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Development

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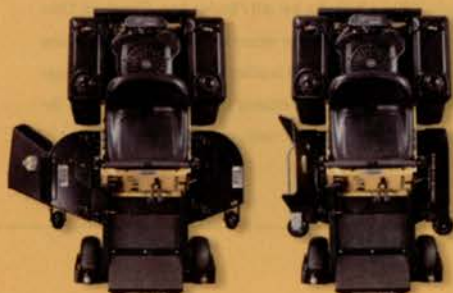
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Lawn & Landscape On The Road

At *Lawn & Landscape*, our top priority is to make sure the news and articles you read in *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and on *Lawn & Landscape* Online are up-to-date and accurate. To do that, *Lawn & Landscape's* editorial staff spends several weeks a year on the road visiting industry events around the country. As soon as we return, our responsibility is to report back to you, the reader, sharing the latest products, news and business information available to help you be more successful.



To help you keep tabs on where the *Lawn & Landscape* editorial staff is today, we've debuted the *On the Road* section of *Lawn & Landscape* Online, which will be updated frequently with news briefs from manufacturer field days, regional and national trade shows, and *Lawn & Landscape's* own conferences and events. Check it out - it's right on the *Lawn & Landscape* homepage.

Best of the Web

Do your customers need to know how much money your company brings in per labor hour? What about the individual price for each shrub you're installing in their yard? Is offering a grand total for lawn and landscape services appropriate when billing a customer or does itemizing have its advantages? *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board users recently tackled that very topic. Find out how different business owners handle itemized billing at their companies by reading this month's *Best of the Web* feature on page 70.

Lawn & Landscape ONLINE Extras

ONLINE EXTRAS

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

- Professional certification has become a big issue in the green industry. How can you earn those letters after your name and what can they do to benefit your business? Find out more about CLT, CLP and other designations by visiting our January Online Extras section.
- Have you made your New Year's resolutions yet? What about a resolution for your business operations? After reading the *Editor's Note* in the January issue of *Lawn & Landscape*, check out our Online Extras section for some business resolutions recommended by industry consultants to implement in your company this new year.
- Need more information on the new overtime rules? Find additional points from Jean Seawright's *In the Office* column in this month's Online Extras section.

WEB TOOLS

DAILY NEWS

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

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

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Your Top 4 New Year's Resolutions

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



Many contractors wish their companies could stand out more clearly from the competition. They wish customers would buy smarter and pay for the services they get. So, in 2005, *Lawn & Landscape* is going to cover marketing, sales and pricing more than ever.

An underlying aspect of the value/pricing issue is that lowball competitors often set the price bar so low. In response, I've thought about some good advice I've picked up along the way regarding profitability, and I'd like to propose four New Year's resolutions for you to consider regarding getting paid what you deserve for what you do.

Resolution #1: Recognize Your Costs. The owner of a Denver remodeling company shared some powerful pricing advice with me a few years ago and it applies to any contractor. This owner had grown his company from a one-person start-up into one of the largest companies in the area. His key to success came from a seminar on estimating. The seminar trainer convinced him of the power of accurate estimating – that if you really know your bottom line job costs and your profit goal, this empowers you to set your price with total confidence. If a prospect won't pay you what you need, then you have to walk. Simple, powerful and absolutely true. No one can knowingly afford to take jobs at a loss. But if you don't know the real cost, it is possible to take such jobs in ignorance.

To make money – guaranteed – all you have to do is know exactly the minimum price you need to cover your costs and then add your profit. If you do this and make the sale, you will make the profit. Do that a lot and your business will be a success.

Resolution #2: Recognize What You Deserve. My first boss taught me the difference between pay and profit. As a business owner you are entitled to be paid for your work and time. Beyond this, your business also needs and deserves a profit. As was explained to me in a conversation about setting advertising rates, a business profit should be greater than what the owner could get by selling the company assets and then investing the money. For example, if your business assets total \$500,000, and you could earn a 7 percent annual return on

that investment (\$35,000), then that fact should help you create a minimum profit target for your company. And that profit is for your business; it is above and beyond your fair compensation for working.

The idea that customers "give" you a profit is wrong. The owner of a business deserves a profit for that business for the risk he or she is taking and for the asset value tied up in his or her business.

Resolution #3: Recognize the Value You Bring. If you are selling mowing, weed control, tree planting, retaining wall construction or other services, you might not be getting as much profit as your competitor who is selling the same services, but pushing the fact that his clients can have "the best looking lawn on the block," "weekends free" or "a space to entertain friends on weekends." The customer decides the value of the services and expertise you sell. So, before giving them a proposal priced at what you think they will buy, ask the prospect enough questions to find out what they expect and then propose the job and price accordingly.

Resolution #4: Recognize Time Wasters. Sandler Sales Training teaches you to get money on the table early in the discussion. In fact, talking about money right away helps contractors separate the tire kickers from the serious buyers. Your time is worth money, so why waste it hoping some prospect might be serious or that they can afford your services? You're better off disqualifying tire kickers and people pumping you for ideas as fast as possible, and then use that time that you saved to qualify other prospects.

By the way, tire kickers and dreamers won't be convinced by your time investment to agree to your outlandish price. Now, if you think your price might be outlandish, then please refer to resolutions No. 2 and No. 3 again.

Here's to a prosperous and profitable 2005!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger Stanley".



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USE READER SERVICE #13

A Tale of Two Taxies

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




I believe delivering exceptional customer service is absolutely crucial to the success of any business, and the lessons in this are everywhere we look. This month, I want to share with you a tale of two taxies – a stark contrast between good and bad service I witnessed on a recent business trip to Denver.

I arrived there late on a Friday night. I was tired. I had worked all day at Grunder Landscaping, drove to the airport to catch a flight to Denver, and then needed to catch a cab to go downtown to the hotel where I was speaking the next day. The Denver airport is about 45 minutes from the city – a long cab ride. I told the airport attendant I needed a cab and one quickly pulled up. The driver was a young man. He put my suitcase in the trunk and said, "Where you headed?" I named the hotel where I was staying and we traveled on our way in the dark. He never spoke a word the entire trip, and I did not try to speak either. The cab was dirty and smelled like a men's locker room. I lost count of the cars the driver cut off on the way to the hotel. He took numerous phone calls from friends, chatting away with little regard to the road ahead. And as much as I was impressed that a Ford Crown Victoria with 197,000 miles on it could reach speeds of more than 80 miles per hour, I begged him to slow down. When we miraculously arrived at the hotel in one piece, I paid him the \$46 fare and gave him a very small tip – small enough that he would know I was not impressed with his service.

After spending the next day conducting a motivational seminar for entrepreneurs, I was ready to fly home. With my bags packed, I checked out of the hotel, thanked the staff at the front desk and asked the bellman for a cab to take me to the airport. At the blow of his whistle a sparkling cab pulled up. A neatly dressed young man in a uniform jumped out of the cab, raced to my side, grabbed my bags and introduced himself. "Hello sir, I'm Jimmy. I'll be taking you safely to the airport today. Please have a seat in my cab." I was impressed immediately. He got in the car and said, "Sir, it will take us about 40 minutes to get to the airport. Please fasten your seat belt. I'm sure you have some people who care about you, so I'm going to obey the speed limit and get both of us to the airport safely. I know you are probably tired so I won't bother you, but I do want you to enjoy your ride. I have Diet Coke,

regular Coke, Sprite, water, and apple juice if you would like a drink. And I also have some wonderful chocolate chip cookies my wife makes. But if you want one of those, I insist that you drink milk, so I've got that too. I also have mints and gum and there is a copy of today's paper in the seat pouch in front of you. Feel free to take it with you. Lastly, what type of music do you listen to? I have all kinds of CDs loaded and I will play whatever you wish to listen to." I could not believe what was I was hearing. I told him I would love to try one of his wife's cookies with milk, I would read the paper and I like country music.

Within seconds, the soothing sounds of George Strait were being played. The cookie was excellent and the milk was a perfect complement. As we headed to the airport, I became curious about this man who had so impressed me. I asked Jimmy how long he had been driving a cab. He told me he worked in a factory for five years before he was laid off. The only thing he could find to do was to drive a cab. "Three years ago, I made the best of it and here I am," he said. He quickly found out that if he did a few extra things, his passengers gave him great tips and called him when they were coming into town to ask him if he would pick them up at the airport. He did not say what he made a year, but he did say his wife likes that he now makes twice what he made at the factory and has more freedom. The 45-minute ride seemed like it took only 15 minutes. Here was a man who had made the most of a seemingly unfortunate situation and had approached his new job with enthusiasm and showmanship, and it had worked. When we arrived at the airport, he hopped out, got my bags, handed me his card, and said, "Thanks for allowing me to take you to the airport. The fee is \$43, and here's my card. If you ever come back to Denver or have friends or family who do, tell them to call me." I handed him \$43 along with a large tip. Jimmie was very appreciative but not shocked – I bet he gets tips like that all the time.

The lesson here is clear. How you deliver service is key. Both cab drivers got me from point A to point B. One driver has a passion for his job and has figured out what his clients want. The other just has a job. One is tremendously successful, the other is just getting by. You can learn a lot from a cab ride. 

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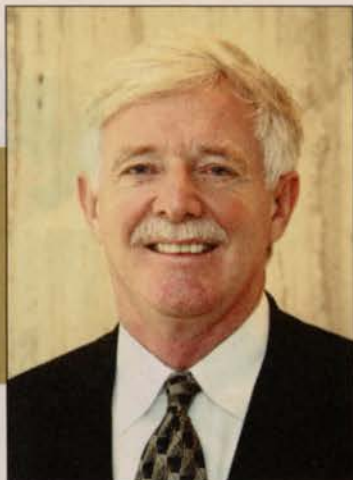
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USE READER SERVICE #14

The Operating Room

Budgeting Made Easy

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



No matter what size your company is – from one truck to 100 – this is the time when every company must develop a budget for the upcoming business year. If you have never created an annual budget, don't fret – it's easier than you think. Here are seven easy steps to create a budget and make more money.

- **Step No. 1:** Start by designing a simple form on an 8½-by-11-inch sheet of paper with information like the one below.
- **Step No. 2:** Make a copy of this form for each of the accounts you have in your financial chart of accounts. This includes all accounts in the sales and expenses columns.
- **Step No. 3:** If you have assigned numbers to each account, fill in the account number on each form, as well as the account name and a description of the category. For an account called "materials," you may use the description "landscape installation plant materials."

SAMPLE ANNUAL BUDGET FORM

BUDGET 2005

Account No. _____ Account Name _____
Description: _____

Dollars	Notes
Jan. \$ _____	_____
Feb. \$ _____	_____
March \$ _____	_____
April \$ _____	_____
May \$ _____	_____
June \$ _____	_____
July \$ _____	_____
Aug. \$ _____	_____
Sept. \$ _____	_____
Oct. \$ _____	_____
Nov. \$ _____	_____
Dec. \$ _____	_____

Budgeted by : _____

■ **Step No. 4:** Make another copy of each form to give to the individual who will make the first attempt at filling in the monthly budget numbers. Remember to keep the original copy of each form in a binder for reference.

■ **Step No. 5:** Distribute these copies to the individuals who will provide their best "guesstimate" of the dollars your company will spend in their division each month. For instance, your installation manager may be best to suggest budget appropriations for the "materials" account mentioned earlier. Your managers in each division should have the best handle on the budgets they need to operate effectively. Try to get as many employees participating in the budget process as possible to get a clear sense of where your money is going. Set a deadline for forms to be returned to you for review.

■ **Step No. 6:** Sit down with each manager to review their estimates. This might be a group meeting where others have an opportunity to provide input. Together, agree on an appropriate monthly budget and write that dollar amount on the original forms you had filed away.

■ **Step No. 7:** Input the budget information into your software program. If you have QuickBooks, you can input the monthly dollar amount for each account under the "Create a Budget" tab. Other budgeting programs have similar features, or you may choose to create an Excel template. Use these programs to track your actual expenditures against your budgets. This extra step lets the computer show you, on a monthly basis, what you actually spent on each item in your budget and what you expected to spend by comparison.

Remember, an effective budgeting program will show you how much money you should expect to gain at the end of the year. If you are not happy with what you see, look at your numbers and make necessary adjustments. Also, use your budget to make good business decisions. If you find that certain expenditures "aren't in the numbers," use that to help you budget more accurately in coming months and years.

After two or three months, you will get a good feel as to the accuracy of your estimates. You also might find it necessary to discipline yourself by going through the budgeting process every quarter.

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Patent #'s 5,484,501; 5,330,828; and Patent Pending

USE READER SERVICE #15

Reviewing the New Overtime Laws

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



After 40 long years, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has updated the Fair Labor Standards Act and has issued new regulations pertaining to salaried employees and overtime. Until the DOL develops a history of enforcement under the new rules, much of the interpretation will be left to employers.

The good news is that the updated rules are more clearly written and provide clarification on a number of formerly questionable practices. The bad news is that the new rules are explained in a 281-page report – hardly the type of document an employer relishes reading. We, however, have very carefully analyzed every page, comparing the new rules to the old ones and have consulted with veteran investigators to obtain their opinion and understanding of the changes.

Here is an outline of the most important provisions. Remember, these provisions pertain to the Fair Labor Standards Act, a federal regulation. Some states have more stringent overtime rules that supercede the federal rules. If you are in one of those states, you must abide by the stricter of the two rules.

NEW OVERTIME PAY RULES.

- Employees classified as exempt from overtime under the executive, administrative, computer or professional exemptions must be compensated on a salary basis at a rate of not less than \$455 per week (\$23,660 per year).
- An employee with total annual compensation of at least \$100,000 is deemed exempt if the employee customarily and regularly performs one or more exempt duties or responsibilities of an executive, administrative or professional employee.
- The White Collar exemptions are *not* available for use by manual laborers or other “blue collar” workers who perform work involving repetitive operations with their hands or physical skill and energy. This includes maintenance and construction workers, carpenters, electricians, mechanics, plumbers, craftsmen and general laborers.
- Employers may deduct from the salary of an exempt employee for unpaid disciplinary suspensions of one or more full days imposed in good faith for infractions of workplace conduct rules. Such suspensions must be imposed pursuant to a written policy applicable to all employees.
- Employers are not required to pay the full salary to an exempt employee in the initial or terminal week of employ-

ment. Rather, an employer may proportionate part of an employee’s full salary for the time actually worked in the first and last weeks of employment.

- Employers are not required to pay the full salary to an exempt employee taking unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act. An employer may, however, pay a proportionate part of the full salary for the time actually worked.
- An employer who makes improper deductions from a salaried exempt employee will lose the exemption if the facts demonstrate that the employer did not intend to pay the employee on a salaried basis. In those cases, the exemption will be lost during the time period in which the improper deductions were made for all employees in the same job classification working for the same manager(s) responsible for the deductions.
- Improper deductions that are either isolated or inadvertent will not result in loss of the exemption for employees subject to the improper deductions if the employer reimburses the employees.
- Employers may provide exempt employees with additional compensation without losing the exemption if the employee receives the minimum guaranteed salary. The additional compensation may be in the form of bonuses or commissions, a flat sum, or may be based on extra hours worked.
- The White Collar exemptions do not apply to employees training for employment in positions that qualify for an exemption. The employee must actually perform the duties required by the exemption.

TIME WILL TELL. While the new rules are mostly good news for employers, how the DOL chooses to interpret and enforce them remains to be seen. The Wage and Hour Division has been known for its anti-employer, inflexible approach. Can these same investigators who, for 40 years, have found it easy to say “No” to employers now begin to say “Yes?” Time will tell.

Employers should proceed with caution and err on the conservative side until more is known about the DOL’s interpretation and enforcement of the new rules. 

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Check the Online Extras section for further explanation of the overtime laws and find out what rules have *not* changed.

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NATIONAL NEWS

Congress Fails to Increase H-2B Cap

The American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) expressed the growing frustration of the green industry with Congress' opposition to increasing the H-2B temporary guest worker program cap. The H-2B program annually grants 66,000 work visas for employers demonstrating a seasonal need for foreign workers.

In March of 2004, the cap was reached unexpectedly early, leaving many industries without access to workers needed to keep their businesses competitive.

Though an omnibus spending bill passed during the recent session of Congress, ANLA notes that members of Congress failed to include a bipartisan amendment to resolve the issue. Though lawmakers did vote to provide the high tech industry with a 20,000 worker cap increase, H-2B employers and the multi-sector Essential Worker Immigration Coalition were unable to reach a bipartisan compromise to the amendment.

ANLA says three key challenges pre-

vented any actions that would have helped the service industry:

- Lack of support from key republicans who made final decisions on the spending bills.
- The opposition of the anti-immigrant and "restrictionist" conservatives in Congress and vocal but misinformed constituents.
- An erroneous perception that H-2B guest workers take jobs from American workers.

"What every American needs to understand is that there has never been, nor will there ever be, an H-2B job that goes to a foreign guest worker at the expense of a U.S. worker," says ANLA Director of Legislative Relations, John Meredith. "Any qualified U.S. worker who applies for an H-2B job must be hired."

H-2B offers the only legal channel for semi-skilled workers to enter and fill seasonal service sector jobs for which too few

Americans apply. Despite the setback, ANLA is preparing to work with the next Congress and the Bush Administration to resolve the H-2B issue and to pursue comprehensive labor and immigration law reforms on behalf of the green industry.

"The H-2B reform is the most urgent labor concern of all service industries," Meredith says. Because of the seasonal need standard, an H-2B worker's visa is valid for a maximum of 10 months. Getting a worker under the program is a long and tedious process that starts at the state level, moves to the U.S. Department of Labor, then to the Department of Homeland Security and ultimately the Department of State which issues the work visa.



Photo: Hunter Industries

ASSOCIATION NEWS

McIntire Named to ALCA/PLCAA Leadership Position

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) announced the appointment of Chuck McIntire as vice president of Atlanta operations and business development manager for the new association being formed by the merger of PLCAA and the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA).

"I am very pleased that PLCAA and the new association will be able to utilize Chuck's vast industry experience and leadership in developing the premier green industry association for the future," notes PLCAA President Jim Campanella. "The already strong staffs of both associations are

fortified with the addition of Chuck's talents and our members will benefit from an individual who is well recognized and respected in our industry."

McIntire has more than 25 years of industry-related experience, including Executive Board experience with PLCAA where he co-chaired one of PLCAA's most successful management conferences in 2000. His past industry experience also includes being vice president of TurfPride, a privately-owned lawn care company in Kennesaw, Ga.; regional director for the southeast for Scotts LawnService of Marysville, Ohio; and cor-



Chuck McIntire

porate technical director for All Green Corp. in Marietta, Ga. Additionally, McIntire was honored with a *Lawn & Landscape Leadership Award* in 2003 for his dedication to the industry.

"I am assuming this role with pride and respect at a time where the merger of the associations provides a very exciting opportunity to contribute to a new green industry association that will lead the industry to new heights," McIntire says. "As we work through the new strategic plan and key result areas that have been detailed to us by the new association's board of directors, I look forward to utilizing my experience as a valuable asset for the association and its members."

In addition to his business management experience, McIntire's operational background and technical knowledge demonstrate an industry passion noted by a bachelor's of science degree in botany from the University of Okla-

homa and graduate studies in plant physiology from North Texas State University.

McIntire lives in Marietta, Ga., with his wife, Tami and four children, Blake, Dayle, Reid and Marissa.

Fender Announces His Retirement

ROLLING MEADOWS, Ill. – After more than two decades of dedicated service, Doug Fender, executive director of Turfgrass Producers International (TPI), has announced his retirement. Kirk Hunter, TPI's meetings manager has been named Fender's successor.

During his tenure with TPI, the organization has grown to more than 1,100 members in 40 countries. Fender was also instrumental in forming the International Turf Producers Foundation (ITPF) in 1994. Under his direction, ITPF has raised more than \$500,000 dollars to fund turfgrass-related research.

In conjunction with his duties at TPI, Fender also serves on the executive committee and board of directors of Project EverGreen, a coalition representing all segments of the green industry and dedicated to promoting the positive values of landscapes. For nearly 20 years, he was a director of the National Council of Agricultural Employers. He also created a coalition of the Irrigation Association, the American Nursery & Landscape Association and the Associated Landscape Contractors of America to create a Web site that addresses landscape water conservation techniques. In 2001, he edited the book, "WATER RIGHT – Conserving Our Water, Preserving Our Environment." In 2002, the Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association recognized Fender's contributions by naming him the Environmental Communicator of the Year.

"This organization has had a number of accomplishments that I'm proud to have been a part of," Fender says. "The growth of the organization and TPI's interaction with groups like Project EverGreen has been tremendous. It's been something we as an industry have wished for for so long and it's evident how much we can do if we get things together."

Upon hearing the news of Fender's re-

tirement, TPI President Art Campbell shared the thoughts of many of Fender's colleagues. "Our admiration, respect and appreciation for all that Doug has done for TPI, ITPF and the turfgrass industry as a whole is difficult to put into words," Campbell said. "His leadership, dedication, commitment to excellence and the manner in which he has represented producers, suppliers and consumers alike, will have a lasting impact on everyone associated with our industry."

"As TPI moves forward to take on tomorrow's challenges and explore new opportunities, we are comfortable in knowing that Doug will continue to be accessible and visible until his successor is in place," Campbell adds. "The name recognition associated with TPI is a direct result of Doug's guidance, management skills and professional stature within the industry."

Fender adds that he would like to stay in touch with the green industry through writing and speaking engagements and looks forward to watching the industry's future unfold. A native of northeastern Colorado, Fender received both his Bachelor of Science and Master of Arts degrees in journalism from the University of Colorado at Boulder. During retirement, Fender, who currently resides in Inverness, Ill., with his wife Sharon, will focus on his wife's growing construction business, do more with the small travel business he started and spend more time with his children and grandchildren.



Doug Fender

NEWS TO NOTE

Don Karnes, Dave Slott Leave TruGreen, Join Sunair to Form New Pest Control Division

MEMPHIS, Tenn. – After years working together for ServiceMaster's lawn care and landscape brands, Don Karnes, former TruGreen Cos. president, and Dave Slott, former president and chief operating officer of TruGreen-ChemLawn, have decided to leave the company in pursuit of other interests.

Karnes and Slott, along with John Hayes, another past senior executive with ServiceMaster, left the company to manage a new pest control services division of Sunair Electronics. Sunair plans to expand this new division through acquisitions and internal growth, and finance the expansion by accessing the equity and debt capital markets.

Prior to this announcement, Karnes served as president of the TruGreen Group (2001-2004), president of Terminix and the TruGreen Group (1996-2000), and president and chief operating officer of TruGreen-ChemLawn (1991-96), and has held various other executive roles since 1979. Slott served as president and chief operating officer of TruGreen-ChemLawn (1996-2004), and has held other executive roles since 1981. Hayes served as executive vice president of the



Don Karnes



Dave Slott

Industry News

TruGreen Cos. (2000-04), and has held various other executive roles since 1975. Hayes joins Sunair's newly formed pest control services division as chief executive officer, and Slott and Karnes join the new group as president and chief operating officer, respectively.

The ServiceMaster Co. announced that Dennis Sutton is being promoted to chief operating officer and interim president of TruGreen-ChemLawn in place of Slott and Karnes. Sutton was previously senior vice president of the company. He and Robert Fates, president of TruGreen LandCare, will now report directly to Jonathan Ward, chairman and chief executive officer of ServiceMaster.

www.lawnandlandscape.com

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

The Care of Trees Acquires Treescapes

OAKLAND, Calif. – The Care of Trees, Wheeling, Ill., announced its merger with Treescapes of Oakland, Calif., which provides a wide range of tree care services to residential, commercial, industrial and municipal clients. Founded in 1977, Treescapes is the second West Coast company to become part of The Care of Trees. Safe and Beautiful by The Care of Trees, its West Coast office in Menlo Park, was acquired in 2002.

This acquisition is part of The Care of Trees' overall strategy to expand its base in the lucrative northern California market. "Treescapes is a perfect addition to The Care of Trees," says Scott Jamieson, the company's president and chief executive officer. "Both companies share the

same philosophy and dedication to tree care and client service. We plan for this new office to become the center for expanding operations throughout the East Bay area."

The acquisition was also done with an eye toward employee development. "The Care of Trees is an employee-owned organization," Jamieson says. "Consequently, one purpose of our growth is to create additional opportunities for our teammates, who are also our shareholders."

"Our acquisition of Treescapes enables both new and long-term employees of the two companies to benefit from the consistent skills training and employee development programs that The Care of Trees

(continued on page 24)

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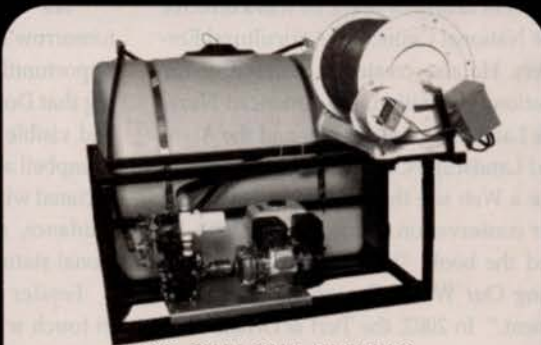
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USE READER SERVICE #19

Industry News

(continued from page 22)

provides," Jamieson continued.

Treescapes will continue to operate as usual under the direction of its founder, Torrey Young, whose new title will be district manager. His entire staff remains intact, and includes many long-term employees. At the same time, Young also will assume the presidency of the American Society of Consulting Arborists for 2005.

The Care of Trees now has its West Coast offices in Menlo Park, Calif., and employs six certified arborists and 36 staff members operating a fleet of 15 trucks.

Headquartered in Wheeling, Ill., The Care of Trees is now a \$42 million company, growing organically and by acquisition. It is the second largest tree care company in the world that focuses specifically on private and commercial arboriculture.

With more than 500 employees, The Care of Trees has divisions serving more than 60,000 clients in metropolitan Chicago; Washington, D.C.; San Francisco; New York and Philadelphia.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Bartlett Expands Canadian Presence

STAMFORD, Conn. – The F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Co. Canada, a subsidiary of The F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Co., announced that it has acquired the business operations of Bostock Tree Service and Hartshorne Tree Service. These are the second and third acquisitions Bartlett Tree Experts completed in Canada, enabling the company to serve customers in the Saanich Peninsula area in addition to Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia and Toronto and Bracebridge, Ontario.

"These acquisitions represent our commitment to growth in the Canadian market," said Greg Daniels, president of Bartlett Tree Experts.

To ensure a smooth transition for customers, Bostock's executive leadership, including Bruce Bostock, David Bostock and David Starkey, as well as a majority of the company's employees will remain in their roles. Additionally, the Hartshorne staff will remain with Bartlett.

"By combining their expertise with Bartlett's resources, customers are truly getting the best of both worlds," Daniels says, adding that Bartlett Tree Experts has been offering tree and shrub care services in Canada since 1997.

(continued on page 26)

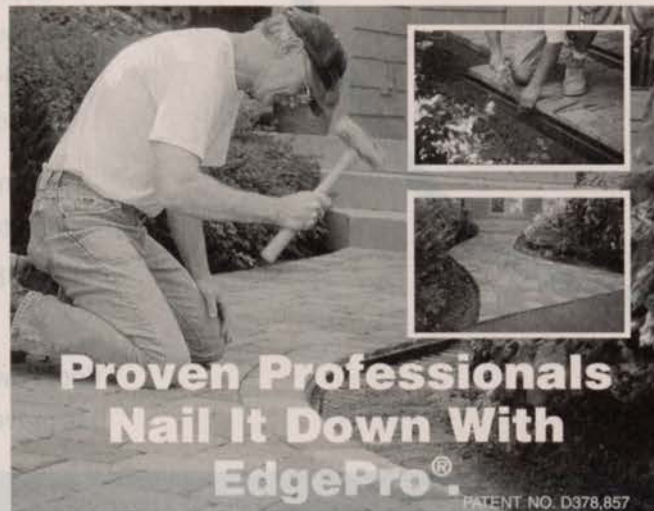
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USE READER SERVICE #22

Industry News

(continued from page 24)

MANUFACTURER MINUTES

John Deere Reports A Record 2004 Year

MOLINE, Ill. – Three years after suffering one of its worst years, Deere & Co. had its best.

The company reported a record \$1.4 billion in net income for its fiscal year that ended Oct. 31, 2004, just three years removed from suffering a \$64 million annual loss. The final results eclipsed projections made in August of about \$1.2 billion in earnings.

This year's annual earnings were more than double last year's \$643.1 million.

Worldwide sales grew 29 percent to just under \$20 billion.

For the fourth quarter, net income jumped 403 percent to \$356.7 million, \$1.41 a share, the 11th consecutive quarter of earnings growth. Sales were up 32 percent to \$5.2 billion.



JOHN DEERE

The company attributed the growth to improving market conditions combined with its focus on efficient operations.

The company projects equipment sales to increase 2 to 7 percent for 2005, with net income forecast to be around \$1.5 billion. First-quarter equipment sales are currently forecast to be up 20 to 25 percent in comparison with the same period last year. Production levels are expected to increase by 11 to 13

percent for the quarter. Net income for the first-quarter of 2005 is forecast to be in a range of \$200 to \$225 million, which would be 17 to 32 percent higher than the first quarter of 2004.

Robert Lane was appointed chief executive officer in 2000 in the midst of those down years. During an appearance in Waterloo in August, he shared with business leaders his blueprint for turning the company around. "Our business wasn't as consistently great as it could be," he said. "We were asset heavy and margin lean. Recognizing our well-earned reputation for great products, I began focusing on a strategy to build a business as great as our products, a business that would be aimed at generating higher returns in all economic cycles."

Building a better business meant controlling costs – including health-care expenses – keeping assets under control and working toward profitable growth, innovation and teamwork, Lane said.

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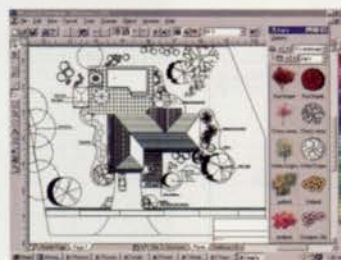


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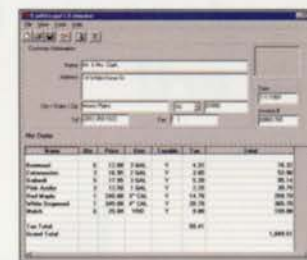
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measurements of proposed gardens and then in another plan, show all the color-coded plants. Then I can bring in the estimating tool and price the job. It gives clients a complete garden recipe to follow to create a beautiful landscape."

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

MANUFACTURER MINUTES

Toro Marks Another Successful Year

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – The Toro Co. reported record net earnings of \$102.7 million on record net sales of \$1,652.5 million for the fiscal year ended Oct. 31, 2004. In fiscal 2003, also a record year, the company reported net earnings of \$81.6 million on net sales of \$1,496.6 million.

For its fiscal 2004 fourth quarter, Toro reported net earnings of \$6.9 million on net sales of \$336.9 million. In the comparable 2003 period, the company reported net earnings of \$5.6 million on net sales of \$310.3 million.

Ken Melrose, chairman and chief executive officer of The Toro Co., said the company's fourth quarter and full year performance benefited from generally favorable market conditions that contributed to continued sales growth in most product categories, as well as the earnings leverage from the company's ongoing profitability improvement and growth initiatives.

"Our record sales and profit performance reflects solid growth in each of our business segments," Melrose said.

Melrose noted that in the first year of a planned three-year initiative to accelerate revenue growth and further improve after-tax profit, Toro exceeded both goals. "Our after-tax profit margin increased to 6.2 percent in fiscal 2004 on a 10.4-percent increase in net sales, exceeding the targets of our '6+8' continuous improvement program," Melrose said. "While the company benefited from growth in our major markets, these strong results also attest to the breadth and depth of our companywide commitment to continuous improvement and to the solid foundation we built with our prior profit-improvement initiative."

A significant contributor to the revenue growth for the year was an 18.1-percent increase in international business. This increase gives support to the long-term strategy to build this part of Toro's business to better balance the company's portfolio. The company also generated record cash flow from operating activities in fiscal 2004, further strengthening its balance sheet and im-

proving overall asset utilization.

As a result of the company's success and good future outlook, the Toro board of directors voted to double quarterly dividends to 12 cents per common share, payable Jan. 10 to shareholders of record on Dec. 20, 2004.

"Our employees have enthusiastically embraced our '6+8' profitability improvement initiative," Melrose said. "Their commitment and performance delivered outstanding results, as was evident in the solid fourth quarter performance. Our industry's outlook continues to be favorable, and we expect the continuing economic recovery will once again boost demand, providing Toro another opportunity to build market share and continue strong revenue growth."

Commenting on the outlook for fiscal 2005, Melrose said the company expects to encounter additional commodity cost pressures and a continued slow pace for new golf course construction. In addition, the company plans to invest more aggressively in innovation and technology, product development, process improvement and overall business and brand development.

For fiscal 2005, Toro currently expects to deliver earnings per diluted share growth of 12 to 15 percent on sales growth of 7 to 9 percent. For its fiscal first quarter, typically the smallest revenue period, Toro expects to report diluted earnings per share of 38 to 43 cents.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Schiller-Pfeiffer Acquires Classen Manufacturing

SOUTHAMPTON, Pa. – Schiller-Pfeiffer, manufacturer of the Little Wonder and Mantis brands, acquired Classen Manufacturing, Norfolk, Neb. The purchase includes all Classen branded products, branding licenses, patents and the rights therein.

Classen's Norfolk, Neb.-based manufacturing facility, with 25 employees, will continue to manufacture Classen products, which include aerators and sod cutters. Larry Classen will become general manager of the Norfolk facility to assure a smooth transition.

Classen products will maintain the Classen brand name and will be sold through Schiller-Pfeiffer's distribution network and Classen's rental associations.

MANUFACTURER MINUTES

Scotts Announces Fourth Quarter Financials, Projects 2005 Financial Outlook

MARYSVILLE, Ohio, – The Scotts Co. announced that strong sales in North America and with Scotts LawnService, coupled with significant margin expansion, led to net income growth in fiscal 2004 of 18 percent on an adjusted basis, and down 3 percent from 2003 on a reported basis.

For the year ended Sept. 30, Scotts reported record companywide sales of \$2 billion, up 8 percent from \$1.9 billion last year. Excluding the impact of foreign exchange, sales were up 5 percent over the prior year.

Adjusted net income for the year was a record \$135.3 million, or \$4.06 per diluted share, compared with \$114.7 million, or \$3.57 per diluted share, for the same period last year. Current period-adjusted net income excludes restructuring and other non-recurring charges of \$34.4 million, net of tax. Including these restructuring and non-recurring items, reported net income for the year was \$100.9 million, or \$3.03 per diluted share, compared to \$103.8 million, or \$3.23 per diluted share, last year.

In North America, sales increased 6 percent to \$250.4 million vs. \$235.5 million for last year's comparable period driven by continued strength in sales of fall season products. Scotts LawnService sales for the fourth quarter increased 17 percent to \$50.4 from \$43.1 million last year. Additionally, on Oct. 1, the company acquired Smith & Hawken, a leading brand of garden-inspired products for a reported \$68.5 million including the value of acquired tax benefits.

The company says it expects its financial performance in 2005 to be in line with its long-term goal, with companywide sales growth to be at 12 to 13 percent and net income to grow 10 to 12 percent. Scotts LawnService is expected to report sales growth of 15 to 16 percent. **II**

Market Trends

EQUIPMENT UPDATE

OPEI Forecasts Modest Growth for Commercial Handheld Products, Mowers

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's second Econometric Forecast for Handheld Products indicated that continued growth in the national economy and strong housing activity has had a positive impact on shipments of handheld products, particularly handheld

blowers, backpack blowers, string trimmers and chain saws, this year.

Handheld product shipments are forecasted to rise 4.1 percent in 2005, coming off of double-digit increases in 2002 and 2003 and 4.3 percent growth in 2004. The last down year for the handheld industry was in 2001, when shipments declined 2.4 percent.

The association is also forecasting moderate growth for commercial turf intermediate riding mowers in 2005. Riding mowers are expecting a double-digit increase similar to its near 30-percent rise in 2004. OPEI attributed much of the growth in this segment to zero-turning radius products, which are expected to continue their rise in popularity.



SALES SOLUTIONS

Selling More Than Price

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Price is always a factor when selling landscape services, but it's not the only one. Quality of work, marketing techniques and customer communication also play a role.

Representatives from about a dozen landscape companies touched on this topic during an Associated Landscape Contractors of America Breakfast With Champions at the Green Industry Expo in Charlotte, N.C. on Nov. 5, 2004.

When first selling to a potential customer, sales representatives need to be careful in their approach, Jay Witte, account manager, GroundMasters, Hebron, Ky., told the group. "You need to build confidence in the relationship, which starts with the salesperson," he says. "You don't want the customer to come in and feel like they're being sold a new car."

In addition to avoiding high-pressure sales tactics, sales associates should make sure the customer is immediately familiarized with the company's account representative, Witte says. "If it's a large property, a lot of times I'll go with the salesperson and do a takeoff," he says. "We want them to see when he's done selling the job, you've got me. They get to feel it—that you're going to be my person for the next three years. If it's a \$70,000 contract, I want to be

involved because I'm responsible for anything he sells."

Jan Cunningham, chief financial officer of Phoenix-based Coy Landscaping, also says there needs to be a seamless transition between the sales representative and the account manager. "Most salespeople know there's an accountability factor if you're selling relationships," he explained to the participants. "It's one representation of the company. Don't let them think they have to go into a job without having an account manager with them. Account managers are an extremely important part of the company."

Witte says just because he's overseeing an account doesn't mean the sales representative is no longer involved. "I don't have a problem with having a dual relationship," he says. "Once I build a good relationship with a customer and they say I've got these other properties, then I'll hand it off to the salesperson."

After account managers establish relationships with their clients, they should ensure open lines of communication to help prevent losing accounts when their contracts expire, several participants explained.

Jay Ketcham, sales manager for Olathe, Kan.-based Signature Landscape, says he meets with customers before their contracts end to find out how the company can retain their business. This way, Ketcham says he can take steps to either renew the clients'



contracts or to begin seeking other accounts to replace them if their demands are unreasonable. "If I go to a customer and he wants me to cut 20 percent, tell me now

so I can get another account," he explains, describing what he seeks during these meetings. "You know us and our services and our quality. If you're going to do something because of price, I need to know today."

Participants also noted that they've been more successful selling based on image and quality rather than trying to outbid their competitors. Contractors first need to define what quality is because it's difficult to show to potential customers in the green industry, Witte says. "Quality service, to me, is to get them to buy into what you're all about," he shares. "You have to paint a picture for them."

Sales representatives should also explain to clients exactly what type of services they provide, including the products they use and how many times the contractor will be cutting their lawns, says Robert Maffei, president, Robert Maffei Landscape Contractors, Marstons Mills, Mass. "By quantifying contracts, you let customers know what you're going to do," he says. "Let people know and be accountable. If you're afraid to be held accountable, you're doing something wrong." – Jonathan Katz

Sure Thing #1:

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Letters to the Editor

I was disappointed by the *Market Trends* article about the election in the November 2004 issue. I do agree that the election does have bearing on our industry, and an informative article that honestly discusses both sides of the issues for our industry was needed. Unfortunately, in my opinion, the article did a poor job of being balanced or adequately discussing both sides. I thought there was a continuous underlying backing of President George W. Bush that was evident from the first sentence to the last.

Your magazine had the opportunity to do what was right, ethically and morally, and, at the least, to present all of the facts, and you blew it. Shame on you.

— Christine Travis

I have run my landscape company for 15 years. We have a revenue of \$2 to \$3 million) and we're not tiny either. We use fertilizers and other chemicals, so I am not one of these "activists" you refer to in "Are you Fighting The Battle?" in the October 2004 issue. However, I do realize that these compounds do pose a risk both to the workers using them and to the environment.

Judging by your editorial, you sound to me like an activist and a crusader yourself. I never listen to extremists on any side of an issue. Activists and lobbyists are one and the same — they simply represent different points of view. In this case, the idea that any fertilizer or chemical use is unacceptable is obviously ridiculous and on the other side, your claim that the work of all of the chemical company lobbyists can be undone by a few environ-

mental activists is simply not believable.

You are asking for your readers to keep an open mind, but I am not convinced your mind is open to the facts either. Pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals we use can and do pose a risk. I live in an area that has suffered hundreds of such incidents. Does that mean that we ban chemicals? Of course not, but it does mean that they need to be regulated and monitored in a coherent fashion. The fact that regulation exists does not mean that it is effective.

We in the green industry will be better off by acting responsibly and thereby showing the buying public that we have their best interests at heart. We can give them a green lawn without contaminating the environment.

— Bill Hildebrand, president, Hildebrand Landscaping, San Francisco, Calif.

Do you have a letter that you'd like to see in this section?

If so, send your letter, name, title, company name, location and e-mail address to Nicole Wisniewski, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113, or e-mail this information to nwisniewski@gie.net.



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Calendar of Events

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

JAN. 9-11 WESTERN 2005 Convention & Trade Show, Kansas City, Mo.
Contact: 816/233-1481 or www.wnla.com

JAN. 11 University of California Davis Extension Pruning and Care of Landscape Fruit and Nut Trees. Davis, Calif.
Contact: 800/752-0881 or www.extension.ucdavis.edu/agriculture

JAN. 11-13 CONGRESS 2005 featuring Fencecraft 2005 – Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Contact: 800/265-5656 or www.hort-trades.com

JAN. 12-14 John Deere Landscapes University, Mashantucket, Conn. Contact: 248/588-2100 or www.johndeerelandscapes.com

JAN. 16-18 Iowa Nursery & Landscape Association 2005 Annual Convention & Trade Show, Des Moines, Iowa.
Contact: 816/233-1481 or www.iowanla.org

JAN. 17-19 John Deere Landscapes University, Atlantic City, N.J. Contact: 248/588-2100 or www.johndeerelandscapes.com

JAN. 19-21 Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 847/526-2010 or www.midam.org

JAN. 20 Ohio Landscapers Association Meeting, Broadview Heights, Ohio. Contact: 440/717-0002 or www.ohiolandscapers.org

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USE READER SERVICE #27

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Top headline stories from Lawn & Landscape's first five years: 1980 - 1984

May 1980 - Lawn Care Businessmen Discuss Computers

"Some ideas die hard. A perfect example is the notion that computers are terribly expensive, totally incomprehensible and thoroughly impractical for all but a handful of high-powered scientists and businessmen. The facts are that truly sophisticated computers have become quite affordable in the past few years and many lawn care professionals are finding them to be useful, even essential, tools of the trade." The article featured four companies who were using state-of-the-art computer technology: a Burroughs L9000, a Radio Shack TRS80, an IBM 5110 and a Sperry Univac BC 8.



July/August 1981 - The Facts About 2,4-D

"Michigan lawn care professionals were jolted by the recent publication of an anti-2,4-D article on the front page of a major Detroit newspaper. The May 19th article, which refers to 2,4-D as 'Agent Green,' was based on charges made by a group of 'young professionals, attorneys and teachers' who call themselves the 'Grass Roots Organization (GRO).'"

January/February 1981 - IPM at the University of Nebraska

"A new program called Integrated Pest Management was recently initiated at the University of Nebraska. The idea is very simple. It uses all available methods of pest prevention and control to keep pests from reaching damaging levels while minimizing potential pesticide influence on man, the environment and turf. In other words, it looks at a total turf management program as a means of minimizing pest problems."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This year,

Lawn & Landscape begins its

25th year of service to the lawn and

landscape 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.



May/June 1982 - The Red Imported Fire Ant as a Lawn Insect Problem

by A.D. Oliver, Louisiana State University

"What is the problem caused by the fire ant one may ask? Since the first eradication attempts, which began in the late 1950s, claims about the horrors caused by the fire ant have been exaggerated. About \$20,000,000 has been spent primarily on eradication attempts and control methods improvement. Yet, more ants and infested areas exist today than at any other time. The claims that fire ants kill significant numbers of livestock, wildlife and destroy crops have been proven false."

Fire ant infestations covered Florida and Louisiana, and portions of Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South and North Carolina, according to the map accompanying the article (above right).

May/June 1983 - Lawn Care Doomed in Ohio

by John Kenney, vice president of PLCAA

"In a surprise move, the State Legislature has just passed a bill which bans the non-agricultural use of pesticides by commercial applicators. A separate bill was also passed which severely restricts the aerial application of any 'suspected carcinogens.' Both of these bills are to become law on July 1, 1983 in spite of the loud cries of the industry spokesmen who claimed that due process was not followed specifically with regard to the public hearing requirements necessary before such laws can be enacted."

September 1984 - Self-Funding Insurance: An Alternative to Standard Policies

"Insurance. An investment for the future. You know how important those premiums are, yet it still hurts the billfold when your insurance company sends you that annual rate increase for your employee health plan. It's enough to make you question the return on your investment - and maybe you should."

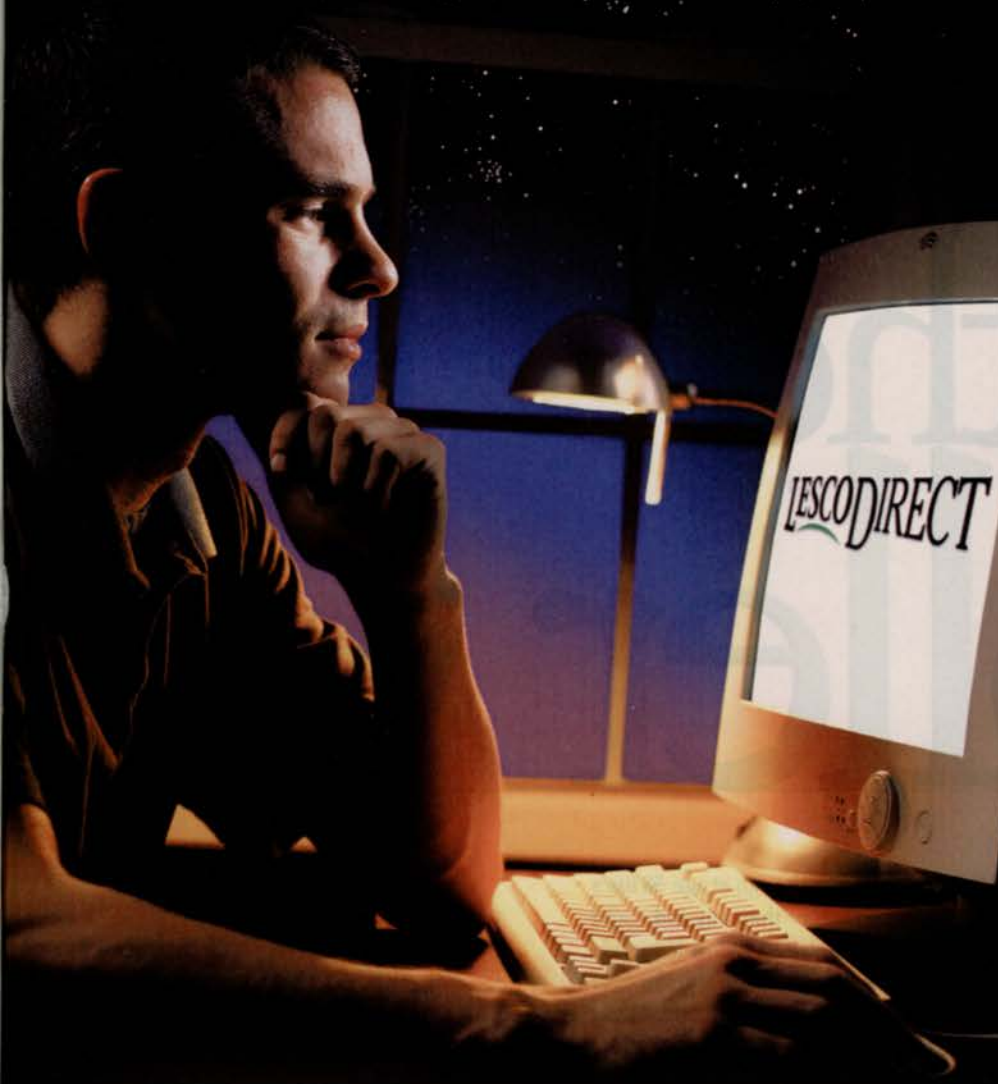


Figure 2: Map showing approximated distribution of the red imported fire ant in the United States to 1980.

July 1984 - EPA and Turf Research

"Millions of dollars and numerous years of research go into the ultimate formulation of turf products. However, it's rare for a company to develop a brand new chemical just for use on turf. 'Primarily because the money's just not there,' says Jay Ellenberger, pesticide product manager for the Environmental Protection Agency office of registration. Because of the substantial investment of time and money, 'most turf pesticides are spin-offs of agricultural pesticides.'"

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USE READER SERVICE #28

Off the Roller Coaster

Dwight Elliott could be called the comeback kid, though at age 58 life's lessons have made him much wiser and stronger than any kid could ever imagine. The owner of Birmingham, Ala.-based Elliott Irrigation nearly destroyed the business his father built in 1962 after signing over stock for two mall stores he owned into his now ex-wife's name. By the mid-1980s, the company had posted more than \$600,000 in sales before falling to \$100,000 after Elliott's divorce in 1989.

But through shrewd marketing tactics, Elliott rebounded and grew 18 percent to 33 percent each year from 1997 to 2001 before topping out at \$1.5 million prior to 9/11. Like most other companies, Elliott suffered post-9/11 losses, but he's making another comeback and is again near the \$1-million mark.

Here, Elliott shares with *Lawn & Landscape* how he survived this roller-coaster ride and what steps he took to resuscitate his business.

Q: What are you doing differently now to protect yourself against future losses? I'm more careful with my investments, and I'm more careful with what I sign. If your car was stolen and you left your keys in it, you wouldn't leave your keys in it anymore. Even though I have the greatest wife in the world and I trust her wholly, still we both do things in our marriage that takes care of us and our families legally. On a business side, everything I did wrong before, I don't want to do again.

Q: So do you have an attorney present for all your dealings now? Definitely - whether it's real estate, office buildings or insurance. I'm all about insurance because I can't afford for

something to happen where I'm not covered. I've worked too hard to get back to where I am for something like that to happen again. Even when 9/11 happened, I had too much money in the stock market. After 9/11, I lost 75 percent of my investments in the stock market, and they're still at 25 percent today. I'm hoping they'll go up, but I don't think I'll ever have that





Master

much money in the stock market again.

Q: You mentioned insurance. Are you now insured in any way for a catastrophic event? There's no way you can insure against stupidity. But before I wouldn't insure my trailers and trenchers, and now I go over my insurance once a year and I go over the whole business operation

and make sure everything is listed. Whereas before if a trailer got off of a truck somehow and went across the median and killed somebody, I'd be gone again because that trailer wasn't covered.

Q: How did 9/11 affect your business? We could all write pages on how this event affected our lives but from a business

perspective it gave me a brand-new approach. Building a growing and prospering business became less important than building a strong, safe and sound business. I have always lived on the edge and loved risks, but now I don't.

Q: What steps did you take to recover financially from this event? Not to take away from the World Trade Center tragedy but I had another event that was worse financially to recover from. The *Real Yellow Pages* left most of my ads out of the 2003 book. Events like these made me go back to the drawing board. Before and right after 9/11 we built our dream building. So here we are in our nice new offices and warehouse and business is down 35 percent due to 9/11 and the *Yellow Pages* error. So I looked at many things. First was the *Yellow Pages* – not to put all my eggs in one basket again. We went from our *Yellow Pages* ads being most of my advertising budget down to where they're probably 25 percent of my advertising budget. We do the little Val-Pak coupons, which is highly successful. I think having the big ads and paying \$30,000 a year for a *Yellow Pages* ad is a total waste. You can pay one-fifth of that amount of money and still be in the books and people will still find you.

Q: So how do you market yourself now? We have done 30-second television spots on cable where we can pick the areas that we advertise to. We put our logo on everything to reinforce name recognition. We advertise in all of the programs for the Alabama Symphony – a full-color page ad because everybody who goes to the symphony is a potential customer and probably a third of them are my customers. We do anything that helps us target our niche customer, which is people who have homes in the \$250,000 and up range.

So I've changed how I market my business, and it is working well – slowly but surely. I am working on better ways to get back inactive customers like with a newsletter or even a personal phone call. I try to look at my clients in the same way I deal with my suppliers. For instance, a few meetings with

(continued on page 40)

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Lessons Learned

(continued from page 37)

some different suppliers and you can always find someone who wants your business more than others, and a few percentage points here can save you thousands.

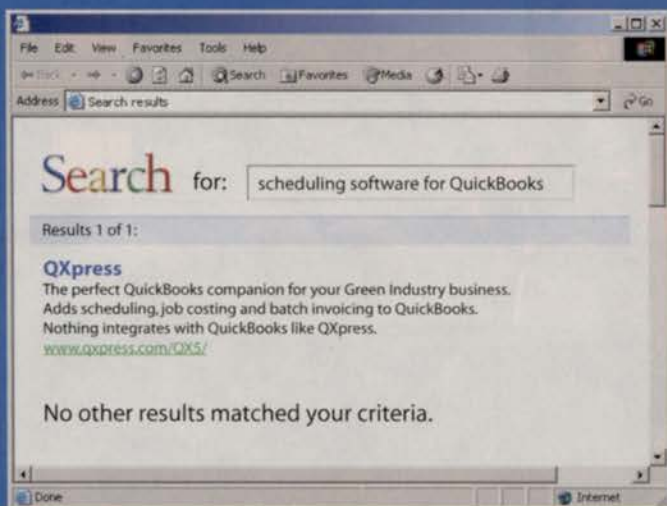
In marketing, I also try not to forget the little things like lettering our trucks. How many people will drive a truck without a telephone number on it and they wonder

why their business isn't growing? We drive billboards around town. Billboards cost you \$1,000 a month. If you've got your trucks all over town, why in the world wouldn't you put your name and telephone number and a little bit about what you do on your truck? And we had a logo developed in the early 1990s just so people would see something

that would remind them of us. All that money invested in that and all those years of getting that logo out there is probably one reason we're the largest around here. It all adds up to better profits for a faster recovery.

Q: How much do you spend on marketing now compared to before? We spend about 7 percent of our gross sales on marketing our business. If you do \$1 million worth of business a year and do \$90,000 or \$100,000 in marketing, that's pretty

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"BEFORE I WOULDN'T INSURE MY TRAILERS AND TRENCHERS, AND NOW I GO OVER MY INSURANCE ONCE A YEAR AND I GO OVER THE WHOLE BUSINESS OPERATION AND MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS LISTED. WHEREAS BEFORE IF A TRAILER GOT OFF OF A TRUCK SOMEHOW AND WENT ACROSS A MEDIAN AND KILLED SOMEBODY, I'D BE GONE AGAIN BECAUSE THAT TRAILER WASN'T COVERED."

— DWIGHT ELLIOTT

heavy, but it pays off in the long run. Before, I was probably spending about 3 or 4 percent of my gross sales a year on marketing.

Q: You gave up on commercial business years ago. Why? I'd rather deal with individuals than all the people you have to deal with on commercial jobs. Commercial was always a battle. We have worked all over the Southeast on commercial jobs, and I don't remember one that wasn't a war to get paid. We had to deal with a whole new group of supposed irrigation experts on each job, who by the way had never installed a system before. I might be wrong and maybe missing out on a huge market here, but I like doing many small jobs instead of putting my company on the line for one large job.

— Jonathan Katz

USE READER SERVICE #30

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* Results based on 2004 Wiese Research Associates survey conducted with landscape professionals.

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USE READER SERVICE #31

Edge-ucation

Landscape edging gives beds a refined finishing touch.

by Leslie Stroope



When it comes to the best method of keeping facial hair in line, most men have a shaving preference. Some swear disposable razors keep the best handle on their handlebar. Others proclaim electric best manages their mutton chops. And still others say a straight razor is best for grooming their goatee.

Contractors express similar sentiments when it comes to the best way of keeping landscape beds looking neat and groomed. Just as the stray whiskers of a missed spot can detract from a perfect shave, so can mulch creeping into the lawn or vice-versa. However, choosing the right edging material can be a tricky endeavor. Whether it is plastic, metal or concrete edging, edging manufacturers and landscape contractors agree that when properly installed, landscape edging provides the crowning touch on a beautifully landscaped yard.

FANTASTIC PLASTIC. Polyethylene or vinyl edging, often referred to as plastic edging, is the least expensive of the three edging materials. Prices range anywhere from 41 cents to \$2.90 per foot, according to Aymie Clayton, sales manager, Oly-Ola Edgings, Villa Park, Ill. "Polyethylene is typically less expensive than the vinyl material," she explains.

Clayton compares the quality of plastic edging products available to the kinds of plastic food storage containers you can get in a grocery store. And as with food storage containers, Clayton says you get what you pay for.

To ensure getting a quality product, Clayton says the blacker and sturdier the material, the better. "You need to look for products without fillers, so it's a truer black material," she

suggests. "If it has more of a grayish tone, it will have more of a tendency to break down."

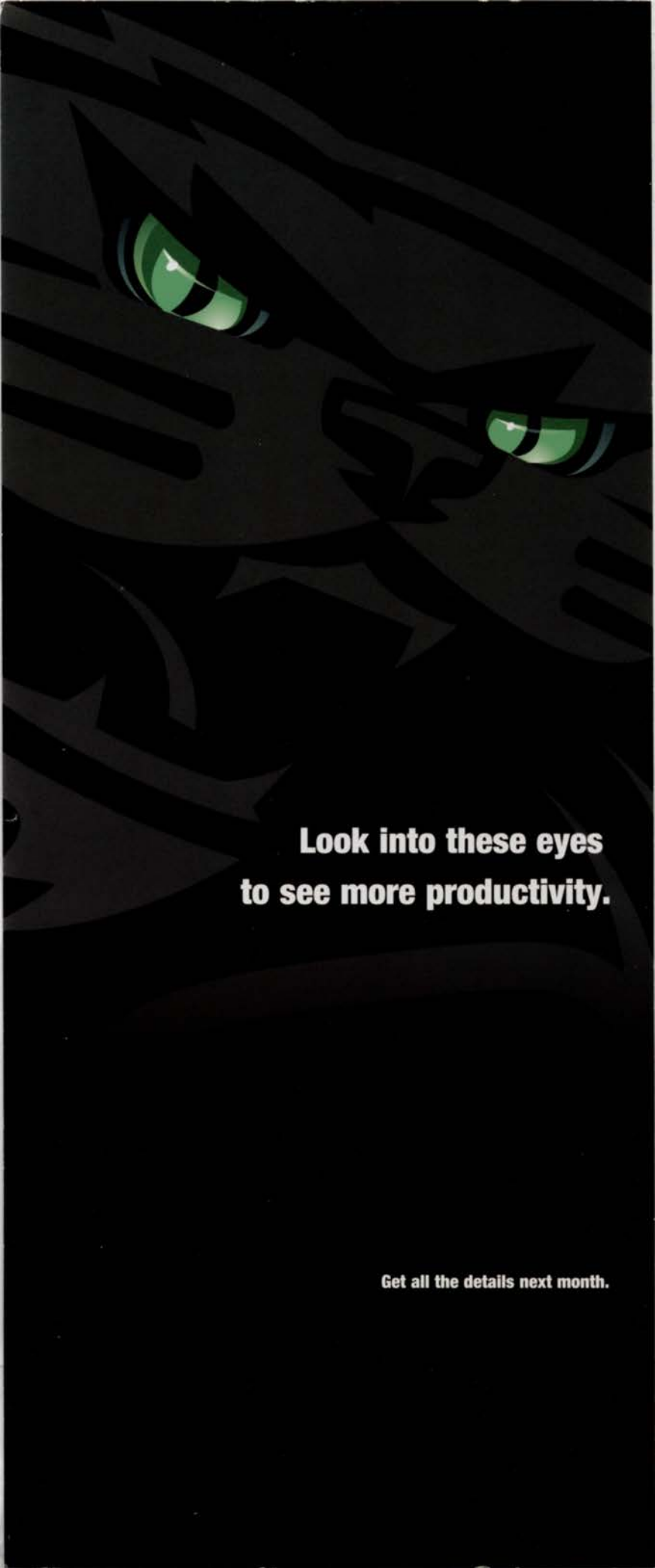
Poly/vinyl edging comes in 100-foot packs of five 20-foot strips in a number of styles. "There's the traditional round-top edging, and those are typically made out of polyethylene," explains Clayton. "That's a little more visible, but it also does a better job of keeping a lawn from invading a bed and vice-versa," adds Andy Vande Hey, president, Vande Hey's Landscape Center, Appleton, Wis. There also are lower-profile plastic edgings without the round bead at the top. "It gives the nearly invisible look similar to steel or aluminum but with the safety features of poly or vinyl," Clayton says.

Installing plastic edging requires a hammer, hacksaw, edging shovel and marking paint and is a fairly simple procedure, according to Clayton. "You just need to paint your line, dig it out making a nice clean trench and set the edging into the trench." She says the top of the edging should not be more than ½ to 1 inch above grade in order to have it stay in the ground and see as little of it as possible. Once the pieces have been connected, the edging goes against the trench wall, is anchored with stakes and the trench is backfilled.

A common complaint contractors express about plastic edging is its tendency to pop out of the ground. "We really do not use it unless a client adamantly wants to use it," says Steve Bonnell, vice president, Dynamite Landscaping, Sterling Heights, Mich.

Both Clayton and Vande Hey stress the importance of correct installation as being key in poly/vinyl's success as an edging material. "Most of the time when you see plastic edging sticking up

USE READER SERVICE #32 →



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Photo: Artistic Borders

Focus on... **Curbing Machines**

Many contractors who install concrete landscape edging use a machine that extrudes the concrete like Play-Doh instead of the lengthy process of setting up form boards. The machines have a variety of shapes that the curb can be molded in, and when extruded, the concrete stands up in full profile, according to Clif Dodge, general manager, The Concrete Edge Co., Orlando, Fla.

"If you were to install 200 linear feet by hand with a two-man crew it would take a full day to form it and install the concrete," Dodge says. "You would also have to return to the job to remove the forms. Using a curb machine, a two-man crew could install 200 linear feet in two hours without having to return to the job to remove the form boards."

According to Dodge, curb machines start at \$3,395, but they can go up to around \$4,695, depending on the features they include, adds Jeremy Garrett, president, Tygar Mfg, Canton, Ga.

Contractors say one of the more popular types of curbing is the "mower edge," which is shaped like a stair step. Jay Stafford, marketing manager, Kwik Kerb, Lake Mary, Fla., says a lawnmower's wheel can ride along the lower portion of the step without damaging it. Another popular shape is the slant edge, which offers a surface suitable for stamping, adds Gary Chambers, owner, Artistic Borders, Brandon, Fla.

out of the ground it's at a connection and it's because a person either didn't use the overlap method or didn't use anchoring stakes," Clayton explains, recommending that contractors overlap the poly/vinyl pieces by cutting 3 to 4 inches off the round bead, using a connector to connect the two pieces and overlapping the two pieces to ensure the product will stay in the ground. "So now you're going to have on the base of your edging about a 3- to 4-inch overlap and you'll put the stake right through that overlapped section. What that does is virtually eliminate any popping up out of the ground."

Vande Hey says his company has had luck using durable, solid connectors and "overspiking" on tight curves and corners. "Rather than put in four spikes per 20-foot piece or whatever the manufacturer calls for, put in double that," he advises. "We spend the extra money and put in extra spikes, and that's how you get edging that is looking great 10 or 15 years later."

HEAVY METAL. Aluminum and steel offer two more edging material options for contractors. Metal edging comes in strips of 8 or 16 feet for residential and commercial

applications, respectively, according to Chad Meyer, marketing manager, Sure-loc Edging Corp., Holland, Mich. Meyer says the price of the most common size of aluminum, 1/8 inch X 4 inch X 16 feet, is about \$1 per linear foot. He says the same size steel edging ranges from \$1.15 to \$1.20 per linear foot.

Besides the price difference, there's also a weight difference between aluminum and steel edgings, Meyer says. "A piece of aluminum this size weighs 7 pounds," he explains. "The same size piece of steel weighs 33 pounds, which makes a huge difference in shipping costs and ease of use." Because of that, steel edging tends to be used for commercial applications and aluminum edging used in residential settings, Meyer adds.

Metal edging's advantages over plastic are its durability and rot resistance, Meyer shares, adding that metal edging's advantages over concrete edging are that it is easier to work with, can be moved if needed and offers more flexible design capabilities.

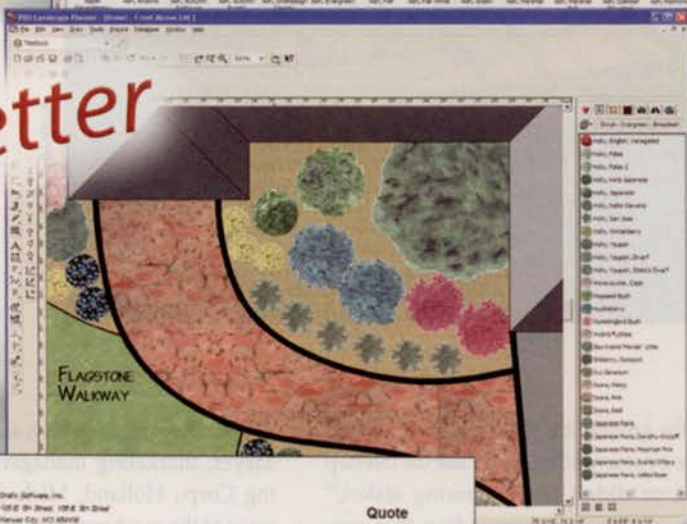
Vande Hey says his company prefers using the plastic edging because he has had issues with metal edging's ability to withstand frost heave. The rising cost of steel makes less ex-

(continued on page 46)

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 Sales Person: LRS
 Expiration Date: December 02, 2009
 Name: [Redacted]
 Project Name: [Redacted]
 Project #: 2009103

SKU	Qty	Description	Quantity	Unit Price	Extended Price
10000	1.00	1.00	1.00	\$20.00	\$20.00
PL001	3.00	3.00	3.00	\$30.00	\$90.00
PL002	1.00	1.00	1.00	\$90.00	\$90.00
PL014	1.00	1.00	1.00	\$20.00	\$20.00
PL015	2.00	2.00	2.00	\$47.50	\$95.00
PL016	1.00	1.00	1.00	\$270.00	\$270.00
PL017	8.00	8.00	8.00	\$13.00	\$104.00
PL018	3.10	3.10	3.10	\$28.00	\$86.80
PL019	220.00	220.00	220.00	\$45.00	\$9900.00
PL020	1.00	1.00	1.00	\$100.00	\$100.00
Totals:					\$12,115.80
Tax Exempt:					\$0.00
Tax:					\$684.17
Total:					\$12,800.00

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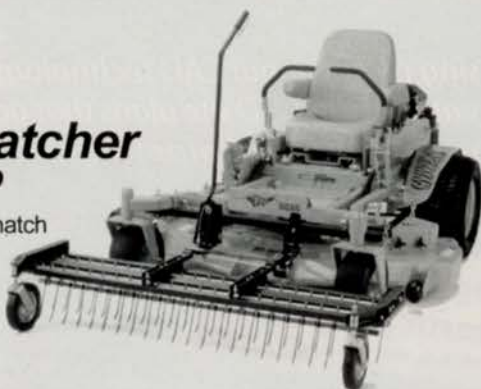
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Business Opportunities

(continued from page 43)

pensive edging materials like plastic more desirable as well, Vande Hey adds.

When it comes to the various metal edging materials available, many contractors prefer aluminum to steel because of its durability and ease of installation. "Steel eventually does rust and break down," Bonnell says. "We find the aluminum is a little easier to work with and has a little more flexibility."

Installing metal edging uses the same process as installing plastic edging. "Basically you only need a spade and a hammer," Meyer says, adding that if the edging is installed correctly – that is, flush with the grass – it can be mowed over. "When you put edging in, you want to adjust it so the mower edge can hang over the top of the edging."

Meyer suggests connecting two or three pieces together before placing the edging in the ground. "Especially if curves are required, this will allow it to look more fluid," he says.

CURB APPEAL. Some homeowners want the line that separates bed and lawn to be decorative and functional. Enter concrete edging. This type of edging, also called curbing, offers the benefit of a single continuous border to ensure that bedding materials and the lawn stay on their respective sides. There are several levels of curbing to choose from, according to Jay Stafford, marketing manager, Kwik Kerb, Lake Mary, Fla. These include plain concrete, sealed concrete, colored concrete and, finally, stamped finish. The concrete can be colored to match everything from the color of the house to the mulch and can also be stamped to resemble materials such as brick and cobblestone.

Concrete edging is installed either by pouring the mixture between form boards or by using a machine that extrudes the concrete in the desired shape. "The old-fashioned way you have to use 2-by-4s, a bender board and lay it on the ground to get your shape," explains Jeremy Garrett, president, Tygar Mfg., Canton, Ga.

"The other downfall to using form boards is that you cannot make nice flowing bends in the landscape and the result is a very hard, rigid look," adds Cliff Dodge, general manager, The Concrete Edge Co., Orlando, Fla.

Stafford uses a concrete mixer, an extruding machine and accessories like stamping tools and trowels, to install concrete edging.

Gary Chambers, owner, Artistic Borders,

The Natural **Edge**

Another popular choice in defining beds is natural edging, which is also referred to as spaded edging or bed defining. This method of edging involves cutting a trench around the bed using either a spade or a trenching machine. While not as low-maintenance as plastic, metal or concrete edging, it provides a more "natural" look while still defining the bed.

Monty Porter, account manager/sales, EZ-Trench, Loris, S.C., says natural edging's appeal is as simple as its name. "Natural edging creates a beautiful flow from a well-manicured yard to flowerbeds without being interrupted by man-made material, such as plastic or concrete edging," he says.

There are also trenching machines that cut angled trenches using blades that dig natural edge rows that can be left alone or in which metal or plastic edgings can be placed. A trench or natural edge can be dug three to four times faster than if it were dug by hand, according to Porter. "In a nice lawn where the soil has got some topsoil you could go out with a machine and dig that trench to put the plastic edging in at 25 to 30 feet a minute," adds Lee Campbell, marketing manager/sales, Brown Manufacturing, Ozark, Ala. Campbell warns that most people are going to dig slower than that because they're following a precise shape and want to take their time. "We have landscapers tell us that jobs that would take them six to eight man hours to do with a shovel, they will do with our machine in 30 minutes," Campbell says.

Then depending on the rain and traffic the edges receive, they only need to be redefined once or twice a season, Campbell adds.

Steve Bonnell, vice president, Dynamite Landscaping, Sterling Heights, Mich., says he likes offering natural edges as a service because it's more time-efficient and more of a lucrative enterprise for his company than doing man-made edging installation because of the regular maintenance required to keep the natural edge looking sharp. "We like natural edges a little bit more because we can come in on a contract basis and that's something we can maintain every year," he explains.

Besides edging, machines can also be used for other applications such as sprinkler systems, low-voltage wiring and underground pet fence installation. Trenching machines range from \$1,995 to about \$2,700, according to Brown and Porter.

Brandon, Fla., uses a ratio of three parts coarse sand to one part Portland cement for his curbing. He also adds color, water and fiber mesh to the mix to give the curb more strength. The proper amount of water is critical to ensure the curb will maintain its shape, Chambers adds, explaining that the amount of water necessary varies by mixer size, weather conditions and the amount of moisture in the sand.

After the curb has been laid, if the homeowner wants decorative edging, the curb is imprinted with stamps and then covered with a sealant to lock in the color and keep mold and mildew off. According to Chambers, the curb dries in 24 hours, but takes a full month to cure.

Some contractors raise concerns about concrete's durability in colder climates.

Meyer says one of metal edging's advantages over concrete edging is that it will not crack with frost heave over time.

Stafford says the local economy dictates curbing pricing. "Someone might sell it for \$5 per linear foot, whereas others can get \$10 to \$12 per linear foot, depending on how ritzy the area is," he explains.

Just as a shave and haircut can make a fellow look and feel like a million bucks, a landscape trimmed with edging can increase not only the perception of property value, but also the actual property value itself. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: Searching for the latest edging products? Check out the Product Spotlight section titled Drawing the Line on page 116 for some ideas.

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SERVICE MIX: 45 percent design/build, 30 percent blower truck business, 15 percent groundskeeping and 10 percent snow removal

CLIENT MIX: 60 percent residential, 40 percent commercial

EMPLOYEES: 39 during the spring, summer and fall; 19 during the winter

GROWTH PATTERNS:

1999 - \$1 million
2000 - \$1.4 million
2001 - \$1.5 million
2002 - \$1.8 million
2003 - \$2 million
2004 - \$2.4 million
2005 - \$2.9 million (projected)

by Nicole Wisniewski

Where can you wager large sums of money on games of chance? Where can great wealth, stories and legends be built and lost in one bet? You might say a casino. Barry Morton Sr. says the answer is "in business." For instance, how many fathers of four do you know who would give up a stable carpentry income to go out on his own and forge a landscape business? How about a landscaper who would try to incorporate the same service three times in a 20-year period even though it proved unprofitable each time? What about an entrepreneur who would shell out a double-digit percent of his annual revenue for one piece of equipment to start a new service he wasn't 100 percent sure would thrive? Or maybe a business owner who would spend the sum of a skid-steer loader to open up his books to a consultant and then shut down his 9-year-old garden center based on that consultant's recommendation?

Morton, 48, owner of Morton's Landscape Development, Columbia Station, Ohio, has done all this, and is still around to tell the tales, boasting a 22-percent average growth rate since 1997. Morton himself might say it's an old-fashioned brand of aggressive work ethic and dedication to providing for his family that has helped him succeed. Others say it's his tough but effective brand of leadership - "they don't call it 'Morton's Marines' for nothing," explains Morton's son, Barry Jr., vice president of the company. While these two factors are certainly a part of it - none of it is possible without the inner gusto to wager a business gamble. It's not just about making the bet, but about having the courage to place your cards on the table. Morton shows us how it's done.

RISK NO. 1 - AXING MAINTENANCE. Morton started working his long hours in high school. "My father left when I was 9-years-old, so I learned early on that if I wanted anything, I had to work hard to earn it," he says.

Morton excelled in carpentry and ended up managing a crew that built bridges for



Barry Morton Jr. and Barry Morton Sr., Morton's Landscape Development

Ohio's Great Lakes Construction Co. By the time Morton was 23-years-old, he also had a wife and four children to support, so he started mowing lawns and building decks for residential clients to supplement his carpentry income in 1978. What started as a second job quickly became a passion – and Morton gave up the security of his carpentry wages to take Morton's Landscape Development full time in 1989.

Morton's carpentry credentials gave him the guts to take a business gamble. "I thought if my landscape business didn't work, I'll just go back into the carpentry business," he says.

Since Morton started landscaping part-time, he already had solid business footing with three crews and 300 clients when he moved the company to full-time, so the only carpentry work he ever saw again came out in his design/build jobs, which became his company's core niche and remains in that spot, dominating 45 percent of his total revenue.

Morton tried retaining residential maintenance as a key

service three times – in the 1980s, again in the early 1990s and finally one last time in the late 1990s, but he gave up because of his dislike of working with Home Owner's Associations, and a lack of profit in this area (5 to 7 percent) compared to design/build (15 to 20 percent). "I had heard from other contractors how it provided recurring revenue and I was determined to try it, but it just didn't work out each time," he says. "Every time I did the numbers and broke down the jobs into dollars per minute, it just didn't prove profitable. I liked to factor it into dollars per minute since we were always spending odd times – like 20 minutes – at a job. What I used to shoot for to cover our costs and ensure profit was \$2 a minute based on a two-person crew and that equates to about \$120 an hour, which in the residential was not competitive. Eventually, as competition in the area increased, we went from charging more than \$100 an hour to \$50 an hour, which wasn't worth our time. We just realized it wasn't our forté."

In 2000, this service skyrocketed as a result of some increased marketing, but Morton said he couldn't get the right people in place

to do the work productively and ensure competitive pricing. So, in 2001, Morton decided to go from more than 200 maintenance clients to 35, and six maintenance crews down to one. "We hung on to our small commercial work, like factories and medical centers, because these clients were willing to pay for our quality services," Morton says. "They weren't rebidding the work every year and basing their decision solely on price. We didn't have to fight annually to keep them as clients."

RISK NO. 2 - ENTERING THE MULCH BUSINESS. In 1997, with revenue nearing \$750,000, Morton decided to buy a \$120,000, 13-yard mulch-blowing truck, so he could add the service to his business and eliminate tedious hand-applied mulching from his landscape crews' to-do lists, freeing up their time to forge ahead on landscape installations – the company's core service.

But spending this kind of money, which equates to \$1,500 monthly payments for five years to own, needs to be planned accordingly. "Every month, I see something in the mail or the paper about someone selling a mulch truck because they jumped into it too quickly," Morton says, adding that he researched the service and the equipment for three years before making the purchase.

First, Morton looked at the amount of mulch his company put down by hand every year and what it cost, which was the equivalent of two people doing the same amount of work with a mulch truck vs. 12 people doing it by hand. Then he looked at the truck price and what the equipment salesperson said it could produce, but he took this information with a grain of salt since he felt this information was sugarcoated. "I knew that having one truck would mean our landscape crews wouldn't have to worry about putting mulch down in the spring and it would put them ahead," Morton explains. "All I



This Morton Landscape Development residential project showcases vibrant landscape color. Photo: Bill Healy

needed was two guys to run that first mulch truck."

But this wasn't as simple as it seemed. "It's easy to train someone to cut grass, but it wasn't as easy to train someone to drive a big truck and run it," Morton says. "We needed two smart guys per truck who were conscientious with customers and one of whom had their Commercial Driver's Li-

many yards as you can. While others told us they were only getting 35 yards a day out of their mulch trucks, we were getting 110 yards a day. A lot of people can't get this kind of production out of their trucks. I think these years of training in the beginning helped us to get there."

A few years later, Morton was able to purchase a second mulch truck – a \$300,000, 35-yard machine. By 2002, Morton's was also spreading soil with its mulch machines, and the company's impressive yardage dispersing both mulch and soil got other local landscape contractors interested in hiring them as subcontractors. These contractors now make up 60 percent of their mulch clients.

Today, the company has three blower trucks and Morton said he keeps two of them busy year-round, while the third is busy in spring and fall but sits in the shop during July and August when the mulch business dies down. He gives his landscape contractor clients first priority at the beginning of the season, taking on residential clients after June 15. To boost the service each year, a small amount of marketing is used via direct mail to landscape contractors throughout Ohio. Morton and Barry Jr. also hand-deliver cookies and gift certificates to Morton's top mulch and design/build clients, spending about \$3,000 annually on this relationship-building service.

(continued on page 52)

Figuring Design Fees

Another tip Morton's Landscape Development Co., Columbia Station, Ohio, learned from its consultant was to forge a design agreement and charge for landscape designs, which are worth the time and effort it takes to produce them, according to Vice President Barry Morton Jr.

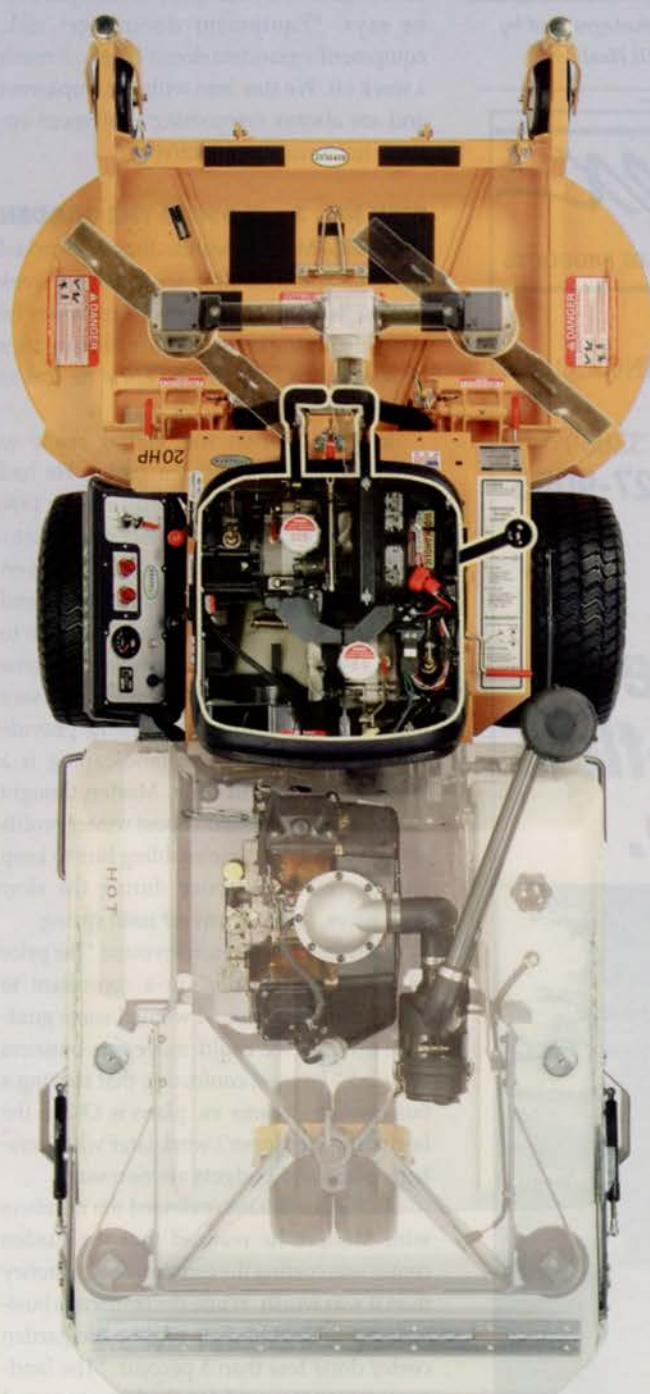
On average, Morton's design fees will range from \$500 to \$1,500, depending on the hours it takes Designer Bill Healy to draft a plan that fits the customer's needs. "If they continue asking for new drawings after seeing a few preliminary drawings, then obviously their design fee will increase," Morton explains, adding that the company's typical high-end residential client will have homes that cost between \$250,000 and \$500,000. Customers normally don't complain about the fee, but Morton makes sure to explain it early in the sales process so they are prepared for it when they receive their bills.

cense. We also needed people who could handle the almost aerobic nature of working with this equipment – it's very difficult."

The service requires a driver and one laborer per truck. Morton operated the first truck himself, training his assistant on how to become a driver. He took this time to perfect and refine the service. "The mulch blowing business is all about yardage," Morton explains. "You have to put down as

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USE READER SERVICE #39

Cover Story

(continued from page 50)

To get other employees interested in potentially running a mulch truck, Morton offers a \$1 raise to employees who get their Commercial Driver's License. Employees who take the test and pass also are reimbursed for their test cost. Once employees have their temporary CDL, Morton will help them practice for their test.



A waterfall designed and photographed by Morton's Lead Designer Bill Healy.

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Morton realizes that buying this equipment – especially since he noticed others failing at offering the service – was a risk. But with the proper training and equipment use, Morton said it has proved profitable. "I have always grown my company on equipment," he says. "Equipment doesn't get sick, equipment's grandma doesn't die so it needs a week off. We stay lean with our employees and are always researching equipment options to increase productivity."

RISK NO. 3 - CLOSING THE GARDEN CENTER. Morton admits that he worked full-time and over time seven days a week getting his business started. But when he was still putting in these hours 20 years after he started the business, he knew he had to make some changes.

In 1998, Morton was getting ready to build a brand new garden center. He had added this segment to his business in 1990 because he bought a community grain store/feed mill located along the railroad tracks on Station Road in Columbia Station, Ohio, and it seemed like the most affordable place to grow a landscape business, while at the same time selling animal feed, mulch, nursery materials and Christmas trees to provide recurring revenue. Since landscaping is a seasonal business in Ohio, Morton thought the garden center would boost winter profits while at the same time enabling him to keep some of his crews busy during the slow seasons vs. laying them off until spring.

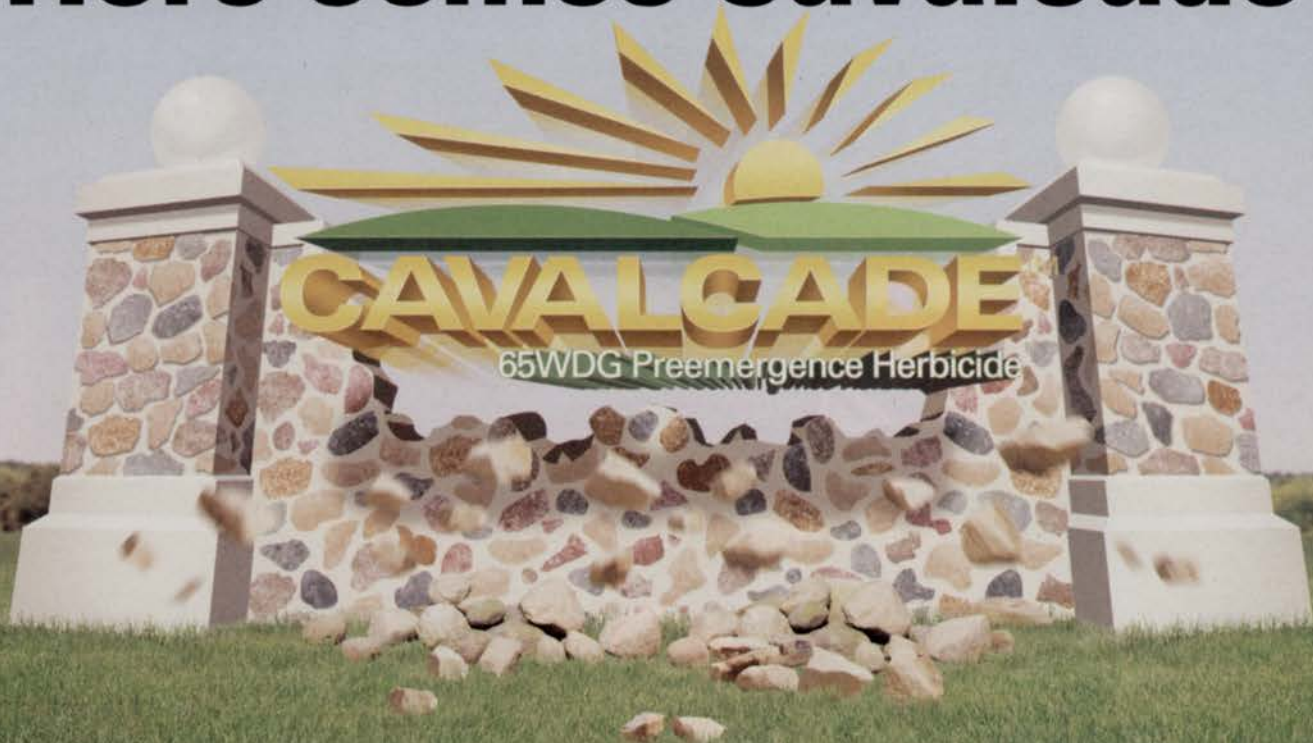
Early in 1998, Morton invested "the price of a skid-steer loader" in a consultant to analyze his business. "I wanted some guidance on how we could move our business forward," he says, confessing that starting a business on dreams vs. plans is OK in the beginning but doesn't work later when strategic plans and budgets are necessary.

As the consultant reviewed the numbers with Morton, he realized that the garden center was costing the company more money than it was worth. While the landscape business made double-digit profits, the garden center drew less than 5 percent. "The landscape company paid for the inventory and the payroll for the garden center since we had to keep more people on to run it, but the garden center never paid the landscape company back," Morton explains. "There were

(continued on page 56)

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USE READER SERVICE #42

Cover Story

(continued from page 52)

some days where someone would come in to buy some bags of feed and we'd make \$35 worth of sales, but we had two people working 10 hour days – when you added it up, it just wasn't worth it."

Even though Morton kept two sets of accounting books for each business, they weren't separate enough to track profitability accurately. "For instance, sometimes the landscape company would buy materials and the garden center would sell them and that money wouldn't be credited back to the landscape company," he says. "And in the winter when we sold Christmas trees, it was fun when it was me and my son selling them – we made some good money for presents. But once we got more employees involved and the payroll increased, our profits decreased."

So the consultant advised Morton to close down the garden center instead of building a new one, and Morton is glad he followed that advice. "We closed it on Dec. 23, 1998,



Most of Morton's design/build residential clients own homes ranging between \$250,000 and \$500,000. Photo: Bill Healy

and that's the first day I started having a life," he says.

Since that year, Morton has retained this consultant, budgeting up to \$20,000 annually for business consultation, which includes this consultant's services, other consultants the company may hire during the year and special business-building seminars. In Morton's experience, most

out-of-state consultants cost about \$5,000 per visit (including travel), Morton says, but the price is lower per visit for in-state consultants.

Another contributor to Morton's more normal schedule is Barry Jr., 27, who started doing small jobs for the business when he was 9-years-old, but really started thinking

(continued on page 58)



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Your Next Mower

(continued from page 56)

about it as a future career when he was 14. Barry Jr., took some landscape design courses through the Ohio Landscapers Association, and then took over design/build sales from his father. Today, he's vice president of the company and still runs sales and customer relations in the design/build division with Designer Bill Healy.

Other family members who have joined the business include Morton's daughter Melinda, 30, as human resources manager and his son-in-law Chad Heidecker as production/operations manager.

"For me, trusting other people was tough," Morton admits. "The transition from me doing everything to me focusing on the

mulch business and strategic planning for the company took a couple of years. I just had to delegate and realize that people will make mistakes and they have to learn from them. I had to realize that I couldn't make a big issue out of mistakes or continually remind them or ride them about things that needed to be done or I'd just be setting them up to make more mistakes or repeat the same ones over and over again. I just had to let go."

Being an entrepreneur means taking risks. In the early days of his business, Morton says he probably relied more on his gut and strong work ethic to make decisions. Today, however, with a strong team in place as backup, Morton says he still takes business gambles, but they are based on more discussion and research. "I had no formal business training when I started out, so I did gamble to build my business," he says. "A lot of times it was based on a gut feeling and a push where I

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A pavilion that highlights Morton's Landscape Development's design specialty – hardscapes. Photo: Bill Healy

said to myself, 'I can do this – if I work hard, I know I can.' The problem is that some gambles will be successful only if you continue to work really hard to make them work, but the minute you stop, it fails. Today, I think there is still a certain percent of risk in the decisions I make, but I base my decisions on the numbers now more than ever. Also, I don't make decisions by myself anymore – I have a strong team to back me up, and that really makes a difference." **LL**

If you have questions for Barry Morton Sr., you can reach him at Morton's Landscape Development, 11564 N. Station Road, Columbia Station, Ohio, 44028; PH: 440/236-3550 or e-mail: bmortonsr@mortonlandscaping.com.

USE READER SERVICE #46

Profession or PROFESSIONAL?

Even though more landscape contractors are earning professional certifications, most business owners remain uncertified. As the industry ramps up certification efforts, find out how some contractors use certification to their advantage and why others choose not to participate.

by Lauren Spiers



Because few homeowners and property managers are up to the task of fertilizing their own lawns, identifying their own pest problems or building their own retaining walls, they hire contractors to make improvements to their outdoor living spaces. Their areas of expertise – from entomology to horticulture to maintenance – make green industry professionals among the most sought-after contractors in the service industry.

However, unlike other services in areas like medicine, law or education, green industry contractors are not required to be certified in order to perform their often technical work. Certainly, individuals or companies who work with pesticides generally are required to be licensed by the states in which they operate. Still, voluntarily earning certifications such as certified landscape professional (CLP) or certified landscape technician (CLT) designations remains an industry rarity.

As such, national industry associations are making a push to bring the values and benefits of certification into the limelight. Hoping to increase the number of contractors carrying credentials from 4,600 now to 7,700 by the end of 2006, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), which officially merged this month, are promoting certification's personal and business advantages to members and nonmembers throughout the industry.

But while more contractors are sitting for certification exams every year, the vast majority of business owners remain uncertified. *Lawn & Landscape* delved into the world of industry certification to learn why this is the case, how contractors can effectively reap certifications' rewards and what the industry stands to gain as more contractors aim to add industry certifications to their lists of credentials.

GRASSROOTS PUSH. Currently, 24 U.S. states and all of Canada offer certification designations, such as CLT and CLP, through national industry associations. As such, becoming association members is the first step toward certification for most contractors. "I've always been a member of my state association, but my big concern was that there was nothing outlining what qualified me to be a member of that association," says Chris James, president of Chris James Landscaping, Midland Park, N.J. "If I wrote them a \$100 check for dues, did that mean I was qualified?"

James, who currently holds CLT and certified snow professional (CSP) credentials, says his worries were confronted in the late 1990s by a colleague who became president of the New Jersey Landscape Association. The state association was looking into offering certification through ALCA, and James saw an opportunity to validate his experi-

ence. "Basically became New Jersey's guinea pig for the CLT exam as a chairman of the CLT committee and as a candidate for the exam," he says. "I took the CLT exam in 1997 in Maryland because New Jersey wasn't offering it at that time. Besides solidifying the fact that I was proficient in the maintenance

areas I was trained in, earning that certification really let me put my money where my mouth was. By this time in my career, I was running my business full time and was out of the field. It's very enlightening as a business owner to take that exam and revisit the techniques you're selling as a company."

Currently, James is one of only about 2,500 CLTs in the industry. Moreover, ALCA reports that there are only 500 CLPs industrywide. While these may seem like strong numbers, 500 certified contractors is less than 1 percent of all contractors.

(continued on page 62)

CERTIFICATION **By The Numbers**

As a concept, industry certification is something abstract that not all contractors are fully aware of in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. Take a look at the following facts and figures for a more rounded view of what makes certification so challenging to earn and so esteemed among industry professionals.

50% – Pass rate for first-time certified landscape professional (CLP) candidates.

\$275 – Cost for an ALCA member to take the CLP exam. The price is \$500 for non-members, plus the cost of study materials for all candidates who wish to purchase them. Retakes are \$75 per session. The cost for the CLT exam varies by state. Contact your state association for information on when the exam is offered in your area and the associated costs. A list of states offering the CLT exam is available in the January Online Extras section of *Lawn & Landscape Online*.

22 – Number of separate sections a successful CLT-maintenance candidate must pass. This includes 12 common core sections and 10 sections for the maintenance module. In addition to the common core, CLT-installation candidates must pass six sections in field work, and CLT-irrigation candidates must pass eight sections in their module.

22% – The passing rate for first-time certified landscape technician (CLT) candidates, according to ALCA. Matt Triplett, vice president Willamette Landscape Services, Tualatine, Ore., notes that the number can be deceiving because most candidates fail only one or two sections of their test, which ultimately results in not passing the entire exam.

"There's a misconception that pass rates on certification exams are low because the exams are too hard and people are failing across the board," says Triplett, a CLT, CLP, certified landscape irrigation auditor and chair of the ALCA International Certification Council. "To say the initial pass rate is low, while accurate, is misleading. It's a tough test, but most people are only missing a few sections, which they then have to retake to become certified."

Triplett adds that companies like his own can inadvertently skew the pass rate numbers by allowing employees who may not be 100-percent prepared for an exam take it anyway. "If I know that one of my employees isn't going to pass the exam, but he'll pass the preponderance of it, I tell him to take it anyway," he says. "Some people may not agree with that tactic, but I'm giving him a jump on it and we both come away with a clear understanding of his proficiencies and the areas he needs to work on when it comes time to retake the sections he missed."

\$1,000 – The estimated cost for Chris James Landscaping, Midland Park, N.J., to put one employee through a CLT exam. "Our employees who take the exams usually have been with me for two or three years," James says. "By that point, we've got an understanding of how that person fits in with the company and if they're willing to take the exam – it shows us that they're with us for the long haul. They're also ready to raise their own education level, as well as the company's professionalism overall." \$1,000 is also the amount of bonus money James's employees will receive for passing the exam after only one attempt. They receive a \$500 bonus for passing on their second try.

70% – Score CLP candidates must earn in each of five sections to achieve certification. CLT candidates also must earn 70 percent on written sections of their exams. The hands-on portions of the CLT allow candidates a prescribed number of deductions in each category before the section must be retaken. A candidate can automatically fail a section for a safety violation.

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Breakthrough Series

(continued from page 60)

"Even though testing for the CLT started in California in the 1980s, there are still roughly only 2,500 CLTs in the industry," James says. "Right now, it's more of an exclusive group from an industry standpoint and when you look at the hundreds of thousands of people in the industry, being one of the few who is certified is special. Still, certification is one thing that raises professionalism in the industry, which is one of the reasons we wanted to get involved with it in the first place and why we're working to get more people certified all the time."

Matt Triplett agrees. "If we offer professional, upper-end services with qualified, uniformed people, we can upgrade the status of the industry and be more prosperous," says the vice president of Willamette Landscape Services, Tualatin, Ore. As a CLP, CLT, certified landscape irrigation auditor and current chair of the ALCA International Certification Council (ICC), Triplett is in the thick of the association's push to raise the

visibility of certification opportunities. "As an industry tool, certification is one of the only places where the national organization

"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A MEMBER OF MY STATE ASSOCIATION, BUT MY BIG CONCERN WAS THAT THERE WAS NOTHING OUTLINING WHAT QUALIFIED ME TO BE A MEMBER OF THAT ASSOCIATION. IF I WROTE THEM A \$100 CHECK FOR DUES, DID THAT MEAN I WAS QUALIFIED?" — CHRIS JAMES

connects on a grassroots level with the state organizations. And it's one of the only functions that crosses state and international lines to bring competitors together. We've

formed a certification community of people who recognize it as a win-win opportunity."

BUILDING PERCEIVED VALUE. Arguably the largest impact certification has on the green industry as a whole, advocates say, is its ability to advance the level of professionalism in the industry as seen from within and without.

"This is still a relatively easy-entry industry and certification is something that can help illustrate to our customers that we're highly trained at the work we do," James says. "Just because someone has a license or insurance doesn't mean they'll do the job up to the right standards. But because employees at our company carry professional certification, it's clear that we have the knowledge and the techniques to provide our customers with services they'll be happy with."

Among contractors, Jason Cupp adds that the professionalism inspired by certification creates camaraderie among industry col-

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leagues. "Our business has grown in the right ways because certification provided me with access to like-minded contractors – people who aspire to the same levels of quality work, customer service and employee relations that I do," says the CLP and president, The Kincaide Co., St. Louis, Mo. "When I get stuck on a problem or business challenge, I have a whole list of other CLPs with the same understanding of green industry business practices who I can turn to for some candid advice."

Cupp says by sharing ideas and learning from business mistakes, contractors can help each other succeed, thereby increasing the professionalism existing customers expect and the appreciation that potential customers have for landscape service providers.

Triplett says contractors like James and Cupp have the right idea and that national associations have a responsibility to increase the perceived value of certification throughout the industry. "As contractors use these exam opportunities to prove their aptitude

and expand the certified community, we can increase professionalism in the industry just by virtue of wanting to better ourselves and be the best at what we do," he says.

Still, Triplett comments that many industry members have not, until recently, put their full effort behind promoting these and other potential benefits to industry certification. "Not everyone is told that certification is the way to go," he says. "It takes a fundamental appreciation of the credential in order to get the most out of it, and that's one place the industry has fallen short. One of our challenges now is to work with the contractors, specifiers, vendors and business owners who don't necessarily see the value in certification and provide them with more education to that end, so we may ultimately create a predictable marketplace for our certifications."

While definite plans are still being ironed out, Triplett notes that the importance of certification is on the front burner of each

association committee – an effort to truly boost the association's appreciation of certification internally so as to reflect the credential's values throughout the industry.

"When ALCA initially adopted certification, it was kept an at arm's length from the board – it was a potential opportunity, but not something that was necessarily marketed strongly," Triplett says. "We've brought it back into the fold because we realized there was a slight disconnect in terms of the importance of certification. Our new, merged association's strategic plan has certification as a key component with representation on every committee, as well as a huge marketing budget. This is in effort to make more people aware of the opportunities."

Cupp, ICC's current marketing committee chair, notes that in addition to CLT and CLP certifications, PLCAA's legacy certifications, including certified turfgrass professional, certified ornamental landscape professional and certified turf professional for

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cool season lawns, also are on his radar screen for promotional opportunities.

REAL WORLD APPLICATIONS? While national associations hope to introduce more contractors to certification through upcoming marketing campaigns, Triplett notes that it remains the responsibility of contractors

themselves to promote the topic to potential clients. "A national organization can't make as strong an impact in a municipality as it can when working with another organization, perhaps at a state level," he says. "There's not the same level of understanding there. The inertia has to be built up at a grassroots level by the people who are in the

field every day in order to make an impact locally. This type of marketing really has been underutilized."

John Palasek, owner of JonKar Design Group, Long Island, N.Y. agrees, noting that, in his area, homeowners know little if anything about professional green industry certifications. "I do think that the CLT and CLP programs have some merit, but in my experience, they aren't yet applicable in the real world," he says. Palasek is licensed in his state, but is not currently certified. "My opinion has always been that there should be more media emphasis on certification and what it means if the industry wants to make it understandable to homeowners and other potential clients."

Palasek explains that most landscape customers are trained through news sources to ask contractors if they're licensed, insured and can supply references. However, no media outlets have insisted on learning whether a contractor is certified or what level of training accompanies such a title.

"The training is good," Palasek says. "But the work I do even without a certification speaks for itself and brings in a great deal of word-of-mouth advertising for my business. When you're flashing business cards with a CLT or CLP logo, right now it's not reaching many more people than other contractors who attend tradeshow and exchange cards. The solution is to lobby the media and explain the importance of certification to them so the media can enlighten the public."

James adds that while certification has been beneficial for his business, many of his customers are still uninformed. "As a company, we still advertise our certification and try to promote it to our customers, but for a lot of people, 'CLT' doesn't translate to anything," he says. "My business card used to say 'Certified Landscape Technician,' and 'Certified Snow Professional,' but when we redesigned our logo and streamlined the business cards, I took that off. For most of my clients, the fact that my card says 'President' below my name is enough to tell them I'm qualified to be on their property."

Triplett acknowledges that public education regarding green industry certification has been lacking until recently. He notes, however, that some clients, such as property managers or developers, are getting the word and recon-

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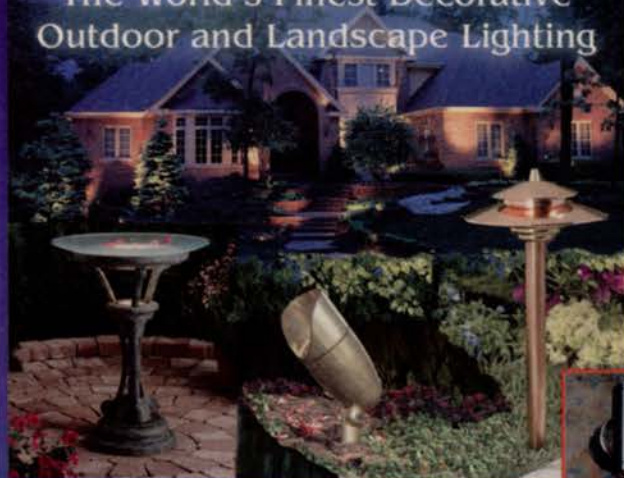
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sidering certification credentials as part of their specifications. "One reason we've found that more contractors aren't buying into certification is because hardly anyone is specifying it yet," he says. "In some instances, it's starting to be built into job specifications and in those cases certification has a very true value."

Triplett says within five to 10 years, he expects to see more management and development firms request contractor certification. This could be a problem for contractors like Palasek, who realize they could be hurting themselves by passing up certification.

Still, Triplett says the industry has yet to

reach the "critical mass" of certified members that would allow it to lobby property managers and insist they hire certified professionals.

POWER OF PROMOTION. Most certified contractors agree with Triplett's assessment that promotion of a company's certifications is, at its heart, up to the company.

"Outside of what may or may not be on our business cards, we recognized that in a commercial marketplace, our customers are asking for licensing, insurance and sometimes even MSDS sheets and labels, but it's up to us to tell them about our certifica-

ANATOMY OF AN EXAM

The concept of industry certification, specifically the CLT, began in 1983 with the California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA). When CLCA decided to broaden their program, nearby states, including Oregon and Washington, bought into the hands-on exam, seeing value in its ability to increase credibility in the trade and ensure that individuals labeling themselves as professionals could perform a wide range of tasks with a high level of accuracy and safety.

Since the 1980s, more state associations have jumped on the certification bandwagon, offering the programs to both members and nonmembers. Effectively a green industry driver's license, even contractors whose state associations do not offer CLT or CLP testing can receive certification in another state and have those credentials apply throughout the United States and Canada. For instance, a Florida contractor could earn his CLT certification in Georgia and return, fully certified, to his home state, which does not currently offer national certifications.

Most contractors would agree that having certification achievements recognized nationwide is a plus, as these are not exams someone would want to have to take multiple times. For the CLT exam, which focuses on contractors' abilities to physically coordinate and complete landscape jobs, candidates must pass core curriculum in first aid and safety, plan reading, and 10 other sections ranging from plant sensitivity and use, certain irrigation functions and truck and trailer operation. From there, candidates must pass an additional six to 10 modules specific to their area of expertise, be it installation, maintenance or irrigation.

A portion of the CLT exam is written, comprised of multiple-choice questions, while the majority of the exam is hands-on fieldwork that candidates must complete in front of judges who follow strict grading criteria. Some states offer the exam in two parts, with the written portion on one day and the hands-on portion to follow, while other states administer the entire exam during one very full day.

The CLP exam, though less intimidating in terms of being judged on the spot, is equally thorough. In this six-hour exam, candidates must answer 400 multiple-choice questions across five different categories: business planning, accounting, and management; risk, law and contracts; sales, marketing, communications, and public relations; health, safety and human resources; and production/operations and horticulture.



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tions," James says. "ALCA produces a CLT flier with information on the exam and what the designation means, so we use that in a lot of our marketing materials and it's helped us to start educating some of our customers.

"I also make sure to promote my CSP certification, especially when I'm acting in a consultant capacity," James adds. "Those customers need to understand that I'm qualified to be on their property and give them advice about how to handle their snow and ice problems. Why should they pay me \$1,200 a day to look at their property if they're not convinced that I know my business?"

Focusing mainly on business prowess and ethics, CLP candidates must earn grades of 70 percent in each category to pass the exam. The same is true on the written portions of the CLT exam, while hands-on CLT sections are allowed a specific number of deductions that the candidate cannot exceed.

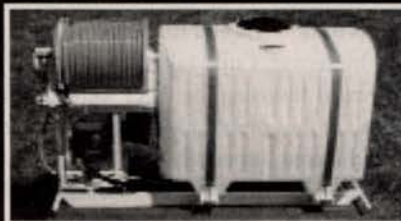
Sound easy enough? Think again, says Chris James. "I've graded guys who I consider top notch and in 21 out of 22 categories they might score a 92 percent, but then get a 58 percent in some area that's just not their forte or something that they didn't think they had to study for," says James, a CLT, certified snow professional and president of Chris James Landscaping, Midland Park, N.J. "On average, New Jersey puts about 50 people through the exam each year and only about 25 of them are first-timers. Since I've taken the CLT, I've worked as a proctor and a judge's technical assistant judging candidates in Wisconsin, New York and Nova Scotia and I can only think of three people who passed the first time through. It's a tough test, but that's how we know people who've passed are knowledgeable in the services they're providing to customers."

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James says he proudly displays this CLT and CSP certifications, as well as memberships in national and state trade associations, on his Web site. He also sends marketing materials provided by ALCA to existing and potential clients for education.

Likewise, Booth Hemingway, owner of Piscataqua Landscape Co., Eliot, Maine, notes that his company "constantly bombards" clients with certification information through the company's newsletter and by including certification logos on all printed materials. "We find it's really important to keep the certification message in front of the client," he says. "We know that certification helps us separate our company from all of the pick-up truck operations around, and over time our clients have come to understand that - it's part of our presentation package. We explain that we're a little more expensive than the other guys, but they realize because of our explanation of certification that our staff is better educated. Anything you can do to add credibility to your company is important."

Cupp also applies the CLP logo to all the letters, design plans and contracts that cross his desk. "All of the plans that exit the company are reviewed by me, and I personally stamp all the plans that leave our office with

the CLP logo," he says. "Also, any contract that goes out the door - regardless of whether I wrote it - is reviewed by me and I write a cover letter to the client explaining why we do the things we do and what our certifications mean to us and to them."

Moreover, Cupp takes his CLP logo on the road by using the "CLP On-Staff" images on the company's trucks and trailers. "Right now, especially in our area of the country, certification is not widespread, but our company does our best to cast a wide net with the credentials we have earned," he notes. "The education and the CLP designation follows me as a company owner, but I also want it to trickle down to the rest of the staff so they understand what it means and how important it is."

Though Cupp, James and other contractors note that quantifying the benefits of industry certification is difficult, both note that their training and credentials have provided their companies with more leverage in the marketplace. "Depending on the type of work and the client, our jobs might be priced 10 percent higher in the commercial arena and 20 to 30 percent higher on high-end residential," James says. "In the neighborhoods where I work, I know my clients can associate our pricing with our experi-

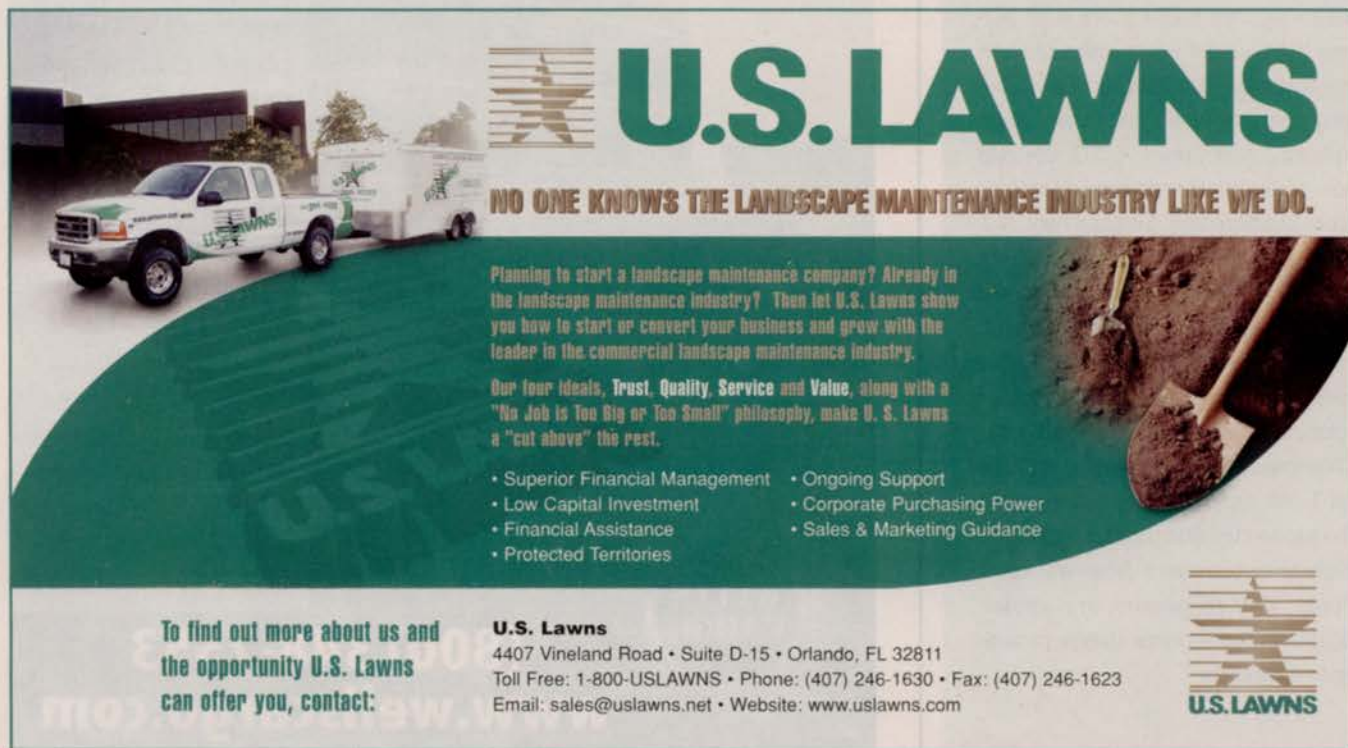
ence and the quality of our work, which stems from certification."

Cupp agrees. "Certification is part of a package that allows us to gain a competitive advantage in our market and thereby drive up the standards that people will expect from our industry and will pay for."

In the industry, certification is beginning to take hold and delineate between the idea of landscape contractor as a profession and that of a landscape contractor as a professional. "As our industry becomes more professional, certification will become a major focus," Cupp says. "There aren't a lot of folks out there doing it right now, but as it gets more attention in the association, the industry and the media, it's something that contractors will need to look at more seriously." **LL**

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For certification marketing ideas, information on how certification exams are created and graded, exam study tips, contact information for a number of industry associations providing certification and more, visit the January Online Extras section.



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Smart Billing

Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users weigh the pros and cons of sending customers itemized bills.

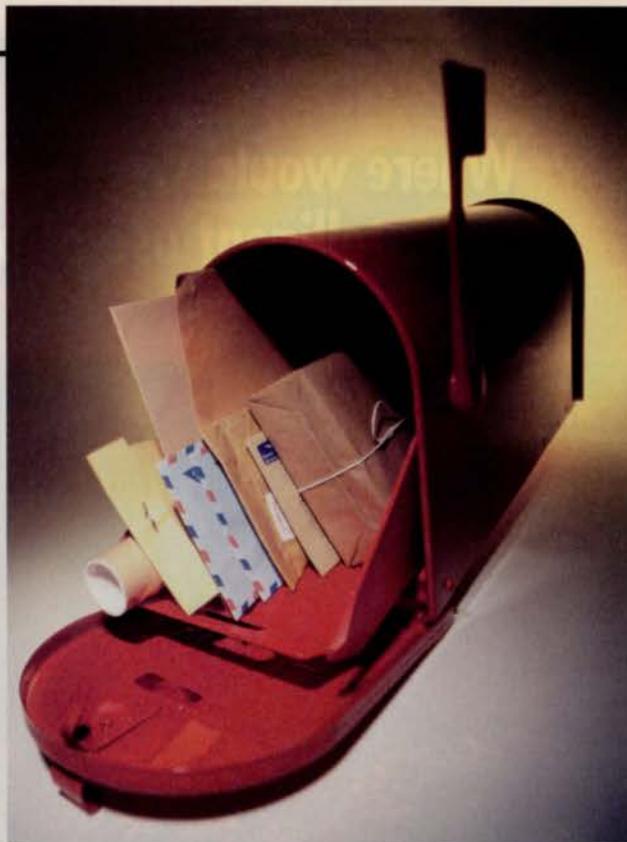
by Jonathan Katz

Billing customers should be fairly simple. When the job is done, print an invoice that shows the total price and the completed service, drop it in the customer's mailbox and wait for the big payday.

But what happens when a customer requests an itemized bill instead of a grand total or complains about an individual charge when a detailed statement is issued? Participants on a recent *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board thread recently addressed these issues when discussing the best way to bill a client. Some contractors say they bill by the hour so customers know exactly what they're getting while others say a total price helps prevent confusion and customer disputes.

TALLY-UP. Most Message Board participants agree that providing customers with a total price is more advantageous than a detailed bill because clients are less likely to question individual charges. "I never itemize for construction jobs," says Andrew Aksar, owner, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md. "If a client sees that you make \$75 an hour off of them, they may not like that. Lump pricing works best."

Matthew Schattner, owner, Mat'z Snow & Lawn, Kansasville, Wis., agrees that contractors may save themselves some trouble by only listing the total charge. "Do not break down and give price per man hour," Schattner says. "It gives the client something to nitpick about on the invoice. Also, when you do that, all you will ever make is what is specified per man-hour no matter how



efficiently you work. Hourly rates are for the inexperienced and encourage most people to work slower. Give a lump-sum price and do your work efficiently and you will make money."

And while contractors may not want to provide detailed bills, they should still determine their costs and profit margins without revealing those figures to the customer, says Terry Duran, owner, Preferred Property Maintenance, Fremont, Calif.

Solana Beach, Calif.-based Naturescape Landscape Co. doesn't itemize bills either, but the company does list each completed phase of a job, says company President Bill Schwab. This way the client knows what they're being charged for each project segment but doesn't know the company's markup and expenses. "We get to one phase, time for a check - we get to another phase, time for another check," he writes. "Fair to us, fair to the client. If the payout goes sour, we pull off the job, which limits the amount anyone can cheat us out of and, on the other hand, the client pays no more than the product on the ground or the labor performed."

COUNTING HOURS. Contractors who support billing by the hour say their method doesn't keep them locked into a quoted price and is more fair to the customer.

For instance, for all jobs other than mowing, such as weeding or leaf pickup, Chad Stern, owner of Chevy Chase, Md.-based Mowing & More, charges by the hour because he says a flat rate can't account for all the variables involved with those jobs.

James Binns, president of Fayetteville, Ark.-based Earthworks

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BEST OF THE WEB

Playing host to a diverse collection of opinions and ideas, the *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board often bounces between professional dialogue, detailed discussion and dynamic debate. To better educate readers, *Lawn & Landscape* will expand upon a Message Board discussion each month in this "Best of the Web" section.

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Best of the Web

(continued from page 70)

Landscape Gardening, also says hourly rates protect contractors from incurring costs of unbilled time. Binns has been billing hourly for more than 15 years on all his company's services except for mowing and installation. "I will not and cannot predict how many leaves are going to be on a client's lawn next year or how many weeds will germinate," he says. "Most people understand that it costs to run a business. When you hire an accountant, that accountant charges by the hour - same with lawyers and plumbers. There are no trade secrets in our line of work. Quit acting like there are."

But Aksar disagrees that contractors can't foresee variables such as weed growth or leaf pickup volume. "You don't wait until the leaves all fall to collect them, do you?" Aksar says. "You don't wait until the beds have weeds ankle tall before you pick or spray them, do you? Assuming you're a full-service grounds management company, of course not. Grounds maintenance is a service industry. Service in-

dustries do not charge hourly like accountants or attorneys, which are professional services."

Aksar adds that most clients won't accept hourly rates unless contractors can justify why it's necessary. He explains this by comparing contractors billing hourly to auto mechanics' billing methods. Most credible contractors bill a lump sum because larger-sized clients want to know their exact annual costs, Aksar says, recommending that contractors track and measure their production hours so they can more accurately determine project timelines.

In response, Aksar maintains that contractors cannot propose hourly rates because most homeowners do not want to monitor how much time contractors are spending at their property. "I assure you that homeowners would be questioning contractors' bills each and every time they are sent out," Aksar says, referring to hourly pricing. "Contractors do not want the stress of someone calling them to say my housekeeper said while I was in Africa that your guys were here from 8 a.m. to 11:45

a.m., but your invoice states 7 a.m. to 12:18 p.m. Thus, a contractor gives a lump price derived from experience and knowledge. The client can accept it or decline it, and there's no monthly calls questioning the legitimacy of the billed hours on the invoice."

Another reason why contractors should avoid hourly billing is that clients may hold equipment failures against them when reviewing their statement, Duran says. "Let's say your mower breaks down, a crafty homeowner will crucify you, whereas if you're under contract, you win some then lose some, but in the end make sure you meet your net and everybody is paid and happy."

Stern says he may consider lump-sum billing someday but for now is satisfied with charging by the hour. "One thing I do not like about charging a flat rate," he explains, "is that it is more expensive to the customer because I have to bid according to the most amount of time a job could take instead of the actual time it takes." LL



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Mowing INTO 2005

Mower manufacturers have responded to contractors' requests for more affordable, compact machines without sacrificing power.

by Jonathan Katz

For 2005, landscape contractors can expect faster, more powerful mowers with innovative deck designs that provide wider clearance on trailers and more affordable options. In response to contractors' desire to replace their walk-behind units with riding mowers, several manufacturers are now offering smaller, less-expensive riders.

"Your bigger walk-behinds are being replaced by smaller zero-turn riders," says Roy Dust, product specialist, Ferris Industries, Munnsville, N.Y. "Even though these machines have smaller decks, they're quicker than walk-behinds, so contractors are replacing the 60-inch walk-behind with the 52-inch or 48-inch zero-turn rider. I think there are as many walk-behinds being bought, but the size range they're being bought in has dramatically changed in the last three or four years."

The walk-behind market isn't dead, but

contractors are seeking smaller units – from 32- to 36-inch cutting widths – that will fit through tighter areas, according to Dust. For areas that contractors can't reach with these mowers, they're managing with string trimmers, Dust says.

Industry-wide demand for walk-behind mowers has decreased by approximately 36,000 units annually in the last five years, according to Kurt Hayes, project manager, Cub Cadet Commercial, Valley City, Ohio. "People don't want to walk anymore," Hayes says. "As far as volume, we don't see any increase in any shape, form or fashion."

Brett Linden, equipment product manager for Cleveland-based LESCO, agrees that the trend is shifting toward riding mowers. "We're seeing an increase in riders throughout the last several years because of efficiency and ease of operation," Linden says.

(continued on page 76)

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(continued from page 74)

(continued on page 78)

Robo Cut

Located on the showroom floor at the 2004 Green Industry Expo was a machine that looked more like a grown-up distant cousin of R2-D2, the pint-sized *Star Wars* robot, than anything relevant to the landscape industry. But the futuristic-style tank is actually a radio-controlled lawn mower that is being sold in Europe and is under evaluation in the United States.

At least three manufacturers are either testing or selling unmanned mowers this year in the hopes that contractors will embrace a new way of cutting grass that is less labor intensive, more environmentally friendly and safer.

One radio-controlled mower that is still being evaluated in the United States can take on steep slopes that may otherwise be too dangerous for an operator, according to Dennis Schwieger, vice president, Jacobsen, Charlotte, N.C.

Another mower available to select landscape contractors in early 2005 is a battery-operated machine that operators can program to cut up to a 1/2 acre of grass, says Bill Grizack, business manager for Electrolux's Automower, Charlotte, N.C. The mower can operate without anyone present and can be programmed to cut on certain days and specific times.

Contractors set up the system by installing a wire around the perimeter of the area they want to cut and then plugging in a charging station that the mower will recognize by a radio signal. When the mower's battery is running low, the mower follows the signal back to the charging station and plugs itself in to recharge, Grizack says, adding that contractors can lower labor costs by approximately 40 percent using these mowers.

Manufacturers are also testing zero-turn robotic mowers that may reduce mowing costs by 30 to 60 percent, according to Rick Curlett, director of sales and marketing, Self-Guided Systems, Rochester Hills, Mich. These mowers utilize laser-light technology to navigate their way back and forth. To set up the mower, contractors must place reflectors around the perimeter of the property and then train the mower by walking it through the areas they intend to mow, Curlett says. The engine is a gas/electric hybrid that is three times more fuel efficient than a fully gas-operated mower and already exceeds 2007 federal environmental standards, Curlett says. These mowers will be sold for \$3,995 at about a dozen dealerships throughout North America in the summer of 2005, he adds.

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New Mowers

(continued from page 76)

FLIP-UP FRENZY. One way manufacturers are making riding mowers more attractive to contractors is by modifying decks so more mowers will fit on standard-sized trailers. One advancement manufacturers have made to zero-turn riding mowers is an electrical lift that raises the deck 90 degrees. With the flip of a switch, a 48-inch mower

can be reduced to 35.5 inches and fit into a 36-inch trailer, Hayes says.

But these flip-up decks aren't limited to just mid-mount riding mowers. Some front-mount mower and walk-behind mower manufacturers have adopted space-saving decks that can be raised by hand. A front-mount mower deck can weigh as much as

175 pounds but in some cases can be easily raised upward by making a few adjustments, says Tim Cromley, marketing manager, Walker Manufacturing, Fort Collins, Colo. Flip-up decks on some walk-behind mowers can add about \$1,000 to the machine's cost, but contractors should easily make up for that in productivity, according to Ken Raney, advertising manager, Hustler Turf Equipment, Hesston, Kan.

Manufacturers are also designing decks to improve cutting performance. One deck style features a 7.5-inch air space in the front that helps move wet or thick grass through quicker, says Robert Ayers, commercial turf technical support technician, Husqvarna, Charlotte, N.C. These decks can increase efficiency by 26 percent, Ayers says. Another upgrade to these "open-tunnel" decks includes raising the vacuum at each spindle point to increase airflow, which also helps pick up grass faster.

New mulching decks will also be available to contractors this year. John Deere is adding a 60-inch mulching deck to one of its 25-horsepower zero-turn mowers, says Wes Freeman, brand manager, John Deere Commercial Mowing, Cary, N.C. These mulching decks add \$700 to \$800 to the mower's cost, according to Freeman. The mulching decks are designed to eliminate the potential danger caused by discharged debris and the hassle of cleaning landscape beds littered with grass clippings.

Some decks now have adjustable baffles that allow operators to change the mower's performance based on lawn conditions, says Randy Harris, senior marketing manager, The Toro Co., Bloomington, Minn. Operators can adjust the baffle to cut clippings into tiny particles, resulting in better dispersion. "That's great when in the spring the grass grows like crazy and you need to be able to get that lush lawn out as fast as you can," Harris says. "The baffle allows you to cut that grass and push the grass out instead of moving it chamber to chamber, and it takes less horsepower off the engine, allowing you to cut faster."

Decks are also becoming more durable with additional steel support. The triple-plated deck design features a 10-gauge steel top with a seven-gauge support plate and a layer of 11-gauge steel that reinforces the

(continued on page 80)

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New Mowers

(continued from page 78)

spindle mounting area, Raney says. The spindles feature tapered roller bearings, which add 50 percent more load carrying capacity than ball bearings.

But there are advantages to decks made from one layer of steel. One new deck on the market now is stamped from one sheet of seven-gauge steel, which eliminates the pos-

sibility of welds breaking, Freeman says.

With all these changes manufactures are making on decks, affordability can come into question. That's why some decks that were once only hydraulically adjustable are now available as manual lifts. Manual lifts may require slightly more effort on the operator's part, but they can reduce the

machine's cost by \$1,000, says Carol Dilger, corporate marketing services manager, Ariens Co., Brillion, Wis. "Contractors were requesting something that was a little lower in price, but they still wanted the heavy-duty commercial unit with the 60-inch cutting deck," Dilger says.

Contractors will also find more smaller deck sizes available in 2005. By purchasing a mower with a 48-inch deck rather than a 60-inch deck, contractors can save about \$1,000, says Roy Van Voorhis, sales manager, Everride, Auburn Neb. These decks are popular in certain regions such as the Northeast where contractors have smaller lots to mow, according to Van Voorhis.

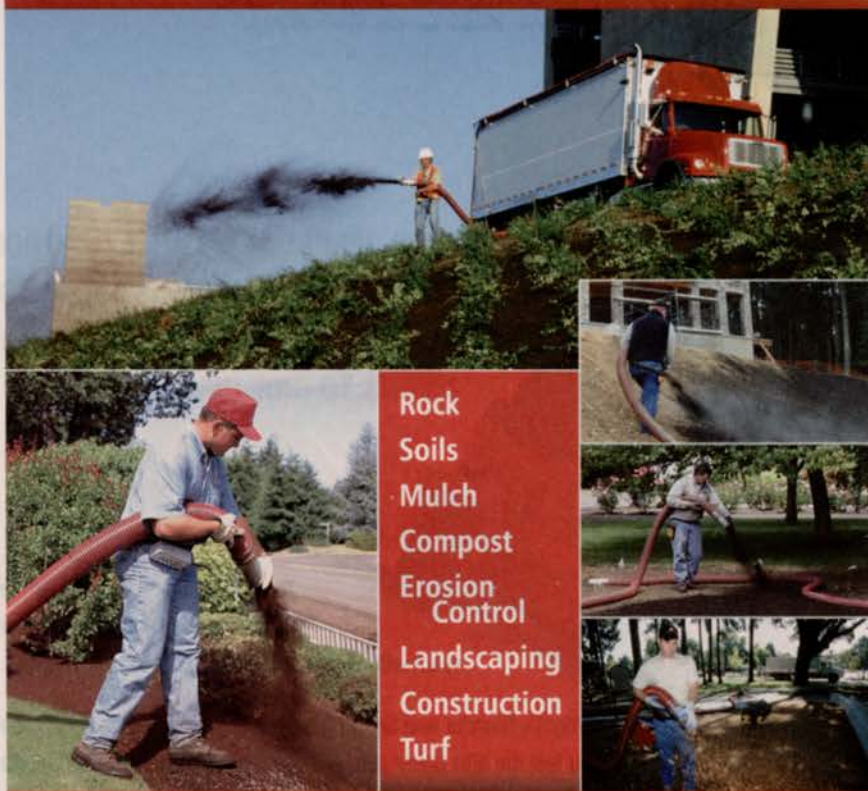
Contractors can also save money with more adjustable deck options being offered on smaller mowers, says Hal White, director of sales and marketing, Wright Manufacturing, Frederick, Md. Contractors have been requesting smaller 36-inch and 52-inch adjustable decks instead of the larger and more expensive 61-inch decks, White says. As a result, contractors can now purchase mowers that are more compact and about \$2,000 less than the larger models, according to White.

TREND SETTERS. Mower manufacturers aren't just focusing on deck enhancements. They're building bigger tires, producing more fuel-efficient options and, of course, adding horsepower. Contractors who bag or mulch grass can lose power, so manufacturers have added horsepower to certain engines to compensate for that loss. This year, contractors will be able to find zero-turn mowers that were once only offered with a 19-horsepower engine now equipped with a 23-horsepower engine, according to Harris. Each additional unit of horsepower generally raises the cost of the mower by \$100.

Whether contractors really need so much horsepower is debatable, but they're still asking for the extra boost. "I don't need 380 horsepower in my car, but I've got it," says Jim Forrester, distributor manager, Encore Manufacturing Co., Beatrice, Neb. For contractors who can't afford high-powered riding mowers, manufacturers are producing walk-behinds that feature the speed of a rider without losing the control associated with walk-behind mowers, says Jeff Haltom, vice president/general manager, Dixie Chopper, Coatesville, Ind.

(continued on page 82)

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Alternative Power

Soaring gas prices and tighter environmental standards have mower manufacturers scrambling for ways to make cleaner-burning, fuel-efficient products. As a result, manufacturers are experimenting with alternative fuel sources such as hydrogen, propane and electric power. "It's a growing trend that hasn't hit the mainstream yet, but it is on the radar screen," says Kurt Hayes, project manager, Cub Cadet Commercial, Valley City, Ohio.

Though it may be years before they hit the market because of high production costs, manufacturers are already experimenting with different fuel types. One recently developed concept mower runs off of liquid propane, which is considered more environmentally friendly than gasoline because it produces less carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and soot when burned.

A potential market for the propane-powered mower could be large cities with ozone issues, says Tony Weber, product manager, Jacobsen Commercial Grounds Care, Johnson Creek, Wis. Propane-fueled mowers cost \$200 to \$500 more than comparable gas units because manufacturers need to add some wiring and fixtures, Weber says.

Propane-powered mowers run similar to fuel-injected engines, resulting in quicker starts and reducing the possibility of engine flooding. The main drawback to propane-powered machines is a 10-percent loss in horsepower, according to Weber.

But developing environmentally friendly mowers should be manufacturers' No. 1 concern right now, says Dennis Schwieger, vice president, Jacobsen, Charlotte, N.C. "I think we're probably going to be moving more toward power trains that don't make much noise, leak or emit a lot of pollutants, and that probably means the industry moves toward electric power," he remarks.

Schwieger also says more manufacturers will begin producing mowers that can accept attachments to perform multiple tasks, such as aeration. "I think the industry is going to be moving toward machines that have more than a single purpose," he says. "We now have an electric lift on zero-turn riding mowers that tow an aerator behind it and allow you to aerate at zero-turn speeds without having to get off of the machine."

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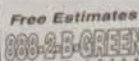
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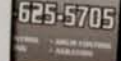
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USE READER SERVICE #77

New Mowers

(continued from page 82)

Horsepower is also increasing as manufacturers add more liquid-cooled engines to their mower product lines. The demand for liquid-cooled engines has increased by approximately 20 percent in the last several years, according to Bill Bower, director of marketing for Ferris. Rising fuel costs have pushed manufacturers to equip more mowers with liquid-cooled and diesel engines.

Liquid-cooled engines can save an estimated 20 percent in fuel. Diesel engines are also more fuel efficient and increase engine life. A liquid-cooled diesel engine costs about \$500 to \$600 more than an air-cooled gas engine. "With gas prices so high now, fuel efficiency is a big thing," Bower says. "It's got more torque and power than a gas engine or an air-cooled, and it's a lot quieter."

Manufacturers have also modified tire sizes for smoother rides, with some increasing from 20 inches to 23 inches, according to Forrester. More seats are being built for comfort this year with adjustable tension features that can be adjusted based on the operator's weight, says Pat Penner, marketing coordinator, The Grasshopper Co., Moundridge, Kan.

Ease of operation is also being addressed through front-wheel steering on a select number of mid-mount zero-turn mowers, says Jeff Huncilman, president, Gizmow, New Albany, Ind. These mowers, which are currently being test marketed, are designed to increase hillside control and allow operators to mow closer around trees and plantings.

Riding tractors are being equipped with all-wheel drive to help maneuver around tight areas, according to Tamara Youdbulis, product manager for the Kubota Tractor Corp., Torrance, Calif. When starting a turn, the rear wheel of these tractors begins to track freely, enabling a tight turn while preventing damage to the turf.

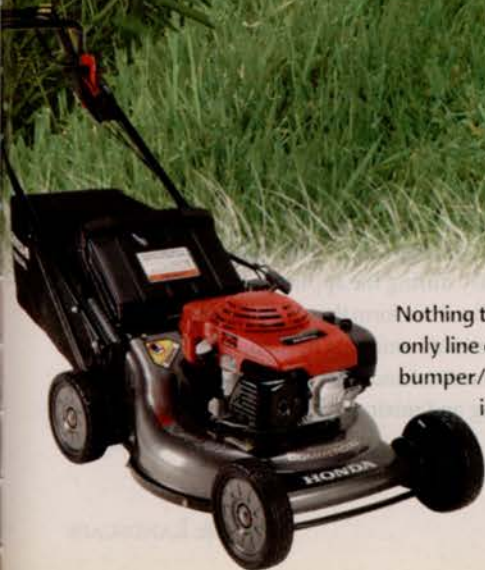
One other trend, which has been steadily continuing throughout the last several years, is the movement away from front mowers to mid-mount machines. Front-mount mowers have declined by 4 percent to 6 percent annually, according to Gilbert Pena, brand marketing manager, John Deere Commercial Mowing. But front mowers still offer some advantages over mid-mounts.

"The trend is going away from front cut, but we think overall the front cut is a much better design, causing you to sit lower to the ground with a lower center of gravity," Cromley says. "When you have a low center of gravity, you can pull the hill a lot better. When the mower sits out in front of you, you can see what you're trimming. You're not looking out over the edge."

Front mowers also have more grass-collection capabilities than mid-mounts. Residents who live in high-end communities often request grass collection as part of their lawn care service, says John Cloutier, marketing communications manager, Exmark Manufacturing, Beatrice, Neb. In response, some manufacturers are adding bagging capabilities to their front-mount mowers to fill this market niche. "There's a lot of homeowners that do like the finished-quality look that a dedicated bagging machine will give them," Cloutier says. "I do think what a lot of property owners like about that type of machine vs. a mid-mount zero-turn, for example, is that it is a much smaller and more compact machine, so it looks less obtrusive on the property." Cloutier adds that because front mowers cut slower than mid-mount mowers, some homeowners appreciate the appearance that contractors spent more time on their lawns and that they got the most value for their service. **LL**

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Know Your Formulation OPTIONS

As formulation technology becomes more sophisticated, lawn care operators should continue to review new options to ensure they've chosen the best product for the job.

by Roger Stanley

While active ingredients are the workhorses of lawn care, the formulation usually determines the benefits that a pesticide product delivers for lawn care companies – enhanced control, lower odor, ease of handling and mixing, reduced risk, lower cost and more.

“Too often two products are considered equal if they both have the same active ingredient at the same concentration levels. If so, then cost is used as the main differentiation point,” says Johnny Reynolds, senior formulation group leader for Syngenta. “But that level of comparison is no longer adequate. Lawn care companies need to consider the testing and design behind the product, the level of support from the manufacturer, and the formulation properties – all these determine the performance of the active ingredient.”

A number of trends are making formulation innovation increasingly important. First, applicators and their customers expect weed, insect and disease control to be a given. The challenge for formulators is to deliver added value. Second, as more turf active ingredients come off patent, the number of formulation options based on those chemistries will also increase. Third, formulation technology itself is becoming far more sophisticated – to the degree that some older active ingredients are being reinvented or gaining new life thanks to advancements in the laboratory. The challenge for applicators is to stay abreast of the newest formulation options and their potential benefits.

WHAT FORMULATIONS DO. The underlying facts behind current pesticide formulations are that most active ingredients are solids or oily liquids that will not dissolve in water, and only a tiny amount of the chemistry is necessary during the application to do the job. The basic job of a formulation is to put the active ingredient in a form that can be applied uniformly using common applicators and in the relatively minute amounts needed.

Beyond this, the formulation also has to be economical and meet requirements for shelf life (two years minimum), storage, transport, handling and mixing. An outstanding formulation

(continued on page 88)

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Pesticide Formulation

(continued from page 86)

often offers unique properties that may even enhance control.

Two common methods previously used to accomplish this have been to formulate active ingredients as a soil-applied granular (G or GR) or to dilute the active ingredient in a petroleum solvent, such as xylene, to form a concentrated oil solution, a liquid emulsifiable concentrate (EC or DC) product.

Granular formulations come ready-to-use, can be combined with fertilizers, are easy to clean up in the case of an accidental spill, and are perceived by some consumers more favorably than spray products. The disadvantages of granular formulations are that they cannot be used when foliar pest application is needed, require more space and effort for packaging, transporting and storage, and can be dusty and labor intensive when handling.

An EC formulation mixed in water and agitated forms a diluted and sprayable oil-in-water solution (think of a vinegar and oil salad dressing). EC formulations provide application rate flexibility, mix easily in water and remain homogeneous with minimum agitation. A challenge with many EC formulations is that the solvent may have an odor, might damage some plants or equipment and may contribute to overall product toxicity concern.

Granular formulations are still widely used in lawn care applications, while EC formulations are used much less in favor of safer and more convenient water-based suspensions, such as suspension concentrates, water dispersible granules and wettable powders. These newer formulation technologies offer important benefits. "Manufacturers are not limited like they once were," says Mike Ruizzo, business manager for imidicloprid and CNI chemistry for Bayer Environmental Sciences. "It used to be that you might have an active ingredient that would only be formulated as an EC with a "Danger" signal word. Today, you might be able to formulate that same active ingredient into a product having a "Caution" signal word. The active ingredient is the science behind the product, but the formulation is the art."

What type of formulation is possible for an active ingredient depends upon its solubility, stability, physical state and intended use. The most common formulation technologies include the following:

- Granules (GR or G) formulations are

typically solid carriers over coated or impregnated with relatively small levels of active ingredient and applied directly to the soil. Granules are often used because of their ease of application using common spreaders.

- Wettable powder (WP) formulations are a concentrated dust with dispersant/wetting agent system incorporated to allow for mixing with water. WP formulations allow a high "loading" of active ingredient – a relatively high rate of active ingredient per container – but can be dusty when mixed and require good agitation to ensure a uniform tank mix. Often wettable powders are packaged in water soluble sachets to minimize dust exposure while mixing.

- Water dispersible granules (WG, WDG, DF or EG) are also high-load formulations. They pour more easily than a WP and are much less dusty, but require good agitation to adequately disperse in water.

- Suspended concentrates (SC) or aqueous suspensions are formulations in which the active ingredient is combined with a solid carrier. It is ground into very fine particles that will suspend in the water carrier. Adequate agitation is important to ensure a consistent application rate.

- Capsule suspensions (CS or ME) are formulations in which the active ingredient is encapsulated in a plastic material that suspends in the water carrier. Depending upon the capsule technology used, the formulation benefits may include reduce odor, prolong residual, added safety when mixing, and easier mixing and clean up.

- Soluble powders and soluble liquids (SP or SL) are possible with active ingredients that will dissolve in water to form a true solution (few active ingredients dissolve in water). A soluble powder may be hard to mix initially, but once mixed it will remain homogeneous without the need for constant agitation.

The properties of newer formulations make it important to follow label directions when tank-mixing two or more products. For example, if a wettable powder and an emulsifiable concentrate are to be tank mixed, first fully dilute the WP in the tank, especially if it is enclosed in a water-soluble sachet, then add the EC. Putting the EC in the tank first may cause the WP to clump up in the tank. If there is any doubt about tank mixing compatibility of two or more products, it is highly recom-

(continued on page 90)

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Pesticide Formulation

(continued from page 88)

mended that a simple jar mixing study be done before mixing a large tank.

SELECTING A FORMULATION. Deciding what lawn care product to buy begins by selecting the best active ingredient based on the target pests, control expectations and environmental conditions. Another basic decision is whether to buy the active ingredient in a granular or liquid formulation.

Selecting the right formulation means determining which option offers the best value for you and your customers. Applicator considerations include equipment, service program needs, ability to tank mix products, special site considerations, cost and the comfort level you have in your technicians using it. Customer considerations include concern about odor, cost, speed of control, residual, watering in requirements and more.

Cost is a factor, but a number of suppliers caution against using lowest cost as the primary determinant. Conrad Harwell, a formu-

lations development manager for Nufarm, points out that lawn care is not usually as price sensitive as agricultural in cost per acre as the basis for product selection. "In farming, profits are tight so a 'good' agricultural formulation should combine high efficacy at a low cost per acre," Harwell says. "In lawn care, value is determined by a combination of factors, including customers' expectations."

Finding out about the benefits of various formulations means reading the label, and talking to your dealer or distributor, other contractors and the manufacturer. Experts advise paying close attention to the label directions. While the wording of some sections of the label are mandated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the use directions often include important information about what the manufacturer recommends for best results. For example, one formulation label may advise the addition of a surfactant for best results, while another formulation with the same active in-

redient may already include the surfactant in the formulation, which makes an apples-to-apples cost comparison unfair.

Kathie Kalmowitz, a market development specialist with BASF, says key words on the label can help decide if one formulation is a better value than another. "Generally when a manufacturer claims 'control' for a weed that indicates a control threshold of 80 percent or greater," she says. "If the product does not meet the 80 percent control threshold, then the label should use the word 'suppression.' The label may list some weeds under suppression, while other weeds are listed under control. But even in considering a product for control, read the label use directions for important information on how to gain successful results."

A fast way to compare two formulations is to read the claims made in manufacturers' sales literature or on their Web sites, then talk to manufacturer representatives to get the facts behind the claims. EPA registration

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(continued from page 90)

is not verification of product efficacy. To evaluate efficacy claims mean comparing manufacturer data, especially the field tests that most closely match the end-use turf grass, soil conditions and climate.

Another differentiating point is to compare the products from purchase through handling, use and container disposal. For example, if easier storage, larger active ingredient loading per container and easier container clean out and disposal are important, then a dry flowable formulation is probably preferable to a liquid formulation, even though both products are spray applied. On the other hand, the selection of a suspended concentrate may be a better option if quick or simple mixing in water is desired, or if the product is to be tank mixed with other products or fertilizers. In reality, the decision between two or more products is never that simple as there is a range of considerations involved. Being armed with an understanding of the advantages and benefits of different formulations—and the trade offs involved—makes it possible to make the best decision.

FORMULATION ADVANCEMENTS.

Manufacturers and formulators are constantly at work to develop improvements for their products. Following are a number of the latest advancements and the benefits they offer to lawn care companies.

BASF AquaCap CS. Pendulum AquaCap preemergent herbicide is a microencapsulated (capsule suspension) formulation using the active ingredient pendimethalin, a preemergence herbicide. The solvent-free, ultra-thin capsule formulation enhances stability for the active ingredient in all environmental zones and conditions. Encapsulation reduces volatility and degradation of the active ingredient until it reaches the soil zone where it is rapidly released. For applicators, the benefits include consistent results in any climate, reduced odor and easier mixing and clean up, with no reduction in efficacy. "BASF invested 10 years of research to get the final quality and performance desired for AquaCap," says Kathie Kalmowitz, a market development specialist for the company. "Our primary goal was to create a formulation that upgraded the active ingredient's benefits for applicators. We also wanted a formulation that provided a proprietary position in the market for the active ingredient. With AquaCap we have succeeded

with both goals." For more information, visit www.turfacts.com.

Bayer Allectus. One new innovative formulation is primarily active ingredient-based. Registered by the EPA in a soil-applied granular formulation in November 2004 (SC formulation is pending EPA registration), Allectus insecticide by Bayer Environmental Sciences combines imidicloprid, the active ingredient in Bayer's Merit, with bifenthrin, the active ingredient in FMC's Talstar. The goal was to create a dual-action insecticide for surface and subsurface turf insect pests. Allectus is a unique formulation developed to be cost-effective, provide the broadest-spectrum insect control available, and take advantage of the synergy of the two active ingredients. Bayer field research shows that Allectus provides superior control over Talstar alone on southern chinch bugs, black cutworms and bluegrass billbugs, while equaling or surpassing Merit for control of white grubs. "Creating Allectus required two years of research and development," says Mike Ruizzo, business manager for imidicloprid and CNI chemistry for Bayer Environmental Sciences. "We started from scratch and followed a standard new product development path to find the optimum ratio of the two active ingredients. Allectus is a revolutionary product. It controls all the major surface and subsurface insects, and is labeled for lawn care, golf and sports turf." For more information, visit www.bayerprocentral.com.

Dow Dimension. To give customers a choice of formulations for Dimension preemergence turf herbicide, Dow AgroSciences developed a Dimension in a WP formulation. "Most companies like to have a variation of formulations that meet their use patterns," says Joey Cobb, senior scientist in formulations development for Dow AgroSciences. "Some prefer a liquid, others a dry product. The challenge in developing the WP formulation is that the active ingredient, dithiopyr, has a relatively low melting point. Our formulations scientists were able to come up with a formulation that is stable in temperature conditions ranging from below zero to 90° F." Cobb says the WP formulation ensures that the active ingredient will stay flowable and not cake in high temperatures. A chief advantage of the dry formulation is the higher load-

ing of active ingredient per container, with a four-ounce jar of WP containing the same amount of active ingredient as in a two-gallon jug of the EC formulation. The WP formulation has no solvent, so there is no flash point issue, and if there is a spill, it is easier to clean up. Efficacy for both formulations is the same. Dimension is also available in granular and on-fertilizer formulations. For more information, visit www.dowagro.com.

FMC QuickSilver EC. QuickSilver T&O herbicide was originally formulated in an emulsifiable concentrate formulation, but using proprietary inert ingredients FMC developed an advanced EW (emulsion in water) formulation for the herbicide. Bob Herrick, a product development manager for FMC Turf and Ornamentals, says the EW formulation was developed to improve handling and performance. "Typical advantages of an EW are a higher concentration rate, easier mixing and greater flexibility in tank mixing," Herricks says. "In an EW formulation, the active ingredient, carfentrazone, actually shows increased activity due to better spreadability. And as an EW the product offers applicators speed in mixing time, less need for constant agitation, easier tank clean-out and no nozzle clogging. Using proprietary formulation technology, which includes inert ingredients specifically designed for this type of molecule, allows us to formulate an EW with a 'Caution' signal word." QuickSilver is also easy to tank mix with other foliar applied herbicides. For more information, visit www.pestsolutions.fmc.com.

Nufarm Escalade. Basic in phenoxy herbicides, Nufarm manufactures 2,4-D and related herbicide active ingredients and is continually developing formulations using them. The newest of these formulations, Escalade and Escalade Low Odor herbicides, are based on a combination of 2,4-D, dicamba, and fluroxypyr, an active ingredient licensed to Nufarm from Dow AgroSciences. Fluroxypyr is highly effective, controlling clover in small amounts. A formulation challenge was the combining of 2,4-D (water-soluble salts) with fluroxypyr, which is present as an ester. An ester is typically made into an EC formulation. To be able to make Escalade, a hybrid mixture containing fluroxypyr ester and 2,4-D water-soluble salt, Nufarm turned to micro emulsion

(continued on page 94)



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USE READER SERVICE #84

Pesticide Formulation


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formulation technology. "Escalade provides excellent broadleaf control, including control of clover," says Conrad Harwell, a formulations development manager for Nufarm. "The products, Escalade and Escalade Low Odor, perform like and have physical properties similar to a normal EC, and have the low volatility of aqueous salt formulations. Escalade Low Odor, which contains the virtually odorless ingredient, 2,4-D-trisopropanolamine salt, was developed to give customers a wider choice in using these active ingredients." For more information, visit www.us.nufarm.com.

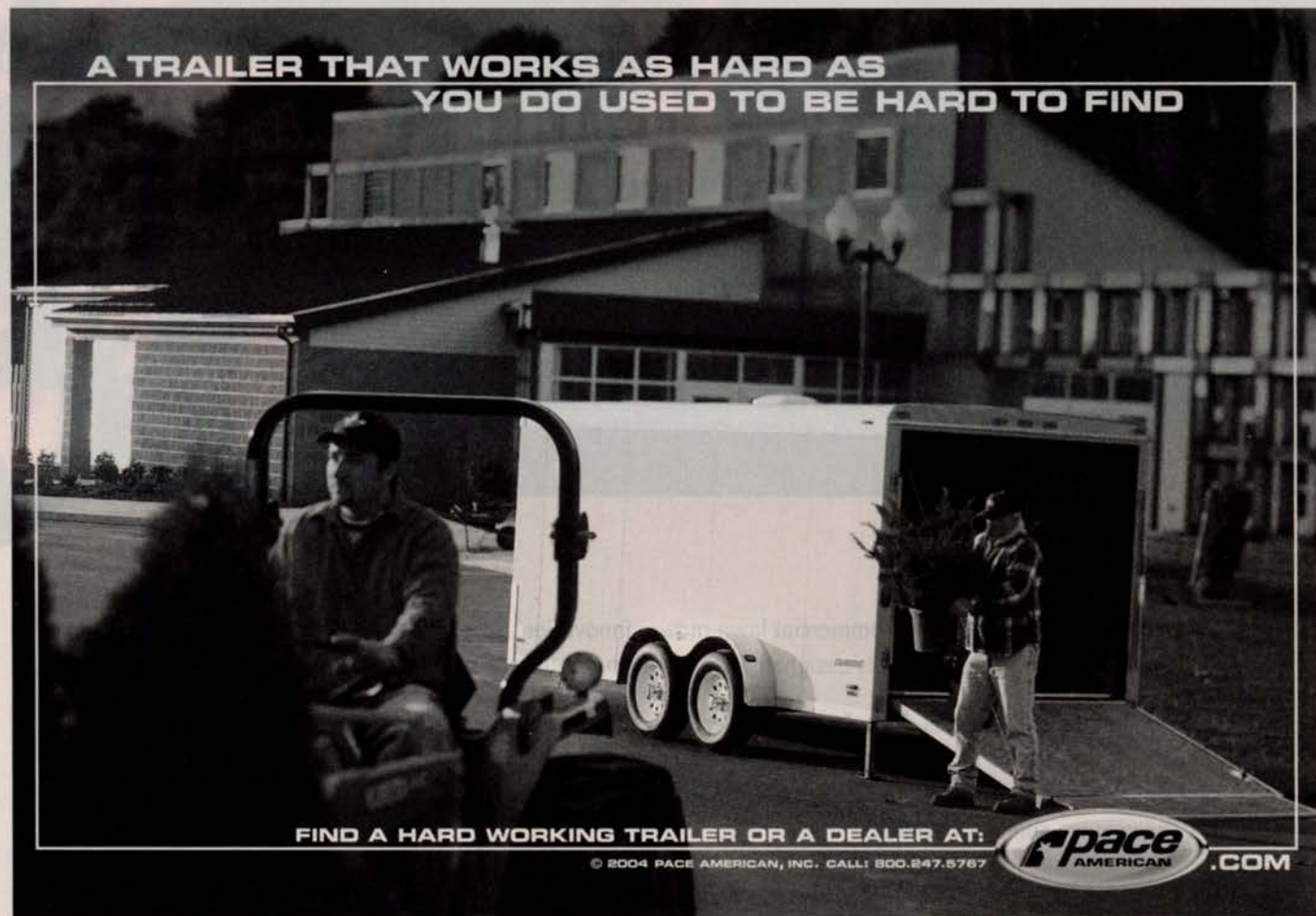
PBI Gordon Surge. Surge broadleaf herbicide is the first turf and ornamental product formulated with the active ingredient, sulfentrazone, a protox inhibitor. The unique mode of action inhibits a key enzyme required for chlorophyll production, which can speed up weed control. Visible control symptoms are visible within 24 to 48 hours following application, and weed death can take place in


as few as 14 days – half the time required for some broadleaf herbicides. In addition to sulfentrazone, Surge is formulated with 2,4-D, MCCP and dicamba. The formulation challenge was to combine water-soluble and non-water soluble active ingredients into a water-based formulation. More than 200 formulations were developed and tested in order to arrive at the best balance of performance and cost, says Doug Obermann, product manager for Turf and Ornamentals. "Sulfentrazone is a proprietary active ingredient that can provide control up to twice as fast as many other broadleaf herbicides," Obermann says. "The unique mode of action can reduce development of weed resistance." Other benefits of the formulation include warm weather weed control at up to 90° F, rain fast in six hours, and yellow nutsedge suppression. For more information, visit www.pbigordon.com.

Syngenta Banner MAXX. Banner MAXX fungicide is formulated as a micro-

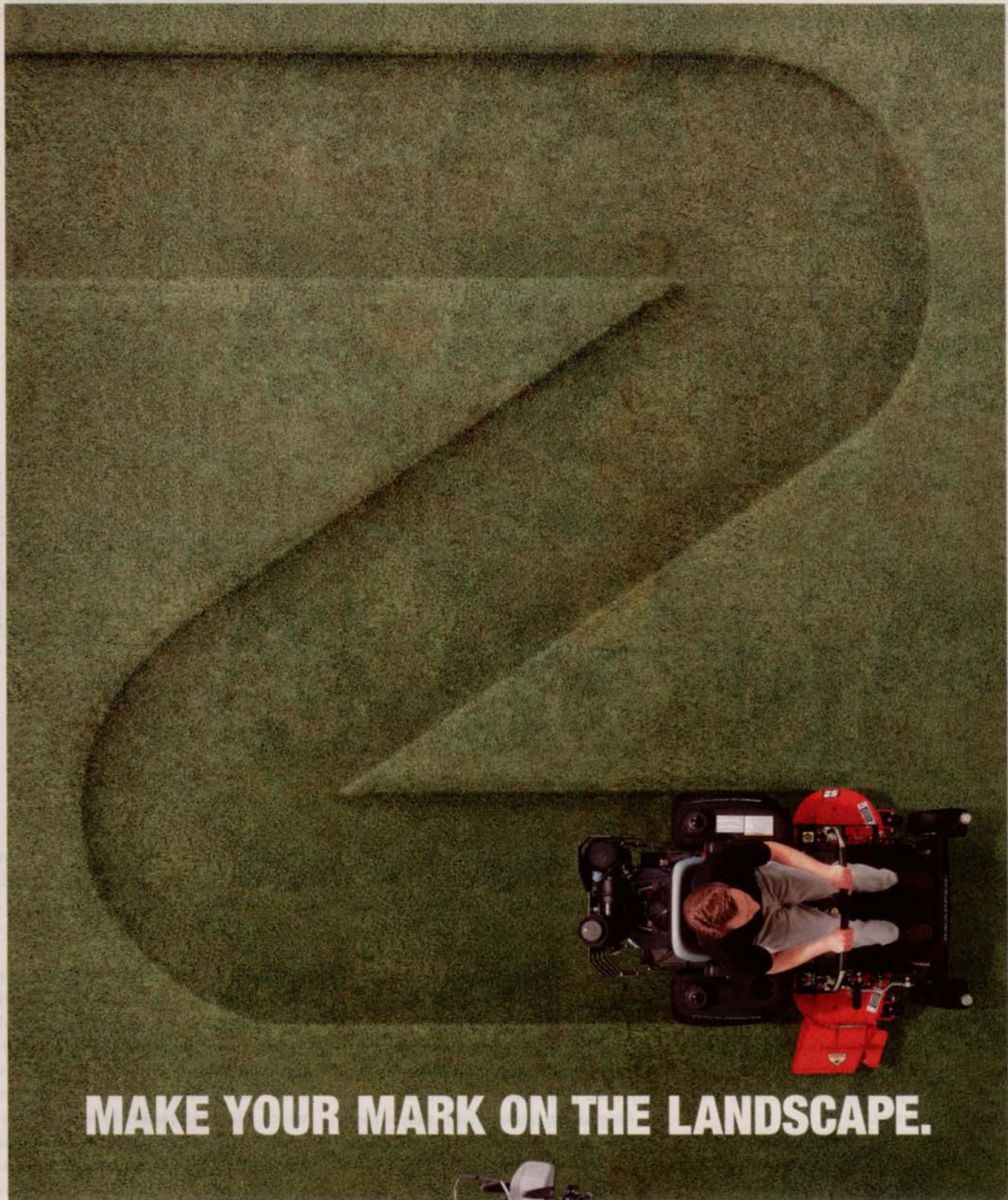
emulsion concentrate (MEC) with particles so small (on the order of 0.1 micron) that they mix with water with minimal agitation. The ability to produce droplets up to 250 times smaller than typical emulsion concentrates improves coverage on plants and enhances performance. The formulation also includes proprietary components to push propiconazole, the active ingredient, to peak performance. The formulation is odorless, stable in the tank, and does not clog filters or screens in the tank. "Micro-emulsion technology is not new, but its application to fungicides in this market is novel," says Randy Cush, a senior formulations chemist for Syngenta. "The formulation provides numerous benefits over previous products. The challenge in formulation work is to make things simpler and safer while enhancing performance. MAXX technology does that." Syngenta also uses similar technology to produce Primo MAXX plant growth regulator and Subdue MAXX fungicide. For more information, visit www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com. 

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USE READER SERVICE #86

Irrigation contractors are benefiting from more uniform spray patterns offered by a variety of nozzle choices.

by Jonathan Katz

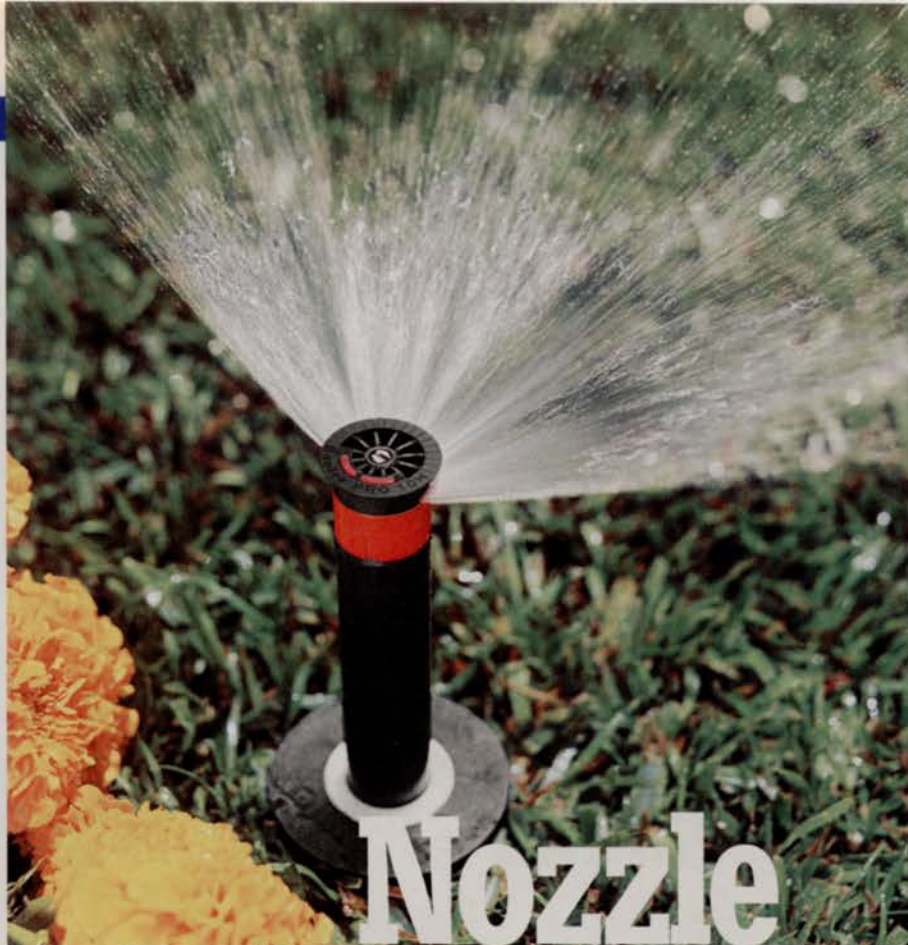


Photo: Hunter Industries

Nozzle NOISE

The more creative landscape designs become, the tougher they are to irrigate. Slopes and hard-to-reach corners can make watering some properties challenging. Irrigation nozzles play a vital role in ensuring that these areas don't go dry.

Irrigation system manufacturers are making more nozzle options available for sprayheads in response to the changing landscapes, increasing conservation efforts and contractors requesting more uniformity with water distribution.

One way manufacturers are accomplishing this is through new design techniques that help them be more precise on design specifications. Manufacturers used to produce nozzles by creating a prototype mold and then testing the nozzle for performance. Now, manufacturers are utilizing computer programs that shorten the duration of product development and improve nozzle performance, says Don Fisher, a product and marketing manager with The Toro Co.'s Riv-

erside, Calif., irrigation division.

"By the use of complicated engineering tools, such as computer-aided design, engineers are able to design the parts so they can optimize flow of water through the part and the pattern of water coming out," says Kevin Gordon, senior product development manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. "So it's the ability to manufacture with tighter tolerance on spray nozzles that has improved performance significantly."

Original nozzles were fairly simple, comprising nothing more than a piece of plastic with a hole to disperse water, Fisher says. Older-style nozzles did not breakup water enough along the middle of the arc, making it more difficult to irrigate close-in areas. Nowadays, manufacturers are building nozzles with veins or geometrical designs that create turbulence and break up water closer toward the arc's origin. "It's pretty hard to create breakup all the way across if you have just one big hole coming off of the

face of that nozzle, so we create veins behind the nozzle and then we put features in the nozzle to create some kind of downspray at the head," Fisher explains.

VARIABLE DISTANCES. In the past, contractors had to buy several nozzles with different trajectory points to thoroughly irrigate their clients' properties. But, in the last several years, more contractors have been purchasing variable-arc nozzles, which allow contractors to set arcs from 0 to 360 degrees on one nozzle. Fixed-arc nozzles are typically available in one-quarter, two-thirds, one-half, three-quarters and full-range settings.

At Toro, adjustable sprayhead nozzles can range from \$1.50 to \$1.85 each compared with \$1.65 to \$1.75 for fixed-arc nozzles, Fisher says. About 25 to 40 percent of contractors are using variable-arc nozzles exclusively, according to Fisher, who says that

(continued on page 98)

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USE READER SERVICE #87

Irrigation Innovations

(continued from page 96)

number will likely rise to about 60 percent in the future.

But unlike international markets where adjustable nozzles have almost completely replaced fixed nozzles, Fisher says many U.S. contractors will likely continue using the traditional nozzles. "Contractors still prefer a definitive fixed arc," Fisher says. "A standard still delivers better efficiency off of the nozzle face because they are a preset geometry. It's hard to have an adjustable nozzle that gives good performance all the way from 0 to 360 degrees because at various points in the arc it's just going to be weaker in the pattern."

Josh Jordan, product manager for commercial sprays, Rain Bird, Glendora, Calif., agrees that adjustable nozzles have their advantages in terms of flexibility but that fixed nozzles are still in demand. Most larger commercial projects are designed for fixed nozzles because of conservation concerns.

(continued on page 100)

Pressure Points

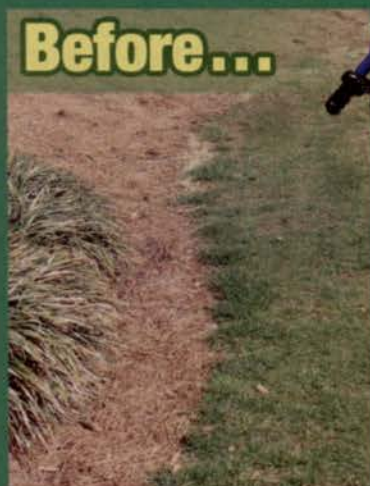
For spray nozzles, more pressure is not necessarily better. Too much pressure can negatively affect spray pattern and performance and force irrigation contractors to run the system longer than normal. When pressure levels are too high, the water can become so atomized that it may drift away and not adequately water the targeted area, says Josh Jordan, product manager for commercial sprays, Rain Bird, Glendora, Calif. "If you see a sprayhead that is popped up and is misting and fogging, that's an indication of an over-pressure situation," he says. "In that situation, we would recommend an in-stem pressure regulator that will regulate from 80 psi down to 30 psi."

Sprayheads equipped with pressure regulators can help irrigation contractors maintain an optimum water flow. Pressure regulators ensure that nozzles distribute water to nozzles at 30 psi, which is considered the optimum pressure level for spray nozzles, says Kevin Gordon, senior product manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. In general, pressure regulators add about \$3 to \$4 to the price of a sprayhead, Gordon says.

Regulators also help contractors maintain uniform pressure in the zones where pressure tends to be higher at the first sprinkler than the last. "When you pressure regulate, you get uniformity in the zone because all sprinklers operate at 30 psi," Gordon says. "So by pressure regulating, it gives you some flexibility in your piping design."

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Irrigation Innovations

(continued from page 98)

"Landscape architects are in tune to water conservation efforts and interested in efficiency and trying to minimize run times, so they recognize the better uniformity of fixed-arc patterns and therefore specify that," he explains.

When variable-arc nozzles are set at a half circle, they're comparable in efficiency to a fixed-arc nozzle but begin to lose coverage capability beyond that point, according to Fisher. Efficiency in irrigation refers to how the water is laid out across the irrigated plain. It's difficult to quantify how much more efficient fixed-arc nozzles are to adjustable nozzles, but it could be as much as 30 percent, according to Jordan. "We're very careful about talking about those numbers because there are numerous ways of measuring that, and there hasn't been any industry agreement on how to do that," Jordan says.

"CONTRACTORS STILL PREFER A DEFINITIVE FIXED ARC. A STANDARD STILL DELIVERS BETTER EFFICIENCY OFF OF THE NOZZLE FACE BECAUSE THEY ARE A PRESET GEOMETRY. IT'S HARD TO HAVE AN ADJUSTABLE NOZZLE THAT GIVES GOOD PERFORMANCE ALL THE WAY FROM 0 TO 360 DEGREES BECAUSE AT VARIOUS POINTS IN THE ARC IT'S JUST GOING TO BE WEAKER IN THE PATTERN." — DON FISHER

Fixed-arc nozzles are also more vandal resistant than adjustable nozzles, which a mischievous person can easily change. "People sometimes like to play with an adjustable nozzle and change the pattern, and you don't have to worry about that with a fixed arc," Jordan says.

Another nozzle that's helping to improve

even spray distribution is the dual-orifice nozzle. These nozzles feature one opening at the top and another at the bottom, which is designed for more close-in watering. The top orifice provides a similar trajectory and pattern to a standard nozzle. The bottom hole diverts about 15 percent of the spray at an angle of 6 to 7 degrees lower than at the top, according to Jordan. "In a traditional sprayhead nozzle that is definitely an advancement because you have water coming out of two different orifices to cover the entire spray pattern," Jordan says.

A new product that's also considered successful in reaching spots that are often neglected with variable and fixed patterns is the rotary nozzle. "Rotary nozzles are designed to work in that 15- to 25-foot throw distance, which is historically no-man's land between sprayheads and rotors, and this new

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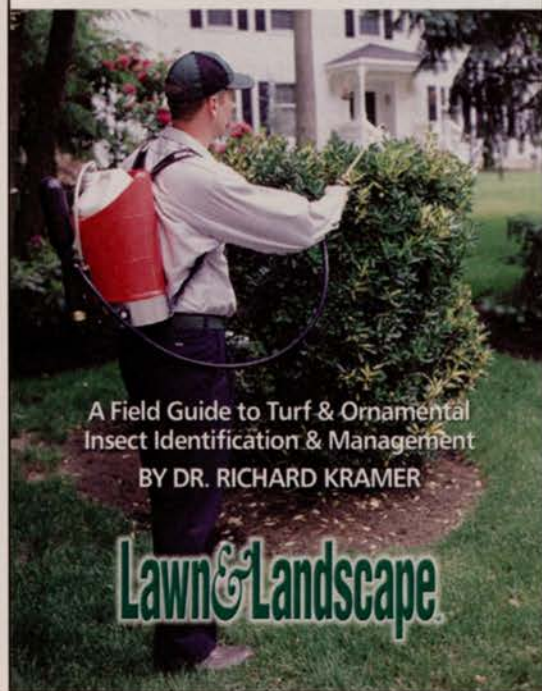
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(continued from page 100)

rotary nozzle is designed to cover that throw distance and is available in a variety of fixed-arc patterns and provides good uniformity similar to rotors," Jordan says. "It also has a precipitation rate that's in the rotor category as opposed to the sprayhead category and that can be mixed on a zone of rotors."

Rotary nozzles fit on sprayheads and deliver multiple rotating streams that are designed to provide even coverage throughout the radius range. They can provide 60 percent less flow than conventional sprayhead nozzles, meaning more heads can be installed per zone. Rotary nozzles sell for about \$8 a piece, Jordan says.

WEATHERING THE STORM. Wind conditions and land shape can sometimes affect the type of nozzle contractors will need for a particular job. If contractors are working in areas where windy conditions exist, low-angle nozzles typically work best. Most standard nozzles range in trajectory from 23 to 28 degrees and travel 10 to 12 feet, Fisher says. Water traveling from these nozzles will likely blow back toward the sprinkler during high winds.

Low-angle nozzles have a trajectory of 8 to 13 degrees, which lowers the throw distance to 4 to 6 feet. Contractors lose 20 percent of the spray radius with low-angle nozzles but reduce the chance of water loss from blowing sprays. "More of that water will actually hit where you want it to in the turf area because it's not diffusing in the air, it's not blowing back and it's not evaporating," Fisher says.

When using low-angle spray nozzles, contractors must install more sprinkler heads and space them closer together to reach their targeted areas. Slope can also determine whether a contractor uses a low-angle nozzle. On hilly areas, contractors may want to use a standard-trajectory sprinkler at the top of the slope and a low-angle nozzle at the bottom so the water will follow the hill's contours better, Gordon says.

But low-angle nozzles only feature one angle of trajectory, so some manufacturers are now making nozzles that have adjustable trajectories from 5 to 25 degrees. "This is a very important step for the irrigation industry because the actual in-

staller can fine-tune the sprinkler to the hardscape conditions," Fisher says.

So in a situation where the sprinkler may be spraying near a tree, the contractor can angle the nozzle down so it doesn't spray tree branches or any other obstruction. Variable-arc nozzles also perform well in irregular-shaped landscapes such as meandering sidewalks where it becomes more difficult to reach oddly positioned areas of turf, Fisher says. "In communities with green belts and so forth, you have arcs that simply don't fit well in that quarter, half, three quarter scenario, so you have to fill in 92 degrees, and the variable arcs work very well in that type



Designed to provide even coverage, rotary nozzles fit on irrigation sprayheads and deliver multiple rotating streams. Photo: Rain Bird

Free Rain

The most common maintenance problem irrigation contractors encounter with nozzles is plugging. Blockages can occur when dirt and debris enter a nozzle, causing irregular spray patterns or completely stopping the flow of water.

"If you see a half pattern and it's only spraying a third of what it's supposed to be, that's a good sign that it's probably clogged," says Josh Jordan, product manager for commercial sprays, Rain Bird, Glendora, Calif.

Generally, a nozzle will clog because of either low head placement in fresh soil, resulting in debris being sucked back into the nozzle upon retraction, or a very dirty water supply, which clogs the screen or nozzle quickly, says Kevin Gordon, senior product manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif.

In both cases, the best way to clear the nozzle is by removing it and rinsing it out in a clean bucket of water. Also, gentle use of a small, pointy instrument such as a toothpick can be used to loosen wedged sand grains, Gordon says. Blowing through a rinsed nozzle with compressed air or by mouth will also help clear debris.

of application," Fisher says.

For low-volume irrigation situations like landscape beds where contractors are trying to water more localized areas, microspray nozzles are an option. These nozzles cost about \$3 a piece, Gordon says. They emit a fine mist and are effective in irrigating very specific areas, such as tree wells but don't work well in windy conditions. "In open areas, I think microsprays are a mistake because the water never hits the ground," Gordon says. "They have their place, but it's limited. They're great for small beds because they keep the water in that small space."

An alternative to the microspray is the bubbler nozzle. In the past, contractors could only attach an adapter to a sprayhead and then place a bubbler on top of the adapter. This was an effective way to irrigate a specific area without losing water to wind gusts because the bubbler releases a small stream of water that floods the targeted zone. But these above-ground tubes did not retract, making them aesthetically displeasing in flower beds and susceptible to damage. Now, manufacturers are making bubbler nozzles that fully retract with the sprinkler. They sell for about \$1.85 each. "You get the effect of a bubbler, but you don't have that little nub sticking up when the sprinkler is retracted," Gordon says. ■

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USE READER SERVICE #92

One lawn care company that added full-service tree care to its mix proves that money does indeed grow on trees.

by Leslie Stroope



Adding LEAVES

When Meehan's Lawn Service, Brookpark, Ohio, added full-service tree care to their mix, Tree and Shrub Care Manager Fred Bess says he refused to use the blanket application technique practiced by many companies who offer similar services. "As far as tree and shrub care goes, we sell customers what they need," Bess says. "It's better for their plants, it's better for the environment and it builds customer trust."

Meehan's Lawn Service began offering full-service tree and shrub care in 1997 in response to customer demand, says Owner Tim Meehan. The company's full-service tree care choices include four insect and

disease treatments, spring and fall fertilization by deep-root injection as well as pruning and antidesiccant to help protect evergreens from the windburn and salt spray they are subject to during North-east Ohio winters.

The first step in adding the service to the mix was to bring in Bess to manage it. Bess, who came to Meehan's Lawn Service in 1997 with 18 years of green industry experience under his belt, established the program gradually. "We started out with the basic spray truck equipment and then built up from there with things like pruning equipment, depending on what

(continued on page 106)

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USE READER SERVICE #93

Full-Service Tree Care

(continued from page 104)

the customers' needs were," he says.

Meehan says it took three years to make back the initial investment in equipment costs. He estimates he spent \$20,000 on a spray truck and \$1,000 on the pumping system. According to Meehan, having a spray unit with multiple tanks, reels and pumps is important because some insecticides are phytotoxic to trees, carrying multiple mixes, so this type of equipment allows him to carry various types of targeted pest removal products without damaging trees. "If you don't have the capability of being able to use two different mixes, you're very limited in the products you can use based on what plants you can use them on," he says.

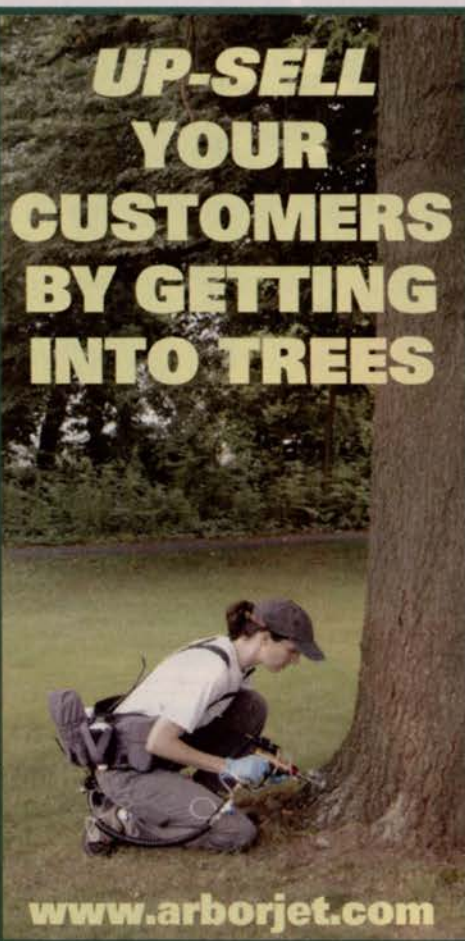
When it comes to marketing full-service tree care as an add-on service, Meehan says the most effective angle has been to educate existing customers that his company offers it. To do this, Bess and his assistant produced and mailed 10,000 direct mail promotional pieces last spring. "Basically, it's a

"WE STARTED OUT WITH THE BASIC SPRAY TRUCK EQUIPMENT AND THEN BUILT UP FROM THERE WITH THINGS LIKE PRUNING EQUIPMENT, DEPENDING ON WHAT THE CUSTOMERS' NEEDS WERE. AS FAR AS TREE AND SHRUB CARE GOES, WE SELL CUSTOMERS WHAT THEY NEED. IT'S BETTER FOR THEIR PLANTS, IT'S BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND IT BUILDS CUSTOMER TRUST." — FRED BESS, TREE & SHRUB CARE MANAGER, MEEHAN'S LAWN SERVICE, BROOKPARK, OHIO

flyer offering all the different services with a bulk rate card on it so you just fill out your name, address, phone number and what services you're interested in, drop it in the mail and then we stop out and leave the appropriate quotes for you," he explains, adding that he doesn't believe in giving service quotes over the phone due to the varying levels of treatment needed from property to property. "We got a 1 to 2 percent return on the bulk mailing cards, but those leads typically sell at between 50 and 75 percent as opposed to methods we've used in the past, such as telemarketing, which generated more leads at a lower cost but had a 20 to 30 percent sale rate."

Educating customers about full-service tree care has been challenging, adds Bess. To get the service information out there, Bess and his assistant distribute newsletters to clients explaining what was done on the property, what tree and shrub prob-

(continued on page 108)



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Biological Pest Control

(continued from page 106)

lems are happening on landscapes in the area and offering some watering tips. "One section that really helps is the one titled, "Hey, you missed some plants," Bess says. "Customers are so used to the companies that come out and blanket-spray everything. This section tells them not to worry if they see that not all of their trees and

shrubs were sprayed because that just means those plants didn't need it at the time. Once the customers are better educated to know that we're doing what's right and not just coming out and spraying whatever we feel like or the entire property, it makes life a lot easier for me."

Meehan's Lawn Service has found that

educating the customer sometimes means giving them bad news, as well. Bess says he occasionally encounters trees that, because of disease, are too damaged to be saved and lays out the courses of action customers can take.

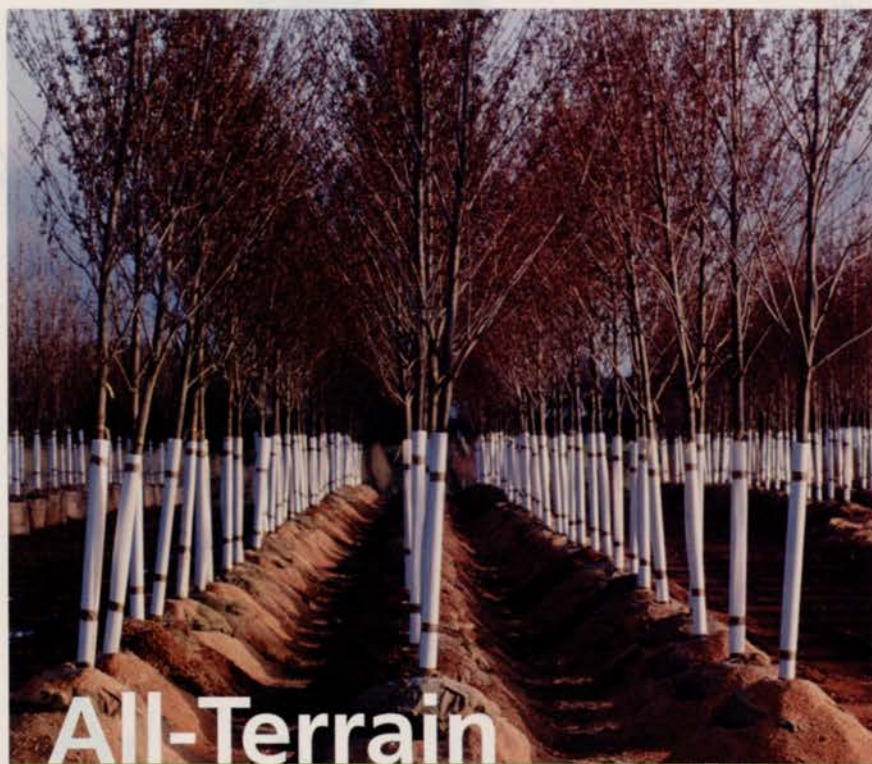
Customers aren't the only ones who can benefit from education. Bess says when companies are looking at adding full-service tree care to the mix, in addition to

"ONCE CUSTOMERS ARE BETTER EDUCATED TO KNOW THAT WE'RE DOING WHAT'S RIGHT AND NOT JUST COMING OUT AND SPRAYING WHATEVER WE FEEL LIKE OR THE ENTIRE PROPERTY, IT MAKES LIFE A LOT EASIER FOR ME." — FRED BESS

having the right equipment for the job, they need to realize that training is an ongoing process, even after employees have received their general ornamental plant and shade tree pest control license. He says while there are a handful of diseases and insects lawn care companies need to know to care for lawns, there are literally hundreds of insects and diseases that affect trees and shrubs, and companies need to be able to recognize and treat them. For instance, keeping up on the latest insect and disease developments afforded Bess the ability to identify the second sighting of a pest in his state – the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid – an aphid relative that has been killing hemlock trees along the East Coast.

Overall, Bess and Meehan say adding full-care tree service to their mix has been beneficial for their customers because they're able to provide better service. "This is because we're there more often so we can spot problems before they become more serious," he says.

And the service, which the company prices based on time and material costs and boasts gross profit margins of about 15 percent, has been worth the effort so far, according to Meehan.



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Once Upon a BOTTOM

Landscape contractors don't need fairy godmothers to find the right business software – all they need is to take the time to do the proper research before they buy.

by Leslie Stroope

For contractors, buying business software can be a lot like Prince Charming's quest to find the perfect fit for the glass slipper – long and tedious, but worth it in the end. The right business software can decrease costs while increasing productivity. That's why manufacturers say it's important that contractors do their homework to make sure the software program that looks like a snazzy carriage initially doesn't turn into a pumpkin once it's installed back at the office.

WHY SOFTWARE? The right business software can save a landscape company time and money by cutting down on paperwork, overhead, redundancy and errors. For instance, Evan Saylor, owner, Hurst Landscaping, Lebanon, Penn., says that, despite having a fleet of 24 trucks, one part-time employee is able to handle all of the operations, including job tickets, payroll and accounts receivable, thanks to software.

Unlike having separate software to handle specific tasks, such as scheduling, job costing and accounting, contractors and manufacturers say an integrated software package streamlines operations while keeping overhead low. "You're using one software program to take you from the initial incoming call all the way through the job cost procedure," explains Nannette Fohs, chief operating officer, Include Software, Glen Burnie, Md. "In between, you're touching on estimating, scheduling, purchasing, payroll and time card entry. All of those things ultimately lead to showing whether you're profitable on the job."

For Bruce Birdsong, president, Precision Landscape Management, Dallas, Texas, one benefit of upgrading from using separate business programs to a single integrated software package was the time saved and errors reduced by not having to repeatedly enter each account into the respective programs during the proposal, bidding and invoicing processes. "Before, we were doing payroll in one system while bidding in another," he says. "Integrated software has allowed me to increase my revenue without increasing my administrative staff, and has reduced my costs considerably. I have also been able to train office personnel to enter projects into the system, which frees up the sales staff to sell."

Glenn Zior, vice president, Sensible Software, Ijamsville, Md., says using business software has allowed his lawn care company to become almost 100 percent paperless. Zior boasts he can run the whole company, including payables, receivables and billing, in about 25 minutes per day.

According to Joe Kucik, president, Real Green Software, Walled Lake, Mich., the average landscape company boosts productivity costs 30 percent by using software. "In the office,



sometimes it's just a matter of having better information at your fingertips so that you can answer customer questions more quickly and with more details," he says.

SOFTWARE FEATURES. Because prices and features of business software vary, choosing which attributes a company will need can be a bit like standing before a giant buffet, trying to decide what will fit on the plate. Manufacturers say business software programs can do everything from consolidated billing, which allows multiple properties to be billed to one property manager, to mailing lists, remote data collection, contact management, materials tracking, scheduling, forecasting, accounting, payroll and expense tracking.

Karen May, software specialist, Adkad Technologies, Delanson, N.Y., says many times contractors think if they spend a lot of money on software, it will include everything they want. "They don't necessarily need all those bells and whistles, like being able to barcode," May says.

Many contractors want a basic software program that will handle billing and scheduling. Zior explains, warning that most business software looks the same on the surface, but not all programs include a good job costing system. "If profit is why you're in business, make

sure the software has a good method to tell you how much you're making," he says.

"The margins on this work are slim, so the ability to analyze how many hours worth of labor it's taking you to get the job done relative to your revenue is very important," adds Maris Franke, president, Practical Solutions, Columbus, Ohio.

COST CONCERNS. Manufacturers say cost is often the determining factor of a software purchase, as opposed to whether it's the best fit for their company. "Contractors don't seem to have much concern about how to project how much their labor requirements will be or their fertilizer requirements or how many rhododendrons they're going to need or how many cubic yards of mulch they're going to need," Franke says. "They think, 'Does it send bills? Yes. Does it cost the least amount of money? Yes. Then that's the one I want.'"

The price of a business software program can vary from \$2,000 to \$15,000, depending on the features it includes and the number of users and clients it can manage, Kucik shares.

On average, the cost of a software package increases based on its number of concurrent users. "You might have somebody at a remote location who is working through an Internet connection at the server at the main office," Fohs explains. "You might also have a person

who's doing accounts payable, and if both of them are logged on at the same time, that's two concurrent users."

May estimates that a company making \$100,000 per year in total revenue would be able to make back the initial investment spent to purchase the software within the first two months of having the system in place.

ASSESS YOUR NEEDS. Precisely because there are so many features for contractors to choose from, manufacturers say that before contractors whip out their wallet and buy the first program they find, it is important to analyze their business' needs to determine what they need a software program to be able to do for them and to make sure the software and its features match with the size of their company. "Ask yourself, 'What am I currently using now? What are my frustrations with it and what would I like to have instead?'" Fohs suggests.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY. Once a landscape contractor has analyzed his business and narrowed his focus to the software choices that target his specific needs, it's time to take a test drive. Many companies offer free, no-obligation trials of their software, either on CD or as a download from their Web site so contractors can get a feel for

Business Software Solutions

how the software works and how easy it is to use before they shell out the money.

Birdsong says when he was searching for a new business software program he auditioned four software products before making his final decision. May says these demonstration versions range from movies of people talking about the software to scaled-down versions of the actual product. "You install the software and it allows you to put in five customers so you can give it a test run," she says.

Once contractors have decided which program or programs have made the cut, it's time for one last bit of research to make sure the shoe truly fits.

Before Birdsong purchased his software, he called references ranging from those provided by the manufacturers to other contractors. Fohs advises all contractors do this, suggesting that they request longtime customer references, as well as new clients.

"You want to get a feel for how they were treated as a customer after the sale was made,

what kind of support they received and how difficult it has been to implement the software," Fohs advises.

May says contractors should also ask manufacturers about the technical support they offer. Manufacturers say support costs range from free to a monthly fee, depending on the software. Contractors need to find out how the service is provided (over the phone, by e-mail or on the company's Web site) and how much, if any, support is included with the initial software purchase. "I've heard horror stories of people paying \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month in annual support," Fohs says. "That's why I suggest speaking to clients or references who have used the software. I also suggest asking your software manufacturer if a separate server is needed to run the software and if the contractor can install the software or if it needs to be installed by a qualified information technology specialist."

Many companies offer the option to sign annual service agreements after the soft-

ware has been purchased. Manufacturers say typically the contract includes a set number of hours of technical assistance, upgrades and state and federal tax tables and form changes mandated by the government, which many companies allow to be downloaded from their Web site. The costs of annual maintenance agreements vary from a percentage of the initial software purchase cost to a set fee, say Franke and Zior. Some companies require contractors purchase a service agreement for the first year, which then has the option to be renewed, Fohs says, adding that 99 percent of landscape companies renew their service agreement after the initial contract is up.

THE LEARNING CURVE. Once the software package has been purchased, different companies offer different ways of learning it. Some offer a set amount of training with the purchase of the software, Franke says.

(continued on page 114)

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USE READER SERVICE #98



BAHIA AMBUSHED!

As the Green Guardians began to infiltrate the secret testing grounds of EverRide on Tuesday, one Guardian met with unexpected resistance.

"One of our Amazon warrior heroines was briefly detained today by security forces as she penetrated the perimeter of the EverRide compound," a government blade told members of the press corps.

Met with gasps of horror, he assured the press that things were still going as planned. "It was only a minor setback, and Bahia is fine. She wrestled with the death machine for a few moments, subdued it with a choke hold to its roll bar, engaged its integrated parking brake and slipped into the shadows of the treeline before it could engage its sinister cutting blades," he said.

The Guardians, who work for the Federation for Overthrowing EverRide (F.O.E.), are on a mission to destroy the world's most efficient turf machines — preferably without breaking a nail in the process.

The Daily Rescue
BY THE GRASS, FOR THE GRASS



Download Green Guardian and EverRide screensavers at EverRide.com

Business Software

(continued from page 112)

Training can take place over the telephone, through online tutorials, on-site at the company or in the manufacturer's facilities, May adds, explaining that, on average, it takes about one week to learn the basics of a software program.

When training employees on the system, Saylor says it's important to not fall into the mindset of training being wasted time. "You have to look at training time and the time you spend talking to people as an investment. You can't look at it as non-productive time because it's productive many times over if you get it done right."

It may seem like a lot of extra effort, but taking the trouble to analyze your business and find the software that best fits your company's needs can ultimately save a lot of time, money and heartache that results from buying the wrong software. By taking the time to do research, ask the right questions and try before they buy, landscape contractors can ensure a storybook ending. ■

Estimates To Go

While many companies use business software in the office to help streamline operations, there is a growing trend of companies using portable software to give on-the-spot estimates. "Especially in residential mowing, usually the first person who can give somebody a price gets the job," explains Phil Dyck, co-owner, Job Time Tools / Lawnmaster Services, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

This portable estimation software is loaded into a laptop computer or PDA. Then once the yard's dimensions and number of obstacles, such as trees and signs, have been entered into the system, the software plugs that information into a series of time-motion analysis-based mathematical formulas that calculate the time it will take to mow the area based on a series of customizable parameters, including the type of mower being used, Dyck explains. The estimate then can be printed on the spot for the customer from a small printer that attaches to the estimator's belt loops.

According to Dyck, estimating software is comparably priced to office software and can save time and money by allowing contractors to bid more accurately and cut down on overtime costs incurred by overbooking crews.

Portable estimating devices also can be used as crew management tools, Dyck adds. "Every day we assign our crews eight hours worth of work and if they're coming in at nine or 10 hours, we know they either need more training or they're slacking somewhere, and if they're coming in too quickly we know that they're cutting corners," he says.

By reducing guesswork required by traditional estimating methods, new estimators can be trained in a matter of hours instead of the years of prior experience normally required, Dyck adds, explaining that in his business, scheduling by time instead of job has reduced bickering and "cherry-picking" of job lists.

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USE READER SERVICE #103

Drawing the Line

Check out these trenchers, curbmaking machines and edging products that give landscapes their defining edges.

compiled by Leslie Stroope

Tygar Bengal TG1000 Curb Machine

- Can be used to install landscape curbs, commercial curbs and 24-inch garden paths and walkways
 - Accepts rocks up to $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch in size
 - Lays curb at up to 16 feet per minute
 - Steering has vertical and lateral adjustments to match grades
 - Self-propelled system
 - Powered by a 2.5-hp Honda OHV gasoline engine
 - Heavy duty pneumatic wheels
 - Tygar Manufacturing – www.tygarmfg.com
- Circle 220 on reader service form**



Decorative Curbmaking Machines Model 207

- Patented auger system continuously delivers concrete to the mold, utilizing 100 percent of the machine's positive energy
 - Constructed of heat-treated, abrasion-resistant carbon steel, powder-coated and chromed
 - Powered by 6.5 HP Honda IC gasoline engine
 - Sized and balanced hydraulic system
 - Heat-treated, abrasive-resistant, carbon steel compaction tube
 - Special wide pneumatic tires allow easy steering and keep the machine from sinking in soft soil.
 - Can lay 10 to 18 feet of concrete curb per minute (depending on mold used)
 - Can accept true concrete (aggregate mix)
 - Decorative Curbmaking Machines – www.decocurb.com
- Circle 221 on reader service form**

Pave Tech Pave Edge Industrial Paver Edge Restraint

- Provides strong, long lasting containment of permeable pavers
 - Geo-grid acts as the "anchor tie-back" to prevent the edging and pavers from moving
 - Alternative to expensive poured-in-place concrete curbs that often increase cost as well as the amount of paver cutting required
 - Tall enough to handle the thicker layer of bedding material on permeable paver projects
 - Pave Tech – www.pavetech.com
- Circle 222 on reader service form**



Sure-Loc Aluminum Edging

- Flexible, durable and lightweight
 - Comes in $\frac{1}{8}$ " and $\frac{3}{16}$ " thicknesses
 - Comes in 4-inch and 5.5-inch heights
 - Comes in 8-foot and 16-foot lengths
 - Available in green, brown, black and mill finishes
 - Will not rot or rust
 - Sure-loc Edging – www.surelocedging.com
- Circle 223 on reader service form**

Cobra Professional Edging

- Ribbed sides form dirt-locking pocket and increases strength
 - 10-year warranty
 - Double "V" shape prevents lifting out of the ground and frost heave
 - Does not require anchoring stakes
 - Available in 20- and 60-foot lengths
 - CobraCo Manufacturing – www.cobraco.com
- Circle 224 on reader service form**



E-Z Trench Bedscaper BE310-A

- Steerable rear wheels for creating smooth-curved and scalloped beds
 - Defines a border and shapes the bed, giving a slightly raised appearance
 - Handle-mounted trigger allows on-the-fly cutting depth changes
 - Powered by a 6.5-hp Honda engine with a "wet clutch," supplying ample power while providing superior durability
 - Can cut 100 feet in 5 minutes, depending on soil conditions)
 - Features adjustable handle height and lift handles
 - E-Z Trench – www.eztrench.com
- Circle 225 on reader service form



The Concrete Edge Co. Lil' Bubba Concrete Curb Machine

- Self-propelled
 - Powered by a 4-hp Honda gasoline engine
 - Creates a consistent flow of concrete with each revolution
 - Open design to fill in uneven terrains resulting in a more even appearing curb
 - Unique motion scores the concrete as it packs the mold to prevent "flat spots" or "weak areas" that can cause cracking.
 - Plunger's motion eliminates concrete bridging in the hopper
 - Can lay curb at up to 16 feet per minute
 - All steel construction
 - All-terrain tires
 - The Concrete Edge – www.concreteedge.com
- Circle 226 on reader service form



- recycled black vinyl
- Rounded keyhole cuts reduce kinking, improve bending radius capabilities, add strength and increase flexibility
 - Smaller size (1½-inch deep by 2½-inch wide) is ideal for shallow pavers, patio blocks, slate or flagstone hardscape installations
 - Does not require cutting or snipping

- Available in rigid or flexible sections
 - Anchored by non-bending steel stakes that eliminate gapping, frost heave and contractor callbacks
 - Covered by a 15-year, 100-percent plus guarantee covering labor, materials and freight costs
 - Oly-Ola Edgings – www.oly-ola.com
- Circle 227 on reader service form



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USE READER SERVICE #104

Floral FOCUS

Add a little color to your clients' landscapes with these plants.

compiled by Will Nepper

MOON Nurseries Spring Snow Crabapple – *Malus 'Spring Snow'*

- Grows in USDA cold hardiness zones to zone 4 (-30 to -20 degrees Fahrenheit)
- Can reach a height of 25 to 30 inches and a spread of 20 to 35 inches
- Plant has an oval shape, medium green foliage and white, sterile flowers
- Has excellent resistance to mildew, good resistance to cedar apple rust and fair resistance to apple scab and fireblight

Circle 210 on reader service form



Ball Horticultural Simply Beautiful Serenity – *Osteospermum*

- Early, uniform and naturally compact across all seven colors
- Basal branching makes a full, mounded plant
- Free-flowering for excellent impact
- Full range of bright colors and flower forms
- Choices of lavender, pink, light lavender, purple, white, lavender bliss and white bliss



- Great cool-season crop for early spring and fall
- Dark green leaves are a great contrast to the bright blooms

Circle 211 on reader service form

Monrovia Bud-Blooming Heather Collection – *Calluna vulgaris*

- Grows in USDA cold zones 5 to 8 and ASH heat zones 4 to 8
- Prized for interesting colors, textures and long bloom time
- Buds first appear in early fall and are extremely resilient, remaining colorful well into winter even though frosts and temperatures are as low as 15 degrees Fahrenheit
- All are evergreen
- Many make excellent groundcovers, planted 12 to 15 inches apart
- They will slowly form a dense mat that is forbidding to most weeds
- Require good drainage and prefer soil that is rich in organic matter



- Excellent source of fall and winter color in containers
- Collection includes Amethyst Scotch Heather – *Calluna vulgaris* 'Amethyst' with purplish-crimson buds from August to January, dark green foliage, upright growth and bushy habits and full growth dimensions of 12 inches tall and 16 inches wide; Aphrodite Scotch Heather – *Calluna vulgaris* 'Aphrodite' with deep red buds that show from August to January, dark green foliage and full growth dimensions of 12 inches tall and 16 inches wide; Annette Scotch Heather – *Calluna vulgaris* 'Annette' with clear pink buds that last from August to December, retain good color when dried and reach 18 inches tall by 16 inches wide; and Melanie Scotch Heather – *Calluna vulgaris* 'Melanie' with elongated clusters of white buds that occur from August to November, upright growth and full growth dimensions of 14 inches tall by 16 inches wide

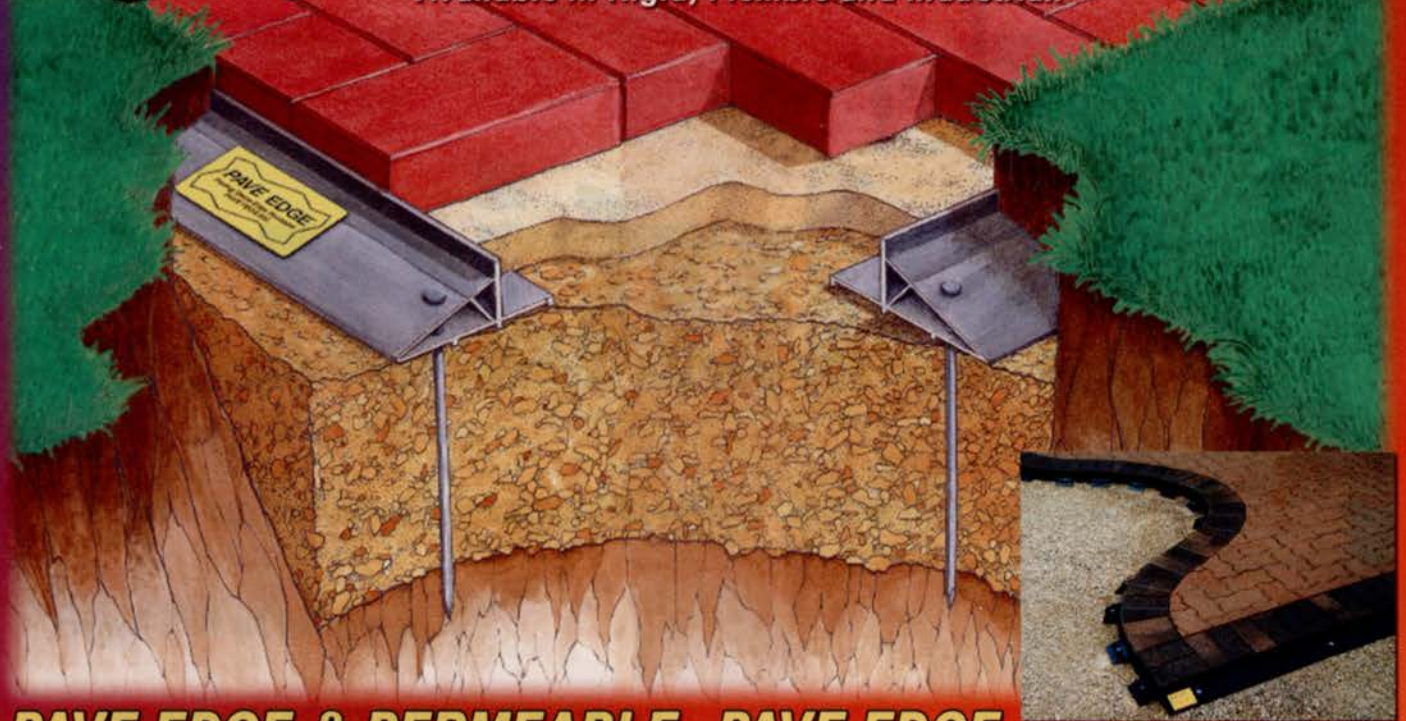
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USE READER SERVICE #105

Spreader Solutions

Don't forget to review these new spreader options when seeking out pesticide application equipment.

compiled by Will Nepper

PSB PrizeLAWN BigFOOT HVO Broadcast Spreader

- Features a hinged plate configured for normal fertilizer applications, which flips out of the way to expose the mass flow port
- Large 13-inch diameter, pneumatic tires on rust-resistant rims
- 300-series stainless steel frame
- Hi-impact, injection molded polyethylene hopper
- 1.75 cubic foot hopper volume holds up to 100 pounds
- All components touching the product are rustproof plastic or stainless steel
- Positive on/off system

Circle 213 on reader service form

LESCO HPS Spreader

- 150-pound hopper capacity
- Remote control pattern adjuster
- Features a rotary agitator
- Has a deflector, cover and stainless steel screen
- Advanced spray system offering up to 34,000 square feet of coverage
- No-boom design – two nozzles spray 9-foot width
- Offers low-pressure, low-drift performance with automatic pressure control
- Offers consistent application rate for the spray
- Paired nozzles are turned to deliver the correct amount of spray per 1,000 square feet at preset ground speeds
- Fourth and sixth gear ground speeds set at 3.5 mph and 5 mph, respectively

Circle 214 on reader service form



Earthway New EV-N-SPREAD Professional Shut-Off System

- Features eight position independent adjustments for right and left side throwing port
- Available on all EarthWay commercial and professional models

Circle 215 on reader service form



Gregson-Clark Hy-Lander

- Self-propelled turf applicator capable of simultaneous dry and liquid applications at 5,000 square feet per minute
- Capacity of more than 2 acres per fill-up
- Hydrostatic drive with joystick controls for on-the-fly functions
- Ground-driven fertilizer metering ensures correct rates regardless of ground speed
- Foam marker eliminates skips and overlaps
- Balanced design concentrates weight over drive wheels for exceptional traction and handling on hills

Circle 216 on reader service form



Spyker Spreaders Model 88 Spreader

- Made with a stainless steel commercial frame and a 5/8-inch solid stainless steel axle

- Equipped with "perfect balance," wide stance and dual handle features
- Has enclosed metal gears
- Has a 110-pound/2.03 cubic foot hopper capacity

Circle 217 on reader service form

Perma Green Ride-On MAGNUM Sprayer/Spreader

- Powered by a Honda 6.5-hp horizontal shaft engine and wet clutch
- Features a heavy-duty transmission
- Equipped with a 150-pound hopper and 12-gallon spray tank
- Offers an improved spray system with 2 gpm pump and improved spreader mechanism
- Sports custom-molded protective panels for safety and style
- 100-percent stainless steel frame is laser-cut and precision stamped



- Has no complicated electrical or hydraulic systems

Circle 218 on reader service form

C&S Turf Care Equipment SS10012 Turf Tracker Time Machine

- 100-pound capacity, 3-speed spreader
- 11.5-hp engine with full hydrostatic drive, zero-turn maneuverability, 4 mph application speed and 8 mph transport speed
- 12-gallon tank; dual-action, rear-mount break-away booms
- Stainless steel frame
- Convenient operator controls
- Options include 25-foot coil hose with spot spray gun, border guard for spreader and adjustable seat
- Allows spread and spray widths of 4 feet to 12 feet wide

Circle 219 on reader service form



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USE READER SERVICE #106

On the **Right Track**

Until recently, the management team at Scott's LawnService, Knoxville, Tenn., had only limited visibility into its field operations. They knew what was scheduled to take place, but as with any mobile service organization, once the workers left the office, keeping track of their activities was difficult. While Scott's managers did occasionally perform on-site job inspections, with nearly 4,000 customers who are visited six to 10 times a year each, keeping an eye on workers at all times was impossible.

For example, Scott's managers could not say for sure how long each lawn technician was staying at a customer site. Also, Scott's lawn technicians would record their daily and weekly billable hours manually, so there was no way to verify the accuracy of the workers' timesheets.

In January 2004, Scott's selected Xora GPS TimeTrack to help improve the productivity of its field operations. The company equipped its 10 lawn technicians with GPS-enabled Motorola mobile phones. The initial cash outlay for the service was about \$1,500, which included the cost of the phones and the setup. Also, on a monthly basis Scott's is spending about \$20 per worker per phone, which includes the cost of the Xora service and the wireless air time.

Scott's workers use the phones to record customer job numbers when they arrive at the customer site. The Xora system also captures the job start and stop times. Back in the Knoxville office, sales managers and the dispatcher have access to web-based maps generated by the Xora service that show how many miles the technicians have driven, how their days are going, and what accounts they've been on.

Today, each Scott's technician uses the phones to clock in and out. This information is then sent via wireless transmission to the Xora data center, where it, along with the maps, is available over the Internet in the form of business reports. Scott's Dispatcher Jessica Smith and three of the company's sales managers use the maps and reports to keep better track of their technicians' activities and billable hours.

Since deploying Xora nearly one year ago, Scott's has saved money and improved the production of its field staff. According to Scott's Sales Manager Keith Boker, "Our production is definitely up since we started using Xora and we'll probably save 5 percent on fuel costs this year from the ability to more efficiently route our drivers."

— Kevin Wolf, Tool Guy Public Relations

Circle 228 on reader service form



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Tom Fochtman, CoCal Landscape

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JANUARY 2005

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I. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

CONTRACTOR or SERVICES

1. Landscape Contractor
 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor
 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
 5. Irrigation Contractor
 6. Landscape Architect
 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

6. Landscape Lighting
 7. Hardscape Installation
 8. Water Features

Landscape Maintenance

9. Landscape Renovation
 10. Turf Fertilization
 11. Turf Aeration
 12. Tree & Ornamental Care
 13. Tree & Stump Removal
 14. Irrigation Maintenance
 15. Erosion Control

Pesticide Application

16. Turf Disease Control
 17. Turf Insect Control
 18. Turf Weed Control
 19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application

Other

20. Mowing
 21. Hydroseeding
 22. Snow Removal
 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
 ____ 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
 ____ 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
 ____ 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
 ____ 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
 ____ 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
 ____ 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
 ____ 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
 ____ 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
 ____ 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
 ____ 11. \$7,000,000 or more

II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

9. Dealer
 10. Distributor
 11. Formulator
 12. Manufacturer

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

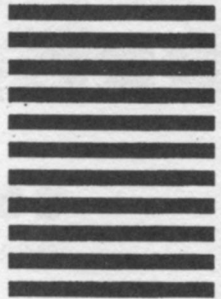
13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
 14. School, College, University
 15. Trade Association, Library
 Others (please describe) _____

2. What services does your business offer?

1. Landscape Design
 Landscape Installation
 2. Seeding or Sodding
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Toro TR Series Rotors

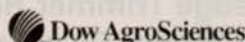
- Help fine tune spray trajectory
- Enable easier water adjustment and water shut off
- Cover a 25- to 77-foot area
- Include easily adjustable, Smart Arc and slip clutch
- Include 5-inch pop-up to clear tall grasses
- Toro – www.toro.com

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Dow AgroSciences Spotlight Specialty Herbicide

- A postemergence herbicide
- Activity is usually visible within 48 hours
- Offers improved clover control along with control of other hard-to-control weeds



Spotlight*

- Advanced chemistry creates a non-volatile ester formulation that is labeled for use on warm- and cool-season grasses
- Can be applied year-round on established turf, including residential lawns, golf courses, parks, sports, sod farms and more
- Active ingredient is fluroxypyr, a systemic herbicide that translocates quickly to disrupt water intake
- Works well with all primary broadleaf herbicides
- Dow AgroSciences – www.dowagro.com/turf

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Rain Bird MPR Nozzles for 5000/5000 Plus Rotors

- Matched Precipitation Rate nozzles are designed for simple adjustment between various radii from 25 to 35 feet
- Eliminate the need for fixed arc patterns
- Feature flexibility in arc adjustment by using top-adjust screws
- Can be quickly custom-tailored to deliver matched precipitation rates within and between radii
- Eliminate the risk of under- or over-watering
- Equipped with Rain Bird's exclusive Rain Curtain™ technology that provides even, consistent distribution of large droplets



over the entire radius, including close-in areas, which helps to reduce both runoff and erosion

- Each of the tree radius choices includes three nozzle trees with quarter, third, half and full circle styles attached and color-coded for fast, error-free identification
- All styles are compatible with the nozzle extraction feature that allows easy maintenance of 5000/5000 Plus rotors
- Rain Bird – www.rainbird.com

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Sno-Way International Series 29 Plow

- Solid direct linkage "marries" plow to vehicle
- Flex Force Frames absorb energy, extending the life of the equipment
- High-strength steels provide durability
- Shock Killer urethane system saves stress on plow, truck and driver
- Full-blade utilization moves snow more efficiently
- Patented Wireless Control option puts operator in total control with fewer truck alterations
- Sno-Way International – www.snoway.com



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Shindaiwa C270 Brushcutter

- Features one-piece electronic ignition
- Has a chrome-plated cylinder and two-ring piston
- Equipped with an easy-access stop switch and a heavy-duty debris shield
- Forced-air cooling, discharged away from operator
- TK slide-valve carburetor all-position and smooth operation
- Spark arrestor muffler with replaceable screen
- Offset ergonomic handlebar for operator comfort
- Full anti-vibration engine, handle and harness
- Carbon steel mainshaft reduces vibration and operator fatigue
- Heavy-duty gearcase helical gears with splined ends for smooth power transfer
- Shindaiwa – www.shindaiwa.com

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shindaiwa

Encore Z34 Riding Mower

- Heavy steel frame with reinforced deck
- Four-point suspension deck

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- The RedMax CHTZ2400 double-sided hedge trimmer is equipped with Komatsu Zenoah's Strato-Charged™ engine plus a new, improved gear case and connecting rod with sealed bearing for longer, more reliable service.
- The 23.6 cc two-cycle Strato-Charged™ engine complies with CARB II and EPA Phase 2 clean air standards without a catalytic converter. Fresh air is introduced into the engine between the exhaust gases and the fresh charge of air/fuel mix.
- The CHTZ2400's double-sided, 24-inch, dual reciprocating blades are at an ergonomic 1.62 inch pitch. Rotatable handle and chain saw style grips maximize operator safety and productivity. A four point anti vibration system reduces fatigue.



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- High blade tip speed – 19,000 FPM
- Cutting speeds to 8 mph
- Encore – www.encoreequipment.com

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Red Max GZ4000 Chainsaw

- Powered by the 40.1-cc, 2.45-horsepower Strato-Charged engine, which meets 2005 EPA and CARB standards without the need for a catalytic muffler
- Engine has a maximum speed of 13,000 rpm
- Equipped with RedMax's dust-free system, which prevents sawdust or other debris from clogging the engine in take and overheating the engine



- With a choice of 14, 16 or 18 inch bar, the GZ4000 can take on limb pruning or removal
- Weighs only 9.67 pounds
- RedMax – www.redmax.com

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- One application provides 8 to 12 weeks of residual control
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- Wide window of application means users can apply when convenient

allectus

- Affective on white grubs, Japanese beetles, mole crickets, cutworms, fire ants and many more
- Bayer Environmental Science – www.bayerprocentral.com

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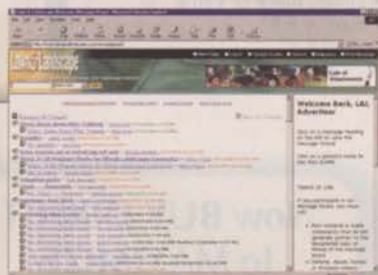
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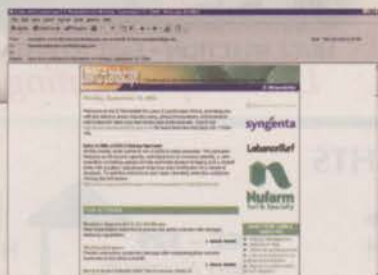


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- Features a quick deck-height-adjust system that allows easy height adjustment for the operator
- Exmark – www.exmark.com



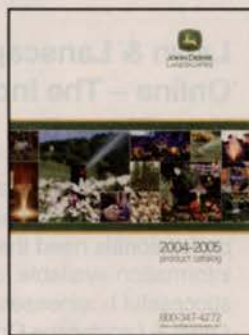
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Do you have a new product you'd like to see in this section?

If so, send your company name, product name, a list of the product's key features, your contact name, e-mail, Web site and address, in addition to a high-resolution color image of the product to Nicole Wisniewski, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113, or e-mail this information to nwisniewski@gie.net.

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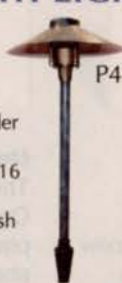
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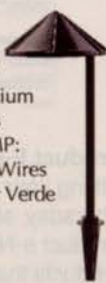
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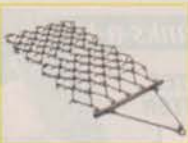
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Send resume to: Skinner Nurseries,

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Hiring Effectively at Swingle Tree & Lawn Care

To meet the challenge of finding and retaining strong employees at Denver, Colo.-based Swingle Tree & Lawn Care, we've created a standardized interview and hiring process that helps us identify "A" players among stacks of job applications. At Swingle, our busiest hiring period is usually during the spring growing season, though we do hire year-round. Management or customer service positions may open at any time of year, so having a structured interview process helps us tackle all hiring situations with the same efficiency.

We begin by advertising open positions in newspapers, at career fairs or as a part of our employee referral program. A range of resumes will come in depending on the position. We may receive 10 applications for a technician position or 60 or more for management positions. Recently, we received nearly 225 resumes through an Internet job site for two customer service openings.

To efficiently and objectively qualify potential candidates, we evaluate each application for a supervisory-level position or above using our Resume Scoring Form. Here, we outline minimum qualifications for the position based on the appropriate job description. For an administrative position, for example, the Resume Scoring Form lists skill sets including industry experience, communication and computer skills, problem-solving ability, etc.

Generally, candidates are scored on a scale of one to 15 for skill sets such as management experience, while other qualifications are graded more concretely. We may give a candidate 10 points for possessing solid word-processing skills or


zero points if they haven't developed these abilities. Additionally, if a candidate fails to address items we specifically mentioned in our advertisement, such as including an example of how they motivated employees at a previous job, this will translate into a lower score than for someone who has the skill set and responded accordingly.

After scoring each application, we typically contact the top 15 to 20 candidates via telephone. Ideally, this helps us narrow down our search to three to five "A" players. From there, a series of two to four face-to-face interviews will lead us to the most qualified candidate. For technician-level positions, we interview everyone who meets our minimum qualifications: having a driver's license, a clean motor vehicle record and an enjoyment of physical outdoor work.

Our resume ranking system has resulted in hiring more qualified applicants and also has forced us to look more carefully at every application we receive. Some applicants may have great skills to provide an employer, but lack the presentation in the form of a resume. If we look more closely at the content of the resume, rather than just the presentation, we may find someone who would normally be overlooked. Also, we can easily identify candidates who are "fishing for a job" by sending out resumes without reading the requirements. Finally, the Resume Scoring Form provides great documentation as to why a candidate receives a callback or not.

Following the resume ranking, our application and interview process begins. Technicians may meet face-to-face with our human resources specialist, as well one or two potential supervisors. For supervisory positions, potential employees meet with the HR director, department manager, operations manager and company president, if necessary. In combination with resume ranking, face-to-face interviews give us the opportunity to learn more about each candidate's personality, professionalism and enthusiasm for the position.

To streamline the interview phase, each Swingle manager involved in the process knows who potential employees already met with and which questions were asked. This eliminates wasted interview time and helps us identify the best candidates in a timely fashion.

While we may occasionally have the urge to fill an open position as quickly as possible, at Swingle, we'd prefer to leave a position open until we find an ideal candidate or "A" player. While this may leave us temporarily short-staffed, it results in more qualified employees, reduced turnover and increased efficiencies in the long run. — David Vine 

The author is HR generalist for Swingle Tree & Lawn Care, Denver, Colo., and can be reached at 303/337-6200.

5 KEYS TO Effective Hiring

1. Advertise open positions in newspapers, at career fairs and with employees to attract a wide range of candidates.
2. Create an objective resume-ranking system to identify qualified candidates based on skills. Use existing job descriptions to outline desired skills for open positions.
3. Score each resume or application based on this ranking system. Use point ranges or "all or nothing" scoring scales when appropriate.
4. Standardize the interview process to eliminate backtracking. All management staff members who will interview candidates should know which questions were asked earlier in the process.
5. Call back candidates with the highest resume rankings for interviews. Use this opportunity to weigh candidates' personalities against the skills outlined in their resumes.

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