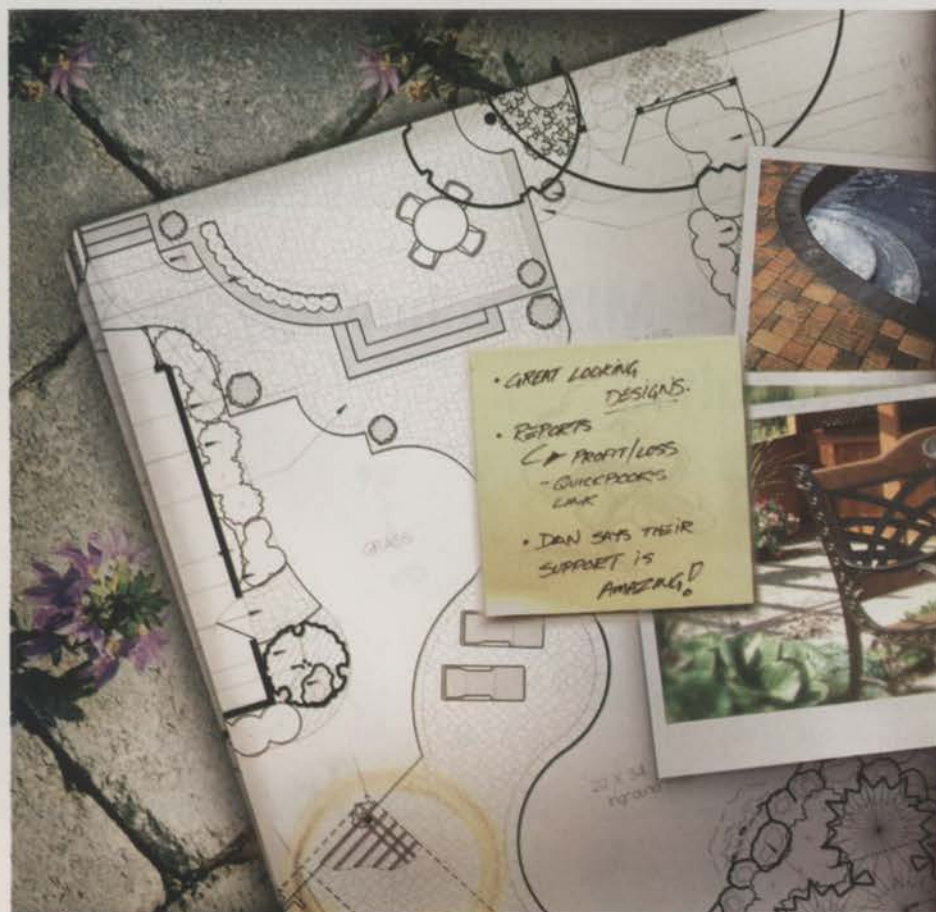
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- For best results, apply between February and April



• Scotts Co. – 888/270-3714, www.scotts.com

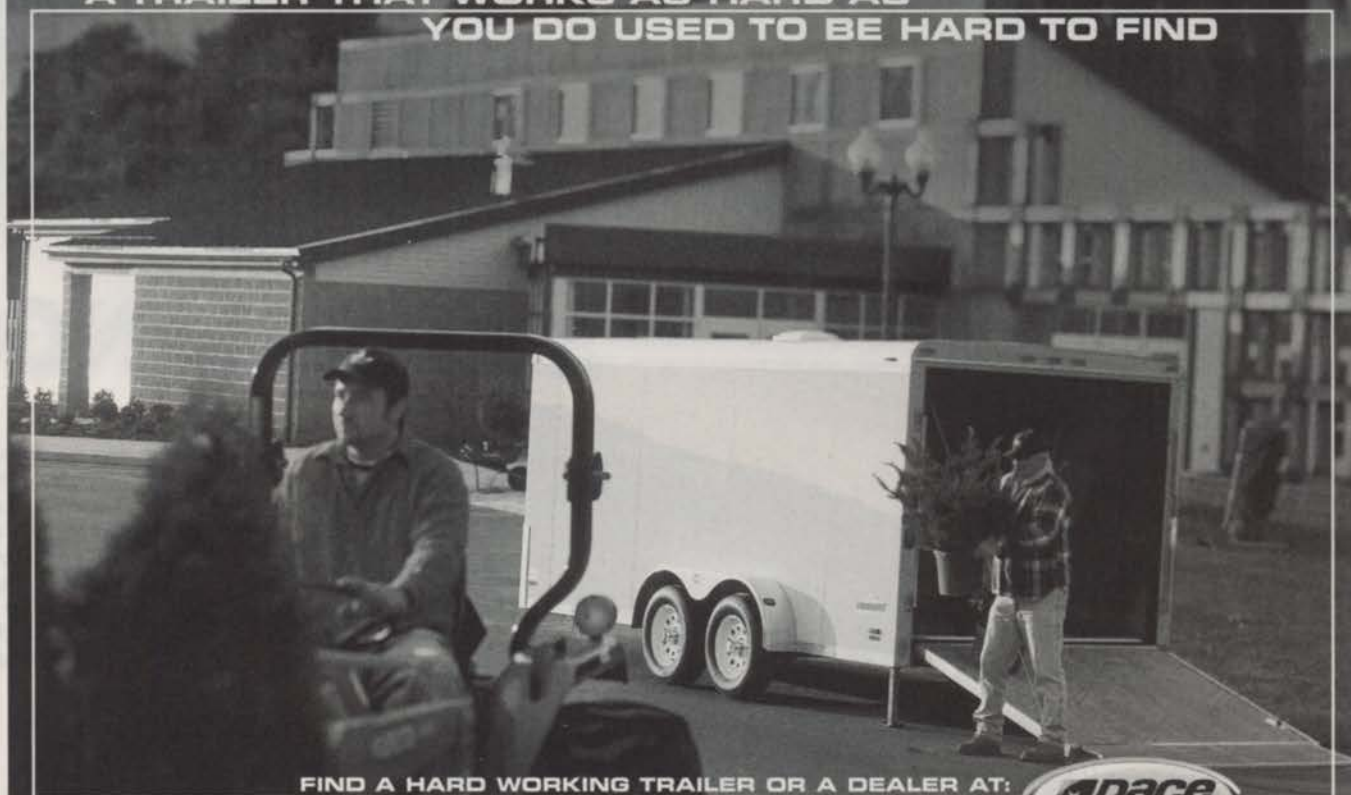
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Spring Valley Greens Grade

- Ultra fine SGN 90 fertilizers are designed to quickly settle with minimal irrigation through the turf canopy
- Ultra fine granules
- Spring Valley has a blending facility dedicated solely to the production of micro and mini fertilizers, preventing the contamination of off-sized granules
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- Eliminates seedhead development



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- Syngenta – 866/796-4368, www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com

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BOB-CAT LEO Plus Mower

- Hydro-Gear transaxles feature built-in charge pumps that provide handling and a smooth, quiet ride
- Maximum ground speed of up to 7.5 mph, which enables it to cut up to 3 acres per hour
- Offers PowerLink, a built-in mobile generator that produces up to 1,000 watts of continuous AC electric power (on 25-hp model only); PowerLink allows operators to hook up to their mower instead of running extension cords or hauling an additional generator to run electrical tools, such as hedge trimmers, blowers, power drills and saws; PowerLink can also work as a back-up generator in emergency situations
- Can handle a tow-behind trailer for transporting equipment like trimmers and edgers, along with an optional 5-bushel-capacity grass catcher and a mulching kit
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- BOB-CAT – 888/922-8873, www.jacobsen.com

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Shindaiwa Speed-Feed Trimmer Head

- Can be reloaded without dismantling
- Line up the eyelets, thread the line through the trimmer head until it exits the opposite eyelet and pull a couple of arms lengths of line; the line is quickly loaded on the spool by turning the large knob on top of the trimmer head
- Spool holds about 25 feet of .095-inch line
- Maximum line size is .105-inch of any shape
- Inner wall reduces amount of dirt inside head
- Large, durable eyelets enhance line life
- Line tensioning system with split spool reduces head vibration
- Bottom cover taps on ground to advance the line and allows head to glide while trimming
- Fits all straightshaft Shindaiwa trimmers and brushcutters; adapter hardware available to fit with most major competitive models
- Shindaiwa – www.shindaiwa.com

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- Business software featuring enhanced Quick Books integration and industry-specific scheduling options
 - Turns user's current software package into industry-specific management software
 - Features scheduling, job costing and invoicing capabilities
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 - Alocet – 877/529-6659, www.alocet.com
- Circle 203 on reader service card

John Deere 997 Diesel Z-Trak Mower

- Powered by a 31-hp, 3-cylinder, liquid-cooled Yanmar engine
- Has a 7-Iron deck
- Fully enclosed engine compartment reduces overall engine noise
- Choose from a 60- or 72-inch side-discharge or a 60-inch rear-discharge deck
- Full-floating deck provides vacuuming action to lift grass before cutting
- Cutting positions range from 1.5 to 5 inches in .25 increments
- Hydraulically adjustable deck lift is optional
- 12-gallon fuel tank
- Has transport speeds up to 11.5 miles per hour
- Features a folding two-post ROPS
- John Deere – 800/537-8233, www.johndeere.com

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- Can be used as an alternate power source
- Has transaxles by Hydro-Gear with built-in charge pumps
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- Jacobsen – 888/922-8873, www.jacobsen.com

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e-mail: sean.stroub@acresgroup.com.

For Wauconda, contact Jeff Dumas at 847/487-3005, fax 847/487-4841,

e-mail: jeff.dumas@acresgroup.com

For Plainfield, contact Jeff Kelly at 815/439-2420, fax 815/609-3643, e-mail: jeff.kelly@acresgroup.com

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DESIGN/BUILD/MAINTENANCE

Company located on the Isle of Palms, a barrier island of Charleston, South Carolina. Looking for a well educated and experienced person to work in the upper management with high-end residential clientele. Horticulture or design degree required. Other duties include; meeting w/customers, up selling existing customers, auto cad, problem identification/solving, training, and company development.

Also, NSPI, Geniuses 3, Kinman assoc., or state certification a plus. Fax Resume to 843/886-4918 or email jparker815@aol.com.

HELP WANTED

NURSERY MANAGER

Spillane's Nursery is a well-established Wholesale Nursery located in Southwestern Massachusetts and is seeking an aggressive, self-motivated and experienced individual to run the every day operation of our 50-acre farm and wholes distribution location. Major responsibilities include managing our growing wholesale yard and in-house sales. 5 years experience and knowledge of all types plant material is a must. Experience with equipment is preferred as well as excellent communication skills. We offer an excellent compensation package and a competitive salary. Please send resume in confidence to: Spillane's Nursery & Landscape Co. Inc., 230 Bedford Street, Middleboro, Mass. 02346 or fax to 508/946-4907 or email to spillanesnursery@msn.com.

HELP WANTED

GREEN HOUSE GROWER

Spillane's Nursery is looking for an experienced grower for our growing greenhouse production. Seeking a self-starter with extensive knowledge on plants, soils, insects and disease. Responsibilities will include production of annuals, perennials & ground cover throughout the year. Pay commensurate with experience, motivated individual for this position. Please send resume in confidence to: Spillane's Nursery & Landscape Co. Inc., 230 Bedford Street, Middleboro, Mass. 02346 or fax to 508/946-4907 or email to spillanesnursery@msn.com.

HELP WANTED

LANDSCAPE DESIGN & SALES

Spillane's Nursery & Landscape Co. Inc., is seeking a talented individual to fill the position of Designer/Estimator for our well-established landscape division. Must be experienced in plant material, landscape design and estimating. Must have excellent client communication skills and the ability to supervise the installation of the finished product. We offer an excellent compensation package and a competitive salary. Please send resume in confidence to: Spillane's Nursery & Landscape Co. Inc., 230 Bedford Street, Middleboro, Mass. 02346 or fax to 508/946-4907 or e-mail to: spillanesnursery@msn.com.

HELP WANTED

MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR

Spillane's Nursery Landscape Co. Inc., is seeking a responsible individual to fill the position of Maintenance Supervisor to manage a number of crews at various locations. Five years experience in business and personal year maintenance. A good knowledge of plant material and yard equipment is required. Excellent communication skills with both client and employee are expected in this position. We can offer a competitive salary to the experienced, motivated individual for this position. Please send resume in confidence to: Spillane's Nursery & Landscape Co. Inc., 230 Bedford Street, Middleboro, Mass. 02346 or fax to 508/946-4907 or e-mail to: spillanesnursery@msn.com.

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Property Patrol at Belknap Landscape Co.

At Belknap Landscape Co., Gilford, N.H., we've developed an add-on service that fits our client niche and helps us strengthen client relationships without creating an undue burden on our staff — Property Patrol.

Just as you may ask a neighbor to bring in the mail while you're on vacation, our Property Patrol clients trust us to keep an eye on their homes while they're away. Because 90 percent of our clients are second- or vacation-home owners who are often only in the area on weekends, this service is valuable.

Our work on a Property Patrol visit varies depending on the property. A visit to a condominium unit may take 15 minutes as we go through a 5-point checklist, including: thermostat settings, water pipes, windows (panes and locks), doors (locks) and lights and appliances. However, our high-end, single-family residential customers may have a long checklist for us to go through, requiring as long as two hours to complete, including travel time.

We inspect both the interior and exterior areas of our clients' properties during Property Patrol visits. Outside the home, we look for downed limbs, water or heat loss, cracks or breaks in the windows and doors, and during the winter we look for ice dams and dangerous or structurally harmful icicles. Inside the house, we run water pumps, flush toilets, check thermostat settings and open and close garage doors to keep them from sticking.

Many clients also ask us to turn lights on and off in certain areas of the house, and some clients request specific details, such as monitoring the levels of the propane tanks that heat their indoor swimming pools. As each item is checked off, the individual conducting the property patrol makes notes of any details. In this case, he or she would write down the propane levels and may also take note of the thermostat setting, any lights that may not be working properly, etc.

The goal for a Property Patrol visit is to make the house look "lived in" while the client

5 Keys to Offering Property Patrol

1. Create a checklist of items your staff will be able to oversee while clients are away from home. Offer the service to all existing clients and include it as an option on contract forms.
2. Offer pricing structures that appeal to homeowners who take long vacations or those who frequently return to their properties. Per-visit and seasonal pricing are two options.
3. Have members of the management staff perform property patrol services to build trusting relationships between clients and the company.
4. Stagger visits to clients' homes to eliminate any patterns that burglars may follow. Ensure that individuals performing property patrols schedule enough time each week to make the necessary visits.
5. Document all details of a property visit, including any changes that are made, such as thermostat settings, lights turned on or off and problems that are found.

is away. Though we won't feed pets or take out the garbage, we may bring in the mail or newspaper so those items don't serve as telltale signs that the homeowners are away. Some visits have had unique outcomes, such as the discovery of rats or bats in the house, or even finding the homeowner has returned. Because of that, we make sure to stay in touch with our clients if any strange activity is found on the property or if the homeowners plan to return early and need to reschedule a visit.

be a regular day and time; however, some customers request visits at different times of day or on different days of the week so as not to create a set pattern that a potential burglar may follow. In these instances, a division manager may visit a property on Monday, Wednesday and Friday one week, and Monday, Tuesday and Thursday the following week. As such, accurate routing becomes difficult and the division managers generally add the visits into their own schedules as time permits.

We added Property Patrol to our service menu in 1997 after a request from one of our clients. Several Belknap Landscape Co. divisions have acquired new business as a result of the service. Our snow removal, site lighting and irrigation divisions, for instance, all have benefitted from new work earned as a result of suggestions made during Property Patrol visits. Additionally, upon signing a Property Patrol contract, we ask clients to provide us with contact information for other vendors they currently use or that were involved in the building of the house, such as plumbers, electricians, window suppliers, gas companies, etc. If we find a problem at the house during a visit, such as a burst pipe or broken window, our division managers can contact the appropriate vendor and have the problem solved before the client returns. In these situations, the division manager would advise the client of the problem first and receive their OK to supervise another contractor's work on

their property. These services would then be billed to our company and the client will receive a bill from us, including an added charge to manage the work.

Overall, the Property Patrol service strengthens our relationships with our clients by showing them that our company is as safe and secure as they want their homes to be while they're away. From trusting us with their house keys and security codes to knowing that we'll be able to rectify any problems that may arise while they're gone, our clients recognize that we are a trustworthy company with their best interests in mind. — Andrew Morse LL



Currently, 2 to 3 percent of our clientele buys into Property Patrol. We offer the service to everyone, though many clients already have full-time caretakers or are outside the 45-minute radius we prefer for this service.

Routing for Property Patrol visits is less structured than our regular maintenance schedules. The service is most popular during the winter months and our five divisional managers are responsible for visiting Property Patrol sites on a rotating basis. When we work out the Property Patrol contract with the client, they will specify the number of times per week they would like us to visit. This could



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