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SETUP FOR SUCCESS

How does Michael Hornung get good work out of his people? By creating an environment that gives them the tools to succeed

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07.05

Cover: Don Pitlik, Pitlik Studio

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Chip Smith

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best of the web

Summer always seems to be the season of more – more lawn and landscape work, more sun to take advantage of, more employees on staff ... and more expensive gasoline. A recent *Lawn & Landscape* Online Poll showed that 59 percent of contractors were raising prices overall or on an as-needed basis to keep up with the rising gas prices, while 34 percent took the hit and absorbed the added cost. So what are the stories behind these different fuel price strategies? *Lawn & Landscape* delves into that question in this month's "Best of the Web" feature on page 80. Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard to share your thoughts.

Inline Sweepstakes



Lawn & Landscape knows you work hard, and so do your suppliers. That's why every month Lawn & Landscape partners with an industry manufacturer or service provider to bring you opportunities to win great products that help you run successful businesses. This month, check page 131 for information on the July Lawn & Landscape Online Sweepstakes sponsored by LESCO. Then, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and click the "Sweepstakes" button on the right hand side of the homepage. Simply answer a few questions about your business and you'll be entered into the sweepstakes.

Think you can't win big in contests like this? Recent Sweepstakes winners have won handheld tools, computers and even a year's worth of business training. Visit *Lawn & Landscape* Online for stories on these winners and then sign up to win this month's prize while you're there. You can't win if you don't enter!

online extras

The July issue of *Laun & Landscape* is packed with great news and articles, but it doesn't stop there. Be sure to visit the *Laun & Landscape* Online Extras section for additional information from a number of articles from this month's issue, including:

Savings with Sulkies: Find out how these mower attachments can increase your productivity
without breaking the bank. Also, look for an Online Extra that shows ways contractors can convert
their stand-on mowers into seated riding units.

• Proper Drip System Operation: Drip irrigation can be a great solution for a number of irrigation projects, but only if they're installed and running properly. Visit the *Laun & Landscape* Online Extras section for proper drip irrigation application tips.

 Free Flowing Pipes: Good filtration is key to an effective irrigation system and is especially important on drip irrigation systems that have much smaller orifices. This Online Extra can help make sure your clients drip irrigation systems are flowing freely.

web tools

Daily News

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

Industry Events

A comprehensive list of conferences, trade shows and seminars throughout the industry. *www.lawnandlandscape.com/events*

Business Forms

A diverse collection of forms to help you run your business more effectively. www.lawnandlandscape.com/tools

Message Board

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

Industry Links

A user-friendly industry index containing categorized information about contractors, dealers and suppliers.

www.lawnandlandscape.com/links

Associations

An easy-to-navigate directory of local, state, national and international trade associations. www.lawnandlandscape.com/associations

Product Directory

A growing database of industry products, including photos and supplier contacts. www.lawnandlandscape.com/product

Marketplaces

An interactive listing of manufacturers and suppliers. www.lawnandlandscape.com/marketplace

Online Store

A one-stop shop for industry-related books, software and more.

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

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USE READER SERVICE # 14

editorial > >

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Connect With Us

This is the time of the year when the editorial team is planning our features and product coverage for 2006. One aspect of this is to decide what topics to write about. The other is to find the interesting companies to interview. You can help us. We want your suggestions on feature topics and product coverage. We are also interested in hearing from you in case you or your company could be included in one of our features.

We discover great contractors to interview in a number of ways. We hear about them from other contractors at trade shows, from staff and members of the national and state associations and from university sources. Seldom do we get a feature lead directly from the contractor. Most think that pitching us about their company would be too self promotional. Others don't think anything they are doing is all that special.

This is my invitation to you to tell us about yourself and your company. You can do that by calling any of the editors on the masthead, by e-mailing us, or by striking up a conversation with one of us at a trade show or industry meeting. We don't want a fancy letter. Just send us a note with a few bullet points. What should you tell us about your company? Pretend you have been invited to speak to 200 other contractors in an industry meeting – what aspect of your business would you talk about? It could be how you find good personnel, do great marketing, have improved production efficiency or any other aspect of your business that you do particularly well. One final point – you don't have to be a huge company to be interviewed. Great ideas and business solutions come from all sizes and kinds of companies.

The media business is changing fast and connecting with subscribers is more important than ever. We want and need to hear from you. So, contact us with story suggestions, to tell us about your company, or even to complain about something you didn't like in an issue – complaints help us learn how we can do a better job. I make it a practice to always return your calls, whether you are calling with a compliment, a complaint or a question.

We're also improving our Web site to make it more useful. Check out the message board on our Web site (www.lawnandlandscape.com). The contractors you will meet there will offer you their best advice on how to improve your company, and then you can return the favor.

Another Web site innovation is our new "dealer search" capability. We have more than 10,000 dealers in our online database representing more than 100 manufacturers. You can access this information by clicking on the "Dealer Search" button on the left-hand of our Web site home page. You can locate dealers by zip code or by distance from your area. You can also use our Web site to search for equipment by type or manufacturer.

One final suggestion is to make sure you are getting our weekly e-newsletter with headlines on top industry news and announcements, and we also offer a weekly product e-newsletter. You can sign up for either by sending an e-mail to Lauren Spiers, our Web site editor, at lspiers@gie.net.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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letters

Dear Editor,

The 29th Annual PLANET Student Career Days at the University of Maryland was a spectacular success and we could not have done it without the support of sponsors like *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and GIE Media. We gratefully acknowledge your commitment to the future of the green industry and thank you for your support of this event. This was our largest Student Career Days to date with nearly 1,500 attendees. We look forward to seeing you at our 30th annual Student Career Days at Brigham Young University, March 23-26, 2006 in Provo, Utah.

Sincerely,

The Student Career Days Committee The Professional Landcare Network www.landcarenetwork.org

Dear Editor,

I would like to thank you for your support of Professional Landcare Network Student Career Days. This event is an excellent opportunity for students to not only showcase their skills but to network with other students and industry employees. As a past student attending with North Carolina State University and now an advisor at Alamance Community College, I have seen the benefits from both perspectives and truly know the impact it can have on a student.

In only our second year of attending Student Career Days, it has already become one of the year's most talked about events for our horticulture department. We understand how much it cost to attend and support the program and we do appreciate the interest that your company shows in the students attending the event – they truly are the best and brightest of our program.

Thank you for supporting our students and I look forward to seeing you at Brigham Young University next spring.

> Thank you, Justin Snyder department head, Horticulture Technology Alamance Community College Graham, N.C.

Dear Editor,

We would like to thank you for all the time, effort and finances that you and your company put into the PLANET Student Career Days. Our time there was an experience – we all appreciate it, and we feel the event will prove to be an asset for our career growth.

> Thank you again, Southeast Technical Institute Sioux Falls, S.D.

Dear Editor,

Your generosity and support is greatly appreciated. We are delighted that you could be a part of such a successful event and hope to see you next year.

> Thank you, 2005 PLANET Student Career Days Team Illinois Central College East Peoria, Ill.

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Jerry Hodgson Jerry's Tree Service Chetek, Wisconsin

CALENDAR

Calendar Note

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.

JULY 14-17 Summer Leadership Meeting – Professional Landcare Network, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/395-2522 or www.landcarenetwork.org

JULY 15 Woody Plant Conference, Swarthmore, Pa. Contact: 601/328-8023 or www.longwoodgardens.org

JULY 16-21 Legislative Conference & Annual Meeting: One Green Industry, One Voice, One Future. Cohosted by ANLA, Professional Landcare Network, TCIA, OFA and NCTA. Contact any of the hosting associations for information or visit www.anla.org

JULY 17-19 Professional Landcare Network Legislative Day on the Hill and Renewal & Remembrance Project, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/395-2522, www.landcarenetwork.org

JULY 17-24 Perennial Plant Association Symposium, Knoxville, Tenn. Contact: 614/771-8431, ppa@perennialplant.org, www.perennialplant.org/symposium/sym05.htm



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USE READER SERVICE # 16

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sales and marketing



Reintroducing Cold Calling

S analyze the current marketplace, identify its weaknesses, and make those weaknesses their strengths. And while bankers, realtors and equipment salespeople still make a lot of cold calls, most landscape professionals do not. This is both a weakness in our marketplace and a great opportunity for those savvy enough to seize it.

Unfortunately, though, for many of us making a cold call ranks right up their with undergoing a root canal or cleaning out the garage in the hierarchy of things we'd like to do. This is because it means approaching people we don't know and who may not initially want to know us, boasting of our abilities, and then asking them to choose us. Clearly it's not for the faint-hearted or those who lack confidence. Yet, minute for minute, few other sales tactics will bring you more business than directly contacting those whom you can see with your own eyes need your products and services. Unlike direct-mail, phone book ads or radio spots, cold calling enables you to assess your prospects quickly, come in contact with them directly and figure out which potential sales are most worth pursuing.

To begin, you first need to identify the best types of prospective clients for your company. What is your company's focus? Are you geared toward the commercial, residential or both? Do you specialize in installation, maintenance or lawn care? Go after those prospects whose needs you think would best be met by your services. You might try driving through a neighborhood with properties where you're already working and assess the properties where you're not. Look next door, across the street and down the block. Once you've identified one that you think could benefit from your services, walk up to the door, ring the bell, take two steps back and wait for them to answer. Be careful not to stand too close to the door - you don't want to intimidate them or come on too strong.

When they answer the door, say, "Hello," and introduce yourself. Explain that you maintain some of the best-looking lawns in the neighborhood. Say that you understand they're busy so you'll get right to the point. Tell them that you have a simple yet very effective way of giving homeowners just like them green grass with no hassle and at a fair price. Ask if you can give them a free estimate. And then don't say another word. Let them do the talking – let it be their decision. No one likes the hard sell and your goal is to make a sale or to sow the seeds for a future one, not to invade their privacy or make them feel as if they're being coerced to respond.

If they say, "Yes," do the estimate on the spot and then try to close the deal. If they say, "No," then politely thank them for their time, tell them that you hope to work with them in the future and give them your card or a flier that clearly explains what makes your company different from all the rest and highlights testimonials from satisfied clients. Also, record their address and put them on your mailing list. You don't need their name unless they volunteer it; you can simply address promotional materials to "Future Client."

Let's say you install landscaping and you spot a new office building under construction. Chances are good that the developers are not aware of you. Chances are also good that they haven't thought about landscaping yet. This is a moment of prime opportunity. Go to the site and find out who is responsible for the landscaping. Then, pay the decision maker a personal visit. Or, if it's a particularly large job, begin by writing a letter or making a phone call to introduce yourself and gauge their level of interest. These types of sales can be the hardest to make, but nobody said growing a business was easy. Make that cold call today. ⁴¹

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

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USE READER SERVICE # 17

business operations



Improve Your Proposals

Now is a good time to take a fresh look at the most important first impression you leave potential clients – your proposal. Follow these recommendations, and keep in mind that your ultimate goal is to knock your potential client's socks off with your proposal.

COVER LETTER. An introductory letter is not always needed, but if you use one, it must entice the buyer. Ask these questions about the cover letter you generally use for proposals: Is it friendly? Do you thank the client for this opportunity? Does it guide them through the rest of the pages? Do you leave an impression of professionalism and quality? Do you highlight your company's great customer service and note that you are easy to work with?

If you elect to have an introductory letter, make it short. Remember, clients are looking for the bottom line and will probably not read more than the first paragraph before looking for the dollar sign.

PROPOSAL OPTIONS. In the residential arena, a proposal could be as simple as a preprinted form on which you check off services and make notes with the dollar amount. This is fine as long as it is well designed – investing in a graphic design service can make these proposals look really professional. This type of form also allows you make a proposal onsite and pump out numerous proposals in a day. However, be sure to provide the potential client with additional materials that tell them about you and your company.

Commercial proposals are much more detailed and often become a "contract" referred to in case of conflicts, etc. Commercial clients will compare the services provided and see if you are "apples to apples" with your competition. Psychology plays a role here. In some cases, the larger the proposal, the more value will be perceived by the client. Regardless of its size, a commercial proposal must look and feel professional and be submitted with a brochure or folder. I have seen contractors spend as much as \$15 just to print these packages.

One proposal feature I like to see is the annual contract amount on the first page. Next time you present a proposal, notice how the client flips to the last page first, looking for the price. Why not make your proposal more userfriendly with the bottom line easy to see?

PLAY UP SERVICES. In any type of proposal, describe your services in detail. For example, don't simply say "Spring Clean-up." Embellish it by listing what's included, such as bed trenching, debris removal, pruning, mulching, etc. Build perceived value by helping the client envision all the labor it will take to perform the function. At the same time, keep it brief.

Another consideration is to have a separate sheet listing your company's services. On this page, you can check the items that are included in your proposal, then mark the items that are quoted separately as "extras." Potential clients may hire you knowing that you can provide other services if needed.

COMPANY CULTURE. Potential clients also may be interested in your company culture. Do you have clean vehicles and equipment? Do employees wear uniforms? Do they speak English? How often do you communicate with clients? What are your invoicing practices and payment options? How can clients get in touch with you? Can they contact you by e-mail or cell phone? Give clients answers to these types of questions in your proposal package. This can be another separate sheet or included in your brochure. You might find that a client wants to work with someone like you. And guess what? They will be willing to pay more for it.

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

jack mattingly



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Severance Pay & Benefits

At least once each week a client asks me if his or her company must provide severance pay or benefits to an employee who is being terminated, laid off or who is resigning. To set the record straight, unless your business is located in one of four states (or the Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico), severance is *not* a benefit that employees are entitled to receive. There is no federal law that requires companies to provide severance pay or benefits to employees and, in all but four states, there are no state laws that require severance pay or benefits.

Of the four states that require severance, three (Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts) limit the severance requirement to situations involving a merger, takeover or transfer of control. In Maine, the severance pay requirement applies to companies with 100 or more employees who shut down the establishment or relocate 100 or more miles away. Only employees who have been with the company for three or more years would be eligible for severance pay.

Having said this, there are companies that choose to offer severance pay or benefits under certain circumstances. Let's review some standard practices:

Severance benefits are typically reserved for employees who are laid off (vs. those who are terminated for performance or misconduct) or who lose a job through no fault of their own such as a reduction in force, a merger or other circumstances. The most common severance benefit is money, either as a lump sum or as a continuation of salary for a certain length of time. Some employers also offer terminated employees (paid) continued heath insurance, life insurance, pension contributions or other benefits like outplacement services, job counseling and referral, resume preparation, retraining assistance or access to computers, etc.

Of those employers who do choose to offer severance benefits, most are tied directly to length of service with one or two weeks' base pay for each year of service being the most common formula for severance pay. A maximum dollar amount usually is placed on the total benefit an employee can receive. Some employers offer severance benefits only to managers or other upper-level employees. Another common restriction is a minimum service requirement so that only employees with significant service records are eligible for benefits. Also, some employers stop severance benefits when the recipient finds new employment.

A word of caution: If you elect to offer severance pay or benefits on an informal basis, you could be setting yourself up for a potential discrimination claim if you change the rules down the road and either don't offer the severance to similarly situated employees or inadvertently omit employees or groups of employees who are in one of the protected classes (age, race, sex, etc.). To reduce exposure and potential liability, if you elect to provide severance benefits, I recommend that you clearly define the circumstances under which you will provide payment and benefits, the classes of employees eligible for severance (e.g., those who are permanently laid off or whose jobs are eliminated), the formula used to calculate severance, all benefits associated with the program, and specific language that reserves your right to withdraw the plan or to change it any time. To avoid the potential for a discrimination allegation, apply the policy uniformly so that all similarly situated employees receive the same benefit.

Last, but not least, depending on the nature and circumstances of your program, there may be a number of other laws that must be complied with, including the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, the National Labor Relations Act (related to unions), and non-discrimination laws such as the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the American With Disabilities Act, the Older Workers' Benefit Protection Act and others. If you choose to offer severance benefits in addition to pay, it is wise to seek advice from an expert knowledgeable in these laws and regulations.

ean seawright

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

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association news



PLANET, ANLA Evaluate Possible Merger

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA) and the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) have announced that the



Landscape Association

two associations are evaluating a possible merger. This announcement follows seven months of discussions and exploration by a joint task force of volunteer leaders from both organizations. If adopted, this would be the second merger of national green industry associations in as many years. In late 2004, PLANET was formed when the Associated Landscape Contrac-

tors of America (ALCA) and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) merged.

"With all the challenges and opportunities faced by the green industry, it makes sense for our national associations to be working smarter, not just harder," says Peter Orum, ANLA president. "Bringing these two associations together would dramatically increase the industry's lobbying profile in Washington, D.C."

PLANET leadership agrees. "When PLANET was formed in 2004, our leadership hoped that it would be the first step in a process to expand the scope and capabilities of a single, larger national association for the industry," explains Dan Foley, PLANET president. "These discussions with ANLA are an encouragement that ALCA and PLCAA were on to something."

Combining PLANET and ANLA would result in a national association with annual revenue of more than \$9 million and a staff of 48, a resource base that is larger than about 75 percent of all trade associations in the United States. The combined membership of the two organizations would exceed 6,000.

Because the current memberships of the two associations are largely based in different sectors of the green industry, a potential merged association would represent business interests across the full spectrum of the industry. Members would include individuals and companies involved in lawn and landscape maintenance, agricultural nursery production, lawn care, wholesale distribution, retail garden centers, landscape design and installation, interior plantscape services, snow removal, irrigation and more.

Currently, approximately 150 companies hold membership in both PLANET and ANLA. In addition to opening each association's membership to numerous crossover opportunities educationally, the associations have noted several benefits to the merger.

According to ANLA representatives, a merger of ANLA and PLANET would combine two full-service trade associations that currently address largely discrete, but contiguous sectors of the green industry. Cited merger benefits include a strong membership/financial base, more

President Bush Signs H-2B Bill Into Law



President Bush put his signature on the Emergency Supplement Appropriation's Bill, effectively signing into low the "Save Our Small & Seasonal Business Act of 2005." Photo: www.whitehause.gov

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On May 11, President Bush signed H.R. 1268, the "Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act," which provides funding for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This bill also contained the "Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2005," which provides cap exemptions for service sector guest workers who participated in the H-2B visa program in any of the last three years.

According to John Meredith, the American Nursery & Landscape Association's director of legislative relations, "this legislation rewards those firms relying on the only legal channel to obtain seasonal help." The passage of the H-2B legislation means that employers will have access to a foreign labor "safety net" despite the 66,000 worker cap being hit in January of 2005. Employers depend on these seasonal workers to make up shortfalls in the domestic workforce.

According to bill language, employers were able to file new H-2B visa petitions with the Immigration Service starting May 25. Any worker who has had an H-2B visa in any one of the last three years will be exempt from the H-2B cap (this fiscal year and next). The burden of proof needed to certify that status will fall on the employer. There will be opportunities for new H-2B workers to come and work this year based on the number of educational services, more political influence, strengthened public marketing outreach and collaboration with other associations.

As it stands, both associations' boards of directors have agreed to sign a letter of intent to merge – the first step toward bringing the groups together. The associations already are performing due diligence and beginning preliminary research into merger possibilities. The organizations plan to officially sign the letter of intent in July when leadership from both ANLA and PLANET are together in Washington, D.C. for joint legislative days. Signing the letter of intent to merge will allow the associations to begin more thorough evaluations without putting either association's privacy at risk.

Additionally, ANLA's delegate body, the ANLA Senate also must approve and sign the letter of intent in order for the process to move forward. If the ANLA Senate agrees at its meeting in July, then both organizations will begin a more formal and extensive evaluation. Depending on the evaluation's conclusions, a final vote to merge by PLANET members and the ANLA Senate – with ANLA member input – would occur later this fall. An official merger would likely take place some time in 2006.

Representatives from ANLA note that at this early stage, an ANLA-PLANET merger looks promising. "Historically, there have been points of collaboration between ANLA and especially with PLANET's legacy association ALCA particularly on the legislative side," the association told *Lawn & Landscape*. "We've also collaborated on publications throughout the years, so our circles have overlapped. Right now there's an extraordinary degree of candor and exchange of information going on between the two organizations."

association info

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Founded: 2005 Legacy Associations: Associated Landscape Contractors of America, founded 1961 Professional Lawn Care Association of America, founded 1979 Headquarters: Herndon, Va. with an office in Atlanta, Ga. President: Dan Foley President-Elect: Ion Gibson Secretary/Treasurer: Maria Candler Immediate Past Presidents: Jim Campanella (PLCAA), Kurt Kluznik (ALCA) Vice President of Atlanta Operations: Chuck McIntire Interim CEO: Tanya Tolpegin Membership: 4,000

The American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) Founded: 1876 Headquarters: Washington, D.C. President: Peter Orum Executive Vice President: Bob Dolobois President Elect: Buzz Bertolero Immediate Past President: Dale Bachman ANLA Senate: 43 elected members representing the United States and Canada across four regions. Membership: 2,200

exempt workers currently working in the program. Additional instructions on certification, filing dates and special filing requirements, will be issued by the Department of Homeland Security. The American Nursery and Landscape Association and other coalition partners are working to ensure that implementation starts as quickly as possible.

Other details of the legislation are as follows:

 The cap fix portion of the legislation also provides for equitable distribution of workers subject to the cap by allowing half of the statutory cap in the country during the first six months of the fiscal year and the other half during the second half of the year.

 This bill creates an additional fee to insure against fraud by program users.

• It requires agencies to report to certain information regarding the visas to Congress semi-annually.

• The legislation, which will provide service sector employers temporary relief from the H-2B program's statutory cap of 66,000 seasonal workers, was aided by the relentless support of the H-2B Workforce Coalition, which is made up of program stakeholder industries co-chaired by the American Nursery and Landscape Association and the National Restaurant Association.

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RESEARCH REPORT

Survey Shows Small Businesses Face Tough Competition Attracting Top Talent

Imost three out of four (68 percent) small business owners say their most serious disadvantage when hiring new employees, compared with larger companies, is the ability to provide a competitive benefits package, including salary, health insurance, retirement and vacation, points out the Wells Fargo/Gallup Small Business Index.

Additionally, 60 percent of small business owners see the amount of compensation they can offer an employee as a critical disadvantage when compared to larger companies. Approximately two-thirds of small business owners also report difficulty finding the right qualified employees for their businesses. However, 69 percent say this has not hurt their businesses in the past 12 months. While only 20 percent say they are currently looking for new employees, if they had hiring needs today, 50 percent would be more likely to hire a temporary vs. full-time worker.

"But the competitive challenges are offset by the benefits small businesses offer: autonomy, creativity, flex time, and the opportunity to be part of something entrepreneurial," says Ann Padilla, owner, SunnySide/Temp Side, Denver.

Small business owners remain optimistic about the future. Eighty-two percent expect a positive financial envi-

ronment over the next 12 months; 75 percent expect a positive cash flow; and 61 percent expect revenues to increase. Ninety-five percent expressed feelings of business success, and 90 percent say they are satisfied as business owners.

"Although faced with strong competitive challenges, industry data confirms small businesses generate the majority of all job growth in the United States," says Rebecca Macieira-Kaufmann, small business segment manager, Wells Fargo. – Associated Press

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WEB WATCH

OSHA Unveils Safety & Health Page for Green Industry

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has unveiled a new safety and health topics page that provides Web-based assistance for workers and employers in the landscape and horticultural services industry. The page is a product of OSHA's Alliance with the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET).

"This new page provides useful information and guidance that will help foster a safer work environment for thousands of workers throughout the industry," says Jonathan Snare, acting assistant secretary of labor for OSHA. "It's a perfect example of how an effective alliance can leverage our joint resources to improve worker safety and health."



OSHA's new Web page caters specifically to companies in the green industry about safety and health compliance. Employers and workers can access information to develop and implement comprehensive safety and health programs, and link to sites that identify the most common industry hazards and possible solutions to those hazards. The page also provides employer and employee resources for Spanish speaking workers and youth workers in the landscape industry.

On the Web site, the various landscape and horticultural services are organized into three main segments: landscape design, landscape planting and construction, and lawn maintenance and tree care. Each service category includes information on the most frequently cited OSHA standards, and the standards that

apply to each specific service area.

The Topics page also includes a link to a new Safety Tips Sheet (in English and Spanish) developed through the alliance that provides information on slip and trip injuries common in the landscape and horticultural services industry.

Employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthful workplace for their employees. OSHA's role is to assure the safety and health of America's workers by setting and enforcing standards; providing training, outreach, and education; establishing partnerships; and encouraging continual process improvement in workplace safety and health. For more information, visit www.osha.gov.

MANUFACTURER MINUTES

Syngenta, LESCO Conclude Relationship d this period. At the end of this period. At the end of this period. At the end

syngenta

GREENSBORO, N.C. – The relationship between Syngenta and LESCO will conclude over a transition period. At the end of this period, the full line of Syngenta products will no longer be represented by LESCO in the marketplace.

"We appreciate LESCO's longtime support of Syngenta

CONTRACTOR CORNER

Landscape Images Wins Best of Show



NEW ORLEANS, La. – Green industry company Landscape Images blossomed during the 26th annual Spring Garden Show in New Orleans in early May. A design-build landscape architecture and maintenance firm based in New Orleans, Landscape Images designed a display that won three of the competition's top awards:

- Best of Show
- Ist Place Commercial Horticulture Division
- Ist Place Design Excellence Commercial

The display's theme was "Come Outside and Play" and reflected a whimsical and imaginative al fresco experience, complete with swing sets and sand boxes. Focusing on the value of relaxation and fun, Landscape Images arranged a display that was both safe for children and ideal for hosting special family gatherings. The exhibit provided a nostalgic glance

at childhood experiences to create a unique space that invited visitors to rediscover fond childhood memories.

The 2005 Spring Garden Show took place in New Orleans' historic City Park Botanical Garden during National Landscape Architecture Month

and featured plant and garden products, gardening demonstrations and educational programs and other landscape and horticulture activities.



and its products and services. We have decided, however, that LESCO's strategies in the marketplace are inconsistent with Syngenta's," says Bill Lewis, vice president, Syngenta.

Michael DiMino, LESCO's president and CEO, says, "We are surprised and disappointed by Syngenta's decision. This change is not something that we take lightly, but ultimately this will prove to be in our customers' – and the industry's – best interests. We believe the distributor is responsible for the customer relationship. However, Syngenta seems to believe they own customer relationships and distributors don't provide value to the market."

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THE VALUE OF A TRAINING INFORMATION CENTER

hen people are asked if they were given ten minutes to gather their most important possessions before losing their home to a fire, most of them list their family photos, laptops with personal and work information and precious reminders of their achievements. What's interesting is that none of these items is worth much to anyone else. But to the owner, their value is incalculable.

Let's take this concept into the workplace. Not counting profits, what items capture your culture, vision and people? If you're having a tough time answering, consider establishing a Training Information Center.

Training Information Centers offer opportunities to:

 Share information by listing training outlines, calendars and outside instruction opportunities for further training information

 Highlight champions by showing photos of trainers whose work is making a difference

3. Reinforce the training culture by keeping the Center updated and interesting

4. Reinforce the material by listing reminders of how employees can apply training material on the job in a timely manner

5. Provide a sales and marketing tool demonstrating that training benefits client job sites and enhancespotential employees' future careers. You weigh the costs. A large corkboard costs \$50. Paint for the wall behind it costs \$11. A box of tacks to pin the information up costs 75 cents. Payback on training? Priceless.

Jim Paluch is president of JP Horizons, a group of training professionals that has been helping green industry companies develop a culture of learning for over 15 years.



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industry news > >
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MANUFACTURER MINUTES

Toro Q2 Sales Growth Up 14.7 Percent

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – The Toro Co. reported record fiscal second quarter net earnings of \$62 million, or \$1.33 per diluted share, on net sales of \$628.4 million for the quarter ended April 29. In the comparable fiscal 2004 period, the company reported net earnings of \$52.2 million, or \$1 per diluted share, on net sales of \$548 million.

Earnings per share figures for all periods reported have been adjusted to reflect the effects of a 2-for-I stock split effective March 28.

Kendrick Melrose, The Toro Co.'s executive chairman, said strong shipments of both professional and residential products, especially in international markets, were responsible for the 14.7-percent increase in second quarter net sales. Excluding the effects of Hayter Ltd., a U.K.-based manufacturer of residential and commercial mowing equipment, which Toro acquired in February 2005, net sales would have

increased 11.4 percent. International sales increased 41.1 percent compared with the fiscal 2004 second quarter as a result of strong international demand and contributions from Hayter.

Melrose said he is confident Toro will report another strong year as it continues to focus on its "6+8" profit improvement and growth initiative, international expansion strategies and the development and introduction of innovative new products. "As we assimilate the year's positive and negative prospects, we now expect net earnings per diluted share for fiscal 2005

to exceed last year's record levels by 15 to 18 percent."

PEOPLE

TORO

Debra Holder Joins Brickman

GAITHERSBURG, Md. – The Brickman Group has announced the appointment of Debra Holder as director of industry relations. Holder recently retired from her position as chief executive officer of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), having spent 25 years with that organization. During her tenure with ALCA, Holder spearheaded many programs that focused on elevating the professionalism and perception of the landscape industry. Among them were certification for landscape professionals, the OSHA alliance, Student Career Days, and the ALCA Educational Foundation.

Holder's lifetime of contributions to the landscape industry was recognized by Project EverGreen, which awarded her last fall with its first Stewardship Award, celebrating her contributions to raise industry standards and image. Holder also received the 2005 Professional Landcare Network Lifetime Leadership Award for leadership, service and commitment.

In her new role with Brickman, Holder

will act as an ambassador, strengthening the company's re-



lationships within the industry and with educational institutions. "Debra's depth of experience and passion in this area make her a perfect match for The Brickman Group," says the company's Chief Executive Officer Scott Brickman.

Trained as an educator, Holder is enthusiastic about the contributions the industry can make in partnership with educational institutions. Part of her role with Brickman will be to offer guidance and assistance to the landscape education community.

"The landscape industry is on a growth track, but enrollments at horticultural institutions do not reflect this trend," comments Holder. "We need to continually promote the numerous opportunities that are available in the landscape industry, and to ensure the green industry has a good supply of trained professionals to support future growth."

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FMC

"You've probably always used Bean pumps. Now you can use our lawn sprayers."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This year, Lawn

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



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lessons learned

Locking Up

abor

by jonathan katz

hen Jeff Korhan first heard about the H-2B program, he didn't think it applied to his Plainfield, Ill.-based design/build business, the Treemendous Landscape Co.

"It always sounded like it was something that wasn't for us," he recalls. "It sounded like something that was for people who needed to hire hundreds of employees, meaning companies that do a lot of large commercial projects."

But after learning more about the program during the 2003 Green Industry Expo in St. Louis, Korhan changed his mind. Korhan ended up hiring a dozen H-2B employees and was so satisfied with the results that he applied again for the 2005 season. Unfortunately, Korhan was one of many contractors throughout the country who didn't get their H-2B applications in before the 66,000-worker cap was reached in January.

Korhan was forced to fill positions the old-fashioned way – by advertising and carefully screening applicants. Korhan says missing the deadline has made finding qualified candidates more challenging but that it's also helped the company finetune its hiring practices.

"The biggest benefit of H-2B is that it got us to really focus on the workforce," Korhan says. "We had to because we were bringing in these guys who knew nothing about the business. They were just ablebodied men, and that forced us to really focus on finding guys who will work harder and were willing to learn. When people know you're watching and that you're involved and engaged with them, that's going to improve productivity."

Since Lawn & Landscape spoke with Korhan, President Bush signed into law changes to the H-2B bill that will make any H-2B worker from the last three years exempt from the 66,000-worker cap. Korhan says he plans to reapply for more workers but that he's still cautious. "I know I'm still committed to H-2B but much more gun-shy given what we've been through," he says.

Prior to H-2B, what was your hiring situation like? We've had some good guys work here, but I didn't feel like I had control over the workforce. There were issues that if I had a full-time HR person, I could have handled those issues – people holding



you up for another 50 cents an hour or showing up under the influence. The primary motivation of H-2B is we wanted a stable workforce.

What was your experience with immigrant labor prior to H-2B? I've had numerous regulatory issues with the county, zoning, EPA and the Department of Agriculture that we've managed to learn as we go. So I made the decision that if we're going to do this, let's just do it right so we know that we have a workforce that is properly documented, and if we put a bunch of money into training these guys, we know that we'll be able to reap the rewards. Before, we would always have this core group, but we'd put this time and money into training people, which could take months, and then they'd

move on because the grass is always greener somewhere else.

So how is that situation different with H-2B? These guys think about it as a contract. They're here for work, so we've got a year to develop a relationship and prove that we're a good company to work for, and if we do our job, then they want to come back, so it adds stability to the workforce.

What did H-2B do for your compa-

ny? The results were, No. 1, by default it forced us to put more emphasis on the field labor force, and that increased productivity and made us more profitable. No. 2, it stabilized the workforce. We didn't have this revolving door of guys, so it made our work easier. We didn't have to worry if the guys were going to show up on Monday. I don't think our H-2B workers missed a single day all summer long. And that sent a message to the other guys, so things started to gel and we began to establish some cohesiveness, and it was a great season from a team-building point of view.

So what happened this year when you tried to apply for the program? We knew that it was going to be a tough year from the start. Just about everybody in the industry was telling us that, so we

stayed on top of it, and every step where we could expedite things we did. And things were looking, we thought, good. We started to get all of our approvals in the second week of January. That wasn't soon enough, whereas the previous year we got a late start and got our approvals back later than we would have liked. This year we were planning to bring them up here March 1, way ahead of schedule, and it just didn't work out.

Is there anything you would do differently in the future to ensure that your labor demands are met? I don't have any regrets. I can say we learned a lot, and we're applying those lessons to the workers who we are bringing in. It did help us to clean up our systems with respect to our hiring process, interviewing process, drug testing and so forth. It's unfortunate - you build a relationship with these men. My biggest regret is that they put their trust in me, and I have not been able to deliver. And it's hard to tell them it's the political system, and there's nothing I can do. So what I'm going to do is just not rely on it as heavily. I put a little too much reliance on it. We're a small company, and probably half of our workforce was H-2B, so that was probably not the best thing to do. H-2B will be an adjunct to the workforce that we have now. And we've got a lot of new guys now, obvi-

july 2005

continued on page 38

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lessons learned >

continued from page 35

ously, because we started working early this season and put a lot more focus and attention on it. So far, it's working out fairly well, but it puts a bit of a burden on all the managers because they're having to train entirely new guys.

You said you 'learned a lot' from the process. What exactly did you learn? We're really not doing anything differently – we're doing it better. When potential employees come in to fill out an application, we don't just give them the application, have them fill it out and then evaluate them. We walk them through some paces. We tell them about our company and spend more time with them, so we have a lot more focus and involvement and better results.

How do you retain employees? We offer a below-market wage plus an incentive. We ask them, "How much do you think you are worth?" Then, I offer them a buck or two below what they think they're worth and tell them they'll make up that and then some. It's based on incentives and budgets, and if you can deliver, then you should have no worries. But if you're a short-timer who probably isn't looking to deliver, then you're probably not going to even take the job, which is what usually happens.

How are you dealing with the H-2B

cap this year? I sensed it wasn't going to happen, so I started trying to find people locally. We took every single person who walked through our doors seriously. If we thought the guy was a strong candidate, we hired him. Our strategy was to overhire and let go of guys who aren't working out. We tracked their hours, set up systems and put them with other workers who expected them to participate as part of that team. We basically set up a system whereby the weeding out process is handled in the field because everybody wants to make more money with profit-sharing, and if you've got one guy on your team who is not performing, you either work with him to get him to perform or else.

What would you recommend to a contractor who is considering the H-2B program next year? Honestly, I wouldn't do it because we relied on it and it took an enormous amount of my attention. I gave presentations at our chamber of commerce. I spoke to the legislative committee. And it's still in limbo. So what I told people is that if you can find people some other way, then I would recommend that route first. I would not recommend it for a small company like mine unless you can't find people. H-2B is a lot of work. It's a lot of effort and a financial investment, and we've only proved that it's not going to work every time.

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business opportunities



Five Seasons Landscape Management has found that a niche service like mulch cultivation is a great way to add to its bottom line. teve Woods, vice president of operations for Five Seasons Landscape Management is the first to admit mulch cultivation – turning over or freshening mulch – is not the most exciting service his Columbus-based company offers. The service may not generate "oohs" and "ahhs," but it can generate profit when done correctly, with Woods estimating annual gross profit margins of 50 percent or better.

With an annual revenue of \$50,000, the service represents only 2 percent of the company's \$2.6 million in annual maintenance revenue. But that number is deceiving. "A revenue of \$50,000 may not sound like a big number relatively speaking, but it is when you realize that half of it is going to the bottom line," he says.

Woods started offering mulch cultivation about four years ago, after another by kathleen franzinger

contractor told him about it at an industry event. It sounded like a simple way to add some profit, so Woods decided to try it. It's a decision he hasn't regretted. "The real money in this business is made on enhancement services, such as mulch and flowers," Woods says. "Mulch cultivation is just another piece of the puzzle."

EASY TO EQUIP. At first, Woods' crews used only potato forks to turn the mulch. But then an employee suggested trying the tillers the crews already used to prepare flowerbeds for annual colors. The tillers, which cost \$300, weigh less than 20 pounds, making them easy to handle. Although potato forks still work best for small areas of mulch, the tillers have proved to be a major time-saver on larger areas. "They let us do a lot more in a short time,



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business opportunities

which helps keep our pricing in a range where the clients are willing to buy it," he says.

Saving time is critical for Woods because it's the one thing his busy crews lack. In fact, one of his biggest challenges to starting the new service was figuring out when it could be done. The service doesn't generate enough revenue to support a separate truck and crew, which means the task is left to his enhancement crews who handle mulching, seasonal color and shrub pruning. Adding another service to

their already full plates was difficult. "We had to find time during the season to get everything done," he says.



To ease scheduling problems, Woods says he relies on new ideas for equipment, such as using the tiller. Using the same crews on properties also

improves efficiency. Once a crew is familiar with the property, they know how to get it done as quickly as possible. Experience has also been a great teacher. Even though they've been performing mulch cultivation for four years, Woods says they're still learning. "But now we can look at properties we've been doing for three or four years, and use what we've learned to help us move forward."

CULTIVATING SALES.

Woods admits his mulch cultivation service is still not exactly where he'd like it to be. Selling the service can be diffi-

cult, mainly because customers don't understand it. "Mulch cultivation - what's that?" is a question he hears often.



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USE READER SERVICE # 32



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Woods answers this by educating his clients about the three benefits of mulch cultivation. The first is that it improves a property's appearance. Mulch has a short shelf-life – within two to three months after it's first laid, it starts to compact and fades. Cultivating it gets rid of the gray, giving it a fresh look.

Ninety-eight percent of Woods' customers are commercial property owners, mainly condominium associations, Home Owners Associations and upscale office and retail properties. "Mulch cultivation is a fairly inexpensive way for them to boost curb appeal," he says. But mulch cultivation isn't solely about looks. Plant health is also an issue. While new mulch helps keep in moisture, old mulch can keep out the nutrients plants need. "When mulch compacts, oxygen can't get to the roots of the plant," Woods says. "In addition, compacted mulch can keep water from getting to the roots. Cultivating it

breaks the barrier so that plants can get the oxygen and water they need."

Lastly, mulch cultivation helps break down clay in the soil, which is common in Woods' Columbus location. "The last thing you want to do is establish a 4- to 6-inch thickness of mulch on your client's When customers learn the benefits, most are willing to try the service at least once, says Woods. After that, the service usually sells itself. Around 65 percent of his customers have their mulch cultivated at least once a year, and customer retention is 100 percent.

"A revenue of \$50,000 may not sound like a big number, but it is when you realize that half of it is going to the bottom line." – Steve Woods

properties," he says. "It's too thick, and it hurts the plants." Ninety-five percent of the mulch he uses is hardwood because it helps break down the clay. Cultivating it helps the hardwood decompose and makes the soil more workable. The hard part is increasing the number of times per year a customer receives the service. Most only want the service once a year. His typical client receives two shrub prunes and one cultivation, and he usually performs the



cultivation service between the first and second pruning. "But we really want to do cultivation three to four times a year," he says.

Right now, only 10 percent of his clients receive more than one cultivation. To increase that number, Woods pushes the service with pruning. If a customer hires him to prune three times a year, he offers to cultivate the mulch while he's there. It's great for Woods from a scheduling standpoint because it cuts the cost for a second trip.

Woods estimates annual growth in the service at 10 percent. "But I think we can grow that number significantly just by having our current clients do it twice per year instead of once," he says.

Selling the service also gets easier as it grows in popularity. Woods notices more of his competitors offering the service lately, which he says is good. "Our clients are becoming educated, even by our competitors, which helps us, too," he says. COST CALCULATIONS. Woods

prices mulch cultivation separately from other maintenance work. The key is to keep the price low enough for clients to be willing to buy it. To determine how much to charge, Woods estimates the number of hours it takes to do a job and tries to achieve his standard labor rate of \$40 per hour. "There is hardly any equipment in this service," he says.

To reach his labor rate, Woods starts by calculating how long it takes to cultivate one bag. Even though they do a lot of mulching, Five Seasons Landscape Management uses bag mulch. Woods takes the number of bags and multiplies it by 50 cents per bag. "Say you have 1,000 bags of mulch," he says. "When we apply the 50 cents per bag rate, we get \$500, which is how much we would charge to cultivate."

Woods stresses this 50 cents per bag is simply a starting point. The rate changes depending on the layout of the property. His average property is 3.5 acres, which typically takes a threeman crew 61/2 hours to cultivate. But by experience. Woods has learned that some properties take longer and need to be bid differently. If the mulch is spread out over 10 to 15 acres or if there are more tree rings to maneuver around, he raises the rate 5 to 10 cents per bag. On the other hand, if most of the mulch is spread out in a huge bed that his crews can cultivate with a tiller in 30 minutes, then he lowers the rate. "I take that 50 cents per bag and tweak it one way or the other after I look at the layout of the property," he says.

With any maintenance business, Woods says the goal is to make at least 10 percent before taxes. "Anytime you can add a service that is going to help you achieve that goal, you should do it, even if it's as small as this," he says. "If we can grow it to 3 or 4 percent of the business, that is really going to help." (I



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How does Michael Hornung get good work out of his people? By creating an environment that gives them the tools to succeed.

ichael Hornung doesn't baby-sit his employees at Valley Green Cos., Sartell, Minn. He doesn't bark at them, bully them or tell

them what to do. He doesn't even consider making money to be their problem.

Instead, Hornung has created an environment of accountability. He empowers employees with advanced technology, gives them parameters to work by and then lets go. By creating an environment where people are aware of each department's responsibilities, know their limits and know they can't screw around, Hornung has developed a place where work gets done and profitability remains the focus.

EXTRA HANDS. Part of Hornung's people philosophy comes from growing up working on his family's 1,200-acre farm. "On a farm, when it's time to work, it's

time to work – nothing else comes in front of that," he says. "We work hard, and we play hard. We're flexible, but there are also certain times of the year where we're inflexible. Employees know and respect that."

by nicole wisniewski

ccess

Valley Green lawn care technicians have production-per-hour goals ranging from \$100 to \$135. But technicians are measured by their total performance vs. just on these numbers, according to Hornung. "I would rather a technician do less in dollars per day and do it right and take time explaining products and services to a customer."

Application quality is also closely reviewed, Hornung says. Lawn Care Manager Tony Cauley pulls a technician's route seven to 10 days after the applications and inspects it, including weeds, notes left for clients and job cleanliness. He evaluates all four of the company's lawn care technicians once each month.

And sometimes getting people to im-

nuts & bolts valley green cos.

OWNER/PRESIDENT: Michael Hornung HEADQUARTERS: Sartell, Minn. FOUNDED: 1997

CLIENT MIX: 80 percent residential. 10 percent commercial residential (condos, apartment buildings, etc.), 8 percent commercial (office parks, hospitals, educational facilities, etc.) and 2 percent government/municipal SERVICE MIX: 40 percent irrigation services, 32 percent chemical lawn care, 22.5 percent lighting (landscape and holiday lighting), 4.5 percent tree and ornamental services and less than 2 percent snow and ice removal services EMPLOYEES: five year-round, 18 seasonal

TOP 3 CHALLENGES FACING BUSINESS TODAY

- 1. Controlled, profitable growth of each of our divisions
- Maximize employee and equipment efficiency
- Not letting ourselves become complacent/ constantly looking for better ways to operate

SYSTEMS/PROGRAMS THAT MAKE THE COMPANY UNIQUE:

- 1. Technology
- 2. Educating employees regularly on
- technology, techniques and personal growth 3. Diversity of services and cross-utilization
- of staff 4. Partnership with Supreme Lawn & Land-
- Partnership with Supreme Lawn & Landscape to offer more services to clients

REVENUE BREAKDOWN:

2005 Expected	\$1 million
2004 Revenue:	\$940,000
2003 Revenue:	\$908,000
2002 Revenue:	\$799,000
2001 Revenue:	\$683,000
2000 Revenue:	
1999 Revenue:	\$357.000

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cover story

prove their service means getting tough and setting examples. For instance, one lawn care technician did a great job on his lawn applications, "but his paperwork was terrible," Hornung says simply. "Technicians are supposed to leave personal notes with every customer after they do their lawn care applications. The

notes should explain how the lawn looks and what it needs and highlight seasonal mowing and watering tips, as well as services the technician recommends are necessary to improve the turf's heath. Technicians should also be collecting some personal data about each property, such as whether the home has a sprinkler system, landscape lighting or a rain sensor. If technicians continue to turn in incomplete or illegible paperwork, this can result in

a possible day off without pay. I'm serious about not having to grow by adding more customers but by taking care of the ones we have. To me, paperwork is part of the job. I explain it to them like this – 'If you had a doctor who cured your cancer, but he didn't talk to you once during the appointments or before or



after the surgery, how would you feel?' Medicine is only part of the treatment. And in lawn care, the fertilization is only part of the treatment. When I explained it this way, I saw the looks on their faces change – they understood. These types of examples help get the message across.

"Also, I explain to technicians that I would rather see their production number down 10 percent and their paperwork done correctly," Hornung adds. "Once a technician gets in the routine of doing the paperwork the right way, he realizes that it only takes a few moments and he can continue to raise his production number back to a higher level."

At Valley Green, correcting mistakes in the field is just as necessary as rewarding jobs well done. In the technician training room hangs a sign that reads "COMPLIMENTS" and



> cover story

every time a technician receives a letter praising him or her for their services, it's posted under this sign for all to see. Hornung also reads each letter to the company during Tuesday morning meetings and congratulates the employee who received it.

This year, Hornung also incorporated Valley Green Bucks as a way to reward technicians for going above and beyond. For instance, when they get a compliment from a customer, they receive \$5 in Valley Green Bucks. If they receive an internal company compliment, or what's called a Green Card Comment, they get \$1 or \$2 in Valley Green Bucks. If they do a training session during one of the weekly company meetings, they receive \$5 in Valley Green Bucks. When they want to redeem their Valley Green Bucks, they turn them into the office for lunch gift certificates or extra uniform-type apparel that they can have embroidered with their name

or anything they choose. "My feeling is that you shouldn't be paying someone extra just to do their job, but when they are exceeding your expectations, then it makes sense," Hornung says.

Hornung believes the company's best system is its people. As such, in addition to recognizing great work, he focuses on educating employees regularly on technology, techniques and personal growth. "Your people are your best investment," he says.

Every Tuesday, Hornung holds a 15- to 30-minute company meeting. The first five to 10 minutes are used to discuss basic updates, as well as compliments, new employee introductions, anniversaries and birthdays, etc. The next 10 minutes are reserved for training. Here, Hornung has each division rotate giving a presentation on a part of what their job entails as a way to cross-train his employees so everyone knows what the other divisions' responsibilities are. "We do company-related training two weeks in a row and then every third week, we bring in a professional speaker to focus on something more personal," Hornung says. "The reason we do this is that we did a survey of our employees during reviews in the winter and they said they wanted more personal growth speakers in addition to knowing more about what is going on in the company. Some good examples of these are the local hockey coach we had come in to talk about teamwork, and the retirement plan person we had come in to talk about retirement savings solutions."

HI-TECH HELP. Lawn care and irrigation services naturally have high labor costs. The key to controlling these costs is putting systems in place to increase productivity. Hornung uses the help of new technology to do this.

Last year, Valley Green put global positioning system (GPS) devices in his



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(800) 348-7553 www.wellscargo.com trucks to improve routing and save fuel costs. "We saw a significant improvement in what the technicians get done in a day's time," he says, quoting a 17 to 18 percent productivity increase across the company.

Valley Green installed a GPS system in nine total trucks, which cost about \$800 to \$900 per truck, Hornung says. He does not pay a monthly service fee because he installed a passive vs. active system. This means that the technicians each have a computer key that they must take inside every night after work and insert into a computer to download the day's information. The transfer of information takes only a few seconds.

By the end of each day, Hornung can look at the information and tell if his technicians were speeding, how long they were at their stops and how long it took them to get from job to job. The biggest cut in costs initially was on fuel. "The guys would let the trucks run while they were at jobs so the air conditioning would stay on, which wasted fuel," Hornung explains. "We cut down hours of idle time in the first three weeks with the GPS systems. We saved about \$150 to \$200 the first month in fuel savings as a result. This year we are already under what we budgeted for fuel consumption."

A passive GPS system provides Hornung with feedback on how the crews are operating in the field vs. catching them in transit and rerouting them. "They monitor themselves - we just wanted to give them the tools to help them improve their performance," he says. Hornung will look at the information that comes back via GPS and offer suggestions for improvement. For instance, from past experience, Hornung knows that it takes one minute to treat each 1,000 square feet of turf, so a 10,000-square-foot lawn would take 10 minutes, plus an average of six minutes for paperwork. The total job time should be 16 minutes. If a lawn care technician was there for 25 minutes, Hornung can get this information from the passive GPS system after the technician has returned and downloaded his information and then ask him why. The reason could be perfectly acceptable, such as answering customer questions about a possible new service or this could be an opportunity for Hornung to offer some time-saving tips to help increase that technician's productivity.

USE READER SERVICE # 38 www.lawnandlandscape.com

pesticides

Photos: GroGreen

>>>

The generics are coming

Patent law is driving changes in lawn care.



awn care operators have it good. The turf and ornamental toolbox has a complete set of solid products to handle weed, insect and disease control problems. While it's possible that the lawn care toolbox could be equally

good 10 years from now, or even better, that assumption is far from certain. History shows that external pressures can successfully eliminate products or limit their uses significantly.

Another factor that could affect future pesticides choices is change in the traditional supplier channel. Historically, growth in the lawn care market has been fostered by the introduction of new chemistries, some of which created new lawn service categories. Two factors make continuation of such progress increasingly difficult. First, for any new active ingredient to be successful it must not only be effective in controlling the target weeds, pests or diseases, but must also offer significant advantages over the products already being used to meet the need.

Second is an impending increase in so-called "generic" products, pesticides formulated with active ingredients that have come off patent. Being able to choose between a "branded" or a post-patent product ("generic") is not new to lawn care companies, of course. What is new is the potential scale of choice. About four out of every five active ingredients labeled for turf and ornamental use is or soon will be off patent.

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Major herbicide active ingredients now off patent or soon to be so include dithiopyr, glyphosate, orzyalin, oxadiaxzon, pendimethaline and prodiamine. Turf and ornamental insecticides include abamectin, acephate, bifenthrin, diazinon, imidacloprid, malathion and permethrin, and turf fungicides include chlorothalorin, iprodione, mancozeb, propiconazole and thiophanate methyl.

If enough new pesticides are introduced to the market, based on post-patent active ingredients, a shift in purchases creates major implications for suppliers and ultimately for lawn care companies.

At the most basic level the choice between "branded" and "generic" products appears to be one of cost vs. value, whether the value is real or perceived. It's similar to deciding whether to buy Coke or the



supermarket brand of cola for less money. Certainly contractors strapped with higher fuel and insurance expenses would welcome any opportunity to cut costs somewhere, but choosing a pesticide at the lowest cost is not as easy as picking and buying a soft drink. Generic retail products involve little or no risk - use the product until it's consumed or obsolete, then simply replace it.

In contrast, pesticides are a considered purchase. Their performance on the job directly impacts profitability and the long-term growth of a lawn care business. Put simply, if a product does not work as required, no amount of purchase price savings really matters.

So, what are some of the potential implications of a sharp increase in the number of post-patent pesticide registrations?

One possibility is that fewer truly new active ingredients might be introduced in the future. Research and development of new pesticide compounds is paid for primarily from sales and profit of the basic manufacturer's branded products. If sales and profits of these products decrease this puts pressure on these companies to limit their research investment in new turf and ornamental compounds. "Generic" competition for revenue simply adds to the ever-increasing difficulty of successfully bringing a new active ingredient to market.

In the near-term more and better products could be introduced based on post-patent active ingredients. The introduction of post-patent products will stimulate competition and that is fundamentally good for the lawn care industry. While companies offering postpatent products may focus on producing a lower cost

> formulation using a proven active ingredient, some might also opt to invest in their own research to create a superior product based on their special formulation expertise or by combining the post-patent active ingredient with their own patented active ingredients, or with active ingredients they have acquired rights to formulate and market. Basic manufacturers will also work to improve their previously patented products, including the development of new formulations that could be patentable.

 Lawn care companies may spend less on pesticides, and the savings could be invested back into their companies, taken out as profit, or used to gain a competitive pricing advantage. The worst-case scenario would

be to have companies that sell based on low-ball pricing



*Source: Lawn & Landscape State of the Pesticide Industry, Noll Research, February 2004



use lower cost generic products to further lower their prices.

• Product and technical support could become more limited or eliminated, or contractors may have to pay for all or some of the support they require. Regardless of whether a product is manufactured by the basic manufacturer that originally brought it to market, or by a company that is marketing a post-patent alternative, profit is necessary to fund training and technical support, as well as broader industry support and public education. If overall pesticide revenues decrease significantly, that would put pressure on suppliers to limit investment in product stewardship and industry support. This could be offset, of course, if revenue increases for companies that market products based on post-patent compounds, and those companies invest in industry and customer support.

 Additional consolidation among suppliers is likely as they seek to gain the critical mass necessary to gain a stronger competitive advantage and stop competitors that might be considering the same strategy from beating them to the punch. Consolidation could take place as mergers or acquisitions between basic manufacturers, basic manufacturers and formulators of post-patent products, or between formulators of post-patent products.

Changes in the role of distribution could take place

based on distributors marketing their own post-patent products or aligning themselves more closely with strategic suppliers.

 New foreign-based manufacturers could enter the United States market directly. Overseas manufacturers that are already supplying active ingredients to U.S. formulators could assume a direct presence in the United States if the opportunities become great enough.

Whether any or all of the above scenarios come to pass, the individual lawn care operator will be playing a far more critical role in the future in determining what tools will be available than has been the case so far. Lawn care operators no longer just buy and use pesticides. As more pesticide products come to market with the same active ingredients the choices made by lawn care operators will determine which companies and products are winners and which are losers. Their purchases will actually play a role in determining what products are available in the future.

At the same time some basic things will not change. Progress in lawn care has always been based on a working partnership between lawn care operators, distributors and pesticide manufacturers. Basic manufacturers and post-patent product formulators all agree that this fundamental equation remains essential for future progress, regardless of how many new companies or post-patent products enter the marketplace.

THE PURPOSE OF PATENT PROTECTION

atent protection is central to the free enterprise system in the United States. Patents encourage invention and innovation by granting companies a 17-year period in which they can exclusively market and profit from the invention and development of truly unique new technology or products. At the same time, government seeks to encourage maximum competition within a free market economy, so placing the time limit for patent protection encourages other companies to consider developing competitive products when a patent expires. While a 17-year patent term stimulates invention and progress, the time limit also prevents any one company from gaining a long-term monopoly for its patented technology or product.

For perspective, keep in mind that many of the excellent active ingredients that are coming off-patent today were being researched back in the 1970s and were introduced in the 1980s. As these active ingredients come to the end of their 17-year patent protection periods they become available for other manufacturers or formulators who wish to purchase the rights to use in their own formulations.



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KEEPING THE PESTICIDE PIPELINE FULL

Why a steady supply of new and innovative pesticides is critical.

f lawn care operators could be assured that today's products would remain available in the long-term it might reduce the need for invention of new products and innovation in formulation technology. That is hardly the case. Industry veterans know that in

comparison to products used in the 1960s through 1970s, many of today's lawn care pesticides are less toxic, more targeted, lower in odor and have more specific label use directions. Vast improvements have also been made in application equipment and applicator training. Despite all this improvement, activist challenges to pesticide use means there can be no assur-

ance that today's active ingredients will be available tomorrow.

Research by basic manufacturers is necessary to create new and better compounds, formulations and technologies. Continued industry professionalism is necessary to keep good pesticide tools registered. Suppliers must improve the pesticide tools already available and work together when necessary to keep them in use. A most notable instance of this was the creation of the 2,4-D Task Force, which was formed in the late 1980s when 2,4-D came up for EPA re-registration. The task force was made up of a group of companies all having a vested interest in the fate of 2,4-D. Re-registration required a large volume of data be generated, and the mission of the task force was to fund and develop that data conjointly and to oversee progress throughout the re-registration process.

Despite all progress in industry professionalism and pesticide technology, government and legal challenges to pesticide use are increasing, says Frank Gasperini, director of state issues for Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE).



Gasperini says activist tactics today are taking three primary approaches:

1. The preemption challenge

Activists seek to change laws already on the books to permit local communities to ban or

restrict pesticides ("preemption" or "preeminence"). Activists claim that in a democracy local governments must have the right to determine what is used or not allowed in their communities. While this may sound logical, preemption law requires local communities to abide by federal and state pesticide rules and regulations. Preemption law is based on the fact that

only larger governmental bodies have the necessary tax funds and technical expertise to register and approve labels for pesticides. In 2005, legislative challenges based on preemption were introduced in Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont. RISE actively works with local members and allies to oppose such legislation. Attempts to regulate pesticides at the local level have included action against specific products.

In an important court case involving preemption issues, a U.S. District Court recently upheld a local ordinance in Dane County, Wisc., banning the use of fertilizers and fertilizer-pesticide combination products containing phosphorus. The pesticide industry sued, arguing that the local ordinance should have been struck down since by law fertilizer-pesticide combination products are pesticides and therefore regulated by federal law, and should also be preempted by the state.

2. The precautionary challenge

By definition, a pesticide poses a theoretical risk to non-target species and the environment. While

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Q: Do you feel communities should be able to ban the use of all pesticides?

No

54%

Yes

46%

pesticides in the United States are the most thoroughly researched in the world, the activist challenge is that no risk is acceptable and that unless and until all risks have been thoroughly researched, pesticides should not be allowed. This approach to limiting or eliminating pesticide use has been adopted to some extent in Europe and Canada, where in 2004 the city of Toronto passed a local ordinance to ban use of pesticides for socalled "cosmetic" use, by 2006.

called "cosmetic" use, by 2006. The precautionary argument targets legislators to take action against pesticides for a range of reasons, including fear of increased risk to children, fear of incomplete and ineffective work by regulatory agencies, environmental pollution, "unknown" hazards for pesticide inert ingredients which activists inaccurately claim are not tested, the unknown environmental fate of active ingredients, the unknown effect



from the combination of exposure to multiple pesticides, and more. The activists' proposed use of precaution rejects the validity of the entire pesticide registration process, as authorized under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

3. The cosmetic challenge

This argument attacks the risk/ benefit relationship used to register pesticides and attempts to create a

split between pesticides for public health, agriculture and turf and ornamental uses. The argument is that greater risk is acceptable for control of public disease vectors (mosquitoes and ticks) or for food production than it is for "cosmetic" lawn care uses. At its extreme this position claims that so called cosmetic uses are not justified at all, and therefore lawn care pesticides should be banned or severely restricted. Attempts to regulate pesticides based on non-essential, cosmetic use have been attempted in at least 13 states so far. The argument against cosmetic use of pesticides ignores many of the benefits they provide, including reducing lawn and landscape pests that are nuisances or health risks to humans, improving property value and improving the health of plants that improve the environment.

Effective industry response to activist attempts to restrict or eliminate pesticide and fertilizer uses must be as broad as the challenge. Pesticide applicators must ensure that products are used properly every time because misapplications and spills can generate the negative publicity used to spark calls for legislative or legal action. Pesticide manufacturers and formulators must continue to support RISE and state associations in legislatures and the courts. Suppliers and lawn care companies need to work together to education federal and state legislatures through Legislative Days events, and educate the public through customer contact and public outreach and education through organizations such as Project Evergreen (www.projectevergreen.org).

The bottom line is that new pesticide compounds and technologies need to be discovered, and existing products and labels must be maintained, continuously improved and their use defended by all participants in the industry. ¹¹¹

Clarifying Common Misconceptions

Getting the terminology right helps make product comparisons.



etting a proper handle on whether to buy a "branded" or "generic" product requires getting beyond these two overly simplistic and misleading words. While suppliers produced the active ingredient, its level of purity might not be identical.

Second, the formulations are not likely to be identical. To be usable on turf a pesticide active ingredient

may disagree about what are the best words to use or have terminology they prefer to describe what they do and their products, framing the discussion – and buying decisions – on a "branded vs. generic" level falls short of the mark.

Three concepts are at the heart of understanding the facts and being

able to make an apples-to-apples comparison of two or more products, which at face value might appear to be the same:

I. What is in the container?

If you are looking at two products that have the same active ingredient on the container and the same amount, then the assumption is that both will do the same job. That assumption is partially correct since EPA registration does verify the active ingredient and amount on the packaging.

However, any assumption that two products are the same beyond this comparison can be wrong for two reasons:

First, the active ingredient might not be of the same level of purity. (The active ingredient is the chemical or chemicals in a pesticide that deliver the desired effects.) The active ingredient used in two products might have come from the same manufacturer (the basic manufacturer that invented it). Or, the active ingredients could have come from different manufacturers in the United States or overseas. Depending upon who physically



must first be formulated with other chemicals to lower the concentration level of the chemical compound to make application at the low rate required possible. A formulation can be a solid (dust or granular) or a liquid. Virtually all of the active ingredients used in liquid pesticides begin as solids that will not dissolve in water. To get such active ingredients into a liquid form requires

dissolving them in a liquid carrier, such as in an oil-based solvent, which creates a liquid formulation that can be diluted with water to get the low rate necessary for use on turf. The active ingredient and all the chemicals it is combined with make up the pesticide formulation.

Formulations are very important. They determine the Signal Word on the label, and can affect the use rate, application directions, efficacy, residual effect, odor, easy of mixing and much more. The formulation can be made in combination with a fertilizer or other active ingredients. One formulation may also include an additive in the product that a similar formulation recommends be added before application at an extra cost, so it is important to compare label directions carefully, not just the package price.

Companies that formulate a product using a postpatent active ingredient need a marketing advantage in order to compete with the original branded product or any other post-patent competitive products. In addition to the company's sales and service presence, two obvious marketing approaches are to improve product performance by coming up with a better formulation or try to develop a formulation that creates a significant cost advantage.

2. What comes with the container?

Classifying "brand" and "generic" products is understandable since the active ingredient is usually identified with the original branded product in the minds of lawn care operators. For example, Monsanto's Roundup Herbicide was the original brand for non-selective turf herbicides. So, other products containing, glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, are considered "generic" products.

The problem with this classification is that technically every registered pesticide is a brand regardless of the active ingredient(s) it contains. In legal terms a brand is a mark, name or symbol that is recognized as standing for and representing that unique product.

In marketing, a "brand" refers to the sum of the customers', prospective customers' and the public's experiences and perceptions. The company itself is a brand (McDonald's) and so are its products (Big Mac or Happy Meals). When people are asked about a brand name, then what comes to mind is their past experiences, good or bad, as well as their dreams and emotions. The sum of these perceptions is the brand position for the company or product.

The principle of branding works the same way in marketing a pesticide. So, the brand of a particular pesticide represents more than just its active ingredient. Its brand includes the manufacturer reputation, container sizes and cost, distributor relationships, past problems or lack of problems, applicator training, technical support, special purchase programs, applicator opinions and much more.

Deciding between two pesticide brands, even if both were formulated with the same active ingredient, involves considering a range of factors. Since every pesticide product, whether the original branded product or a post-patent product, is a brand in its own right, each can or will mean something different to end users. The active ingredient(s) are a primary factor, but ultimately deciding what product to buy is a brand consideration. The products selected also impact the lawn care company's own ability to successfully build its own brand reputation with customers and prospective customers.

3. Who made the product?

Trying to make product comparisons based on the

source gets confusing. A company that researches, invents and patents a new pesticide active ingredient and then brings it to market as a finished product is usually referred to as the "basic" manufacturer. Chemical compounds owned by basic manufacturers are proprietary compounds.

Any company that has a physical facility to produce pesticide active ingredients is a manufacturer. It is also possible for a company to be both the basic manufacturer – of its own proprietary pesticides – and a manufacturer of post-patent active ingredients that the company has gained legal rights to produce.

"Formulators" are suppliers that specialize in producing and marketing finished pesticide products. While it is technically true that basic manufacturers and manufacturers are also formulators – if they formulate finished products for market – a "formulator" usually denotes a company that buys active ingredient from another source.

If all this isn't already confusing enough, it is possible for a basic manufacturer or a manufacturer to also be a formulator – if it buys active ingredient from other manufacturers in order to formulate and market products using those active ingredients either as stand-alone products or as a combination product with one of the company's proprietary compounds.

Distributors are companies that usually serve as the marketing, sales and service arm for basic manufacturers, manufacturers and formulators. However, a distributor can also be a basic manufacturer, manufacturer or formulator.

The importance of understanding the source of a product is that it can be an indicator of the supplier's technical expertise, resources for product support, knowledge of the market and relationship to other companies.

How important is cost?

In a Lawn & Landscape February 2004 study, 64 percent of lawn care operators said cost most influenced their peticide purchase decisions, followed by 56 percent for efficacy, 36 percent for safety and 24 percent for dealer location.

In December 2004 Lawn & Landscape research of residential lawn care customers, 59 percent said the top improvement their lawn care company could make would be to, "Do what they said they were going to do." Second would be to "come on time" (45 percent) and third would be to "lower prices" 36 percent). (11)



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A New World for Suppliers

While product rules are changing the value goal remains the same.

n some industries a company can gain a patent for a product and begin selling it immediately and enjoy patent protection for almost 17 years. Because pesticides are a highly-regulated industry, patent law provides fewer actual years to market and sell a product. In fact, getting a patent is just the first step in a long and costly process. Bringing a new turf and ornamental active ingredient to market today requires 10 to 12 years, \$150 million and perhaps 200

tests to meet expanded federal and state regulatory requirements.

To get maximum marketing time with patent protection it would seem to make sense for a basic manufacturer to delay patent application for as long as possible. In reality, manufacturers are under pressure to get patent protection as soon as possible because competitors might be researching the same chemistry, or could do so if they learned about the research. So, as soon after a promising compound is identified the manufacturer will apply for a patent.

A patent is no guarantee that even the most promising chemistry will be viable or successful. The manufacturer must also research formulation and manufacturing options and do extensive laboratory and field efficacy research to meet the regulatory hurdles necessary to earn Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registration. In recent years special state regulatory requirements have become more common and complex. In reality only a small percentage of patented chemistries actually make it to market.

If all research and regulatory requirements can be satisfied the company can begin to market a new product. However, from the time that the patent was granted until marketing can begin may use up five to 10 years of the 17year patent, leaving seven to 12 years to build market acceptance and sales. Sales and profits are not instantaneous since applicators have to be made aware of the product and convinced to try it.

The more successful a new product is, the more interest formulators will have in the active ingredient as a post-patent product. The situation is even more tenuous overseas. United States patents are not universally recognized, so an overseas manufacture might simply disregard the U.S. patent and begin producing the active ingredient for its own end-use products.

From the investment side there are four other important considerations. First, the product performance bar in the turf and ornamental market has

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been raised. Any new product must compete against already good products.

Second, research in agricultural products has decreased.

• Third, other markets in the U.S. and overseas are competing for limited research dollars. In a publicly held company the stockholders are most concerned with the potential return on their investment.

• Fourth, the day of the blockbuster pesticide has passed. The Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA)



made it more difficult to develop a product that is used extensively in several major markets. FQPA sets a limit on total theoretical exposure to a chemical class that cannot be exceeded. For example, an insecticide could be used in food crops, cotton, nurseries, golf, sports turf and professional turf. The sum of the potential human

exposure from all of its uses is estimated and weighed against the theoretical "risk cup" limit set by the EPA. If all of the uses of all of the insecticides in that chemical class exceed the risk cup limit, then manufacturers must reduce uses to get below the FQPA limit.

Taken together these challenges make investment in new specialty chemicals increasingly risky and difficult.

Post-patent suppliers face a competitive marketing challenge

Bringing a post-patent product to market requires more than buying the active ingredient, developing a formulation and selling it at a discount. Rather, it is a process that requires considerable time and money.

The chief challenge in using a post-patent active ingredient is finding a winning marketing strategy in a competitive sales environment. To do so a formulator must consider its core competencies, distribution channel partners and special expertise. Based on those strengths, formulating a post-patent product strateg begins by identifying what promising active ingredients are available and which would be the best additions to the company's product line.

Since the main challenge is marketing, the critical up front work is to analyze the competitive situation. Are distributors and customers open to the proposed postpatent product? Does it make financial sense? Answering these questions usually takes three-to-six months before a go/no go decision can be made. Add months if upper management approval is required for funding. If a go decision is made the next step is to file an application for registration. Contracts are needed for purchasing the active ingredient, formulation, packaging and distribution.

An offer of "data compensation" must also be made to the basic manufacturer. Data compensation is legal recognition that the basic manufacturer is due compensation for its investment in research and development. Once an offer for data compensation is made it becomes a matter of arbitration. Data compensation is usually a one-time payment of \$1 million to several million dollars, depending upon the original research investment made, how current the research is and more.

Once a post-patent formulation has been developed, field trials can begin to generate data for marketing purposes. If field trials are positive, toxicology tests are needed to gain EPA registration. EPA will require additional research to register the new post-patent formulation, as well as ongoing research to maintain it. In some cases ongoing funding is required by all registrants to pay for research to protect the molecule. For example, companies formulating herbicides with 2,4-D must contribute to the 2,4-D Task Force, a coalition of companies that have invested about \$40 million to keep this workhorse compound registered.

Depending upon the above variables, the process to bring a post-patent product to market can require six to 18 months. If the new formulation involves a combination of two active ingredients not previously registered in combination by the EPA, add more time and expense. Developing a formulation for a new label use can also add time and cost. And if the active ingredient had never been registered in the United States for the turf and ornamental market, then introducing it would follow the same basic process and timeline as required to introduce any newly-discovered active ingredient.

A the other end of the spectrum, the easiest way to sell an post-patent active ingredient is to buy it from the basic manufacturer, re-brand it and make the necessary marketing and sales adjustments. Another simple arrangement is to negotiate an agreement with the basic manufacturer to serve as its marketing and sales arm for the product (a "re-packager"). In this scenario the basic manufacturer retains registration of the active ingredient and ownership of the product, but both companies share the profit. Re-packaging arrangements can be completed relatively quickly.

The goal for any pesticide manufacturer or formulator is to take its product line to the next level. In the post-patent environment, business decisions depend upon what active ingredients are available, the market fit and the ever-changing competitive situation. ^{III}



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Supplier Strategies in a New Market

Success depends upon invention, innovation, market presence and value.

hile all pesticides are formulated with either a patented or post-patent active ingredient, suppliers do not align into two neat camps. From a philosophic perspective, suppliers tend to fit into one of three camps – a basic manufacturer,

a "generic" formulator, or a crossover that formulates and markets both basic and post-patent products. A supplier's position also depends upon its alliances with other suppliers and distributors, market specialization, global connections and resources, and more.

For lawn care operators knowing what expertise and resources a supplier brings is important in determining the overall value package. Following are comments from a number of industry suppliers regarding their view of the post-patent market and its impact:

BASF: Focus remains on the customer

Toni Bucci, business manager for Turf & Ornamental Products, says BASF's view of post-patent active ingredients is driven by the Research Triangle Park, NC-based company's two goals for its turf and ornamental business: To give distributor customers all the tools they need, and to be sustainable as a business by developing new and improved products.

"Our mission is to give our distributor customers the tools they need to make their lawn care customers successful, Bucci says. "Ultimately that means listening to distributors and their lawn care customers, and offering products based on need. So, BASF produces and markets proprietary and post-patent products."

Bucci says BASF's pragmatic approach recognizes market change. "There was a time when all we had was aspirin and we were comfortable with that," Bucci says. "Fortunately, competitive opportunities drove creation of other pain relievers and post-patent aspirin products, giving us more choices. We believe that competition benefits the end user and that BASF's expertise guarantees them high quality proprietary and post-patent products."

As the largest chemical company in the world, and with an annual investment of \$1.5 billion in research, Bucci says BASF is making investment in new chemistries for lawn care a higher priority.

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"We recently submitted a new insecticide for federal registration, which could take another two years, and we have other new products that are six-to-eight years out. We're looking at active ingredients from overseas with potential for the U.S. turf market. Turf and ornamental is driving more research and the market is being looked at earlier in the research process. We see the market as one that is growing."

Post-patent products also play a role in new product research as profits from their sale contributes to the research and development. Bucci says investment is the key to long-term industry service.

"I don't see basic manufacturers making changes to their strategies in regard to the sale of proprietary versus post-patent products, Customers tell us they value commitment in terms of offering solutions and product development. This and other market conditions will challenge the survival of small startup companies using post-patent products. Lawn care professionals purchase value, which includes price and service."

Bayer: Deliver and communicate value

Mike Ruizzo, Ph. D., manager of CNIs for Bayer Professional Products, Montvale, NJ, says the company's post-patent strategy has internal and external aspects. Internally, Bayer as a basic manufacturer is making one of the largest investments in discovery research, working to improve product formulations, and investigating combinations of active ingredients. Working with FMC, Bayer last year introduced Allectus Insecticide, a proprietary combination of the active ingredients in Bayer's Merit and FMC's Talstar.

"Allectus should have happened years ago. It's the first insecticide that can control above and belowground turf insects with one application," Ruizzo says. "The changing business environment is making basic manufacturers sharper and causing us to take a new look at our chemistries and technical resources."

Another example, Ruizzo says, is Armada, a brand new fungicide based on two Bayer proprietary active ingredients. "Armada is the first fungicide developed exclusively for lawn care," Ruizzo says. "Armada was developed to let lawn care operators both do and sell disease control. It provides broad-spectrum control of turf disease for 30 days-plus and at a price that allows contractors to sell this service."

Externally, Bayer is working to earn customer loyalty for the value that Bayer brings. In 2003, Bayer launched its "Backed By Bayer" program toward that end. Ruizzo says Backed by Bayer rests upon five pillars: Dedication to the turf market in terms of focus; guarantee satisfaction for product performance; superior solutions in terms of products and support; added value in terms of marketing and industry support; and vision for the future.

"Bayer has been preparing for post-patent products for years," Ruizzo says. "We believe in delivering true value and communicating it. We think end users understand the importance of making informed decisions that benefit them in the short- and long-term."

Externally, Ruizzo says the Backed by Bayer program provides a clear focus for Bayer employees, while making the benefits for lawn care operators visible.

"Bayer represents more than branded products," Ruizzo says. "If a lawn care operator has a problem we will be there until it is resolved. If he or she is not satisfied with one of our products then we will replace it or give them their money back. If they need training we provide it through distributors and associations. Our commitment is tangible; it helps lawn care operators succeed beyond the products. We have a vested interest in their success. When our customers win, we win."

In the long-term Ruizzo says a likely outcome among generic companies is consolidation, the goal being greater market share and profit.

"The ideal for a generic company is to own and market proprietary products. Exclusive products allow you focus on those products and differentiate your business from competitors."

The challenge for a generic company would be obtaining the resources necessary to bring new solutions to customers. Ruizzo says the two hard facts in the turf industry are that the industry wants and needs new solutions and there's a better way to do anything – it's just waiting to be discovered.

"Customers face challenges today and tomorrow," Ruizzo says. "Our job is to help solve them today and be thinking about solutions for the next challenge."

DowAgroSciences: Realize creative market opportunities

Dow AgroSciences is in the business of marketing its compounds directly and in partnership with others, says Scott Eicher, senior product manager for turf and ornamental herbicides. What this means is that Indianapolis, Ind.-based Dow AgroSciences today is a basic manufacturer of proprietary products, a supplier of post-patent active ingredients to others, and a purchaser of post-patent active ingredients.

"As a basic manufacturer our search for new molecules and formulations that add value has never changed," Eicher says. "But in a new business environment we are open to opportunities to market our turf and ornamental compounds directly and through others. That even means looking into post-patent products from other basic manufacturers to investigate combination products with our own active ingredients.

Formulation expertise is being used to improve proprietary products. As an example, Eicher says some applicators do not like the smell of Dimension EC, though they like its efficacy. In response the company is working on a water-based formulation that it hopes to be able to patent.

Eicher says the loss of chlorpyrifos in the late 1990s, at the time the leading insecticide active ingredient, brought an entrepreneurial outlook to the company.

"When we lost chlorpyrifos the income impact was felt across the entire company," Eicher says. "As a basic manufacturer we need patented chemistry, which led us to the purchase of Rohm & Haas. They were strong in fungicides, so the acquisition was an especially good fit for our turf and ornamental business. The end result is that we have now grown our business to more than replace Dursban. Today, Dow AgroSciences is more market-focused than ever and we are taking a 'rifle' approach to serving specific market needs."

Eicher says the net effect of post-patent products will be to put some downward pressure on prices, though to many customers the original brand will remain as valuable as ever.

"There are two misconceptions about generic products. First, is that they are not the same thing as the original branded product. Second, that the same support will be there even though they cost less. You simply cannot cut costs and provide the same level of technical support. My view of buying the original brand is that it is like buying insurance. No one likes paying insurance premiums until the day it's needed. But on that day you're glad you made the investment."

FMC: Traditional approach is the best long-term strategy

FMC's turf and ornamental business strategy is to remain a traditional manufacturer of quality proprietary pesticides supported by traditional distribution, says Maureen Thompson, turf and ornamental manager for the Philadelphia, Pa.-based company.

"The post-patent world brings change, but FMC has been in the professional turf market for many years, so our focus is for the long-term," she says. "We feel that the long-term needs of the industry are best served by innovative chemistries, so our global discovery pipeline is looking for new active ingredients."

While FMC will remain a traditional basic manufacturer, Thompson says the company is adapting to the post-patent competition to defend and improve its products to distributors and lawn care operators:

FMC recently signed a licensing agreement for flonicamid, a novel chemistry for sucking pests. It was introduced in the greenhouse market in March 2005 as Aria, and work is being done now for registration in the landscape market. Recently, FMC signed an agreement for a proprietary fungicide.

Formulation research has resulted in Onyx Insecticide, a new bifenthrin formulation that is superior to Talstar for control of borers and beetles in trees. And in 2004, FMC and Bayer worked together to introduce Allectus Insecticide, a product formulated with FMC's Talstar and Bayer's Merit active ingredients to target both above- and below-ground insect pests.

"We are looking at new compounds and combination products using more than one active ingredient," Thompson says. "Market-based alliances and partnerships allow FMC to offer new and superior products and to add value. We will also introduce private label post-patent products where doing so makes sense."

The bottom line in deciding whether to use a postpatent product or not is a question of value, she says. Basic manufacturers have the best understanding of their chemistries and insight into them that a generic company does not have. Basic manufacturers also have proven quality formulations that have been fine-tuned. Another important differentiation is product support.

"Anyone can put an 800 number on their label," Thompson says. "The question is whether someone answers it and can answer the customer's question. Find out. Call the number. Anyone can say they support the industry. FMC supports state meetings and trade shows and sponsors distributor events. The question isn't whether a generic company can do all that. The question is, are they really doing it?"

LESCO: Focus on the company brand

Being the largest distributor serving the professional turf market gives LESCO a unique post-patent market position and perspective, says Bob West, director of marketing for the Cleveland, Ohio-based company.

"LESCO is more interested in its overall brand than post-patent or proprietary product brands," West says. "The LESCO brand is the overall customer experience and convenience. It's the reliability and the technical expertise that the LESCO associate behind the counter delivers. It's about a customer being able to walk in with a weed or insect in a plastic bag and ask what it is and what they can use to get rid of it. Ultimately it's about the service we provide in our Service Center locations and from our Stores-on-Wheels vehicles."

Often the recommendation is to use a LESCO product, says Brian Rowan, senior director of merchants.

"If you ask LESCO customers what insecticides or herbicides they use, their answer is as likely to be 'LESCO's' as it is proprietary brands," Rowan says. "We offer proprietary brands and our own private label products. Serving the customer means giving them choices."

"That's what LESCO sees as the key to post-patent products for end users – choices," adds West. "Part of our role is to provide the customer with options. The post-patent environment means there are more choices for our customers and more competition among manufacturers. That's clearly good for end users."

As an example of choice, Rowan says LESCO offers Roundup along with its own products formulated with glyphosate: Prosecutor, Prosecutor Pro and Prosecutor Swift Action. A customer may prefer Roundup, or they might need it to match bid specification requirements, but LESCO offers a choice of the original brand and its own private label products with the same active ingredient.

For that and other reasons, West says most basic manufacturers are very interested in working with LESCO to private label post-patent active ingredients, and often do so if it makes business sense. One thing LESCO will not do is discount the price on its private label products, simply because they are post-patent, even if they are adjacent on the shelf to the original brand product. LESCO also does not manufacture pesticides. Along with equipment, the company produces seed, fertilizer and herbicide- and insecticide-combination products on fertilizers. For pesticides, LESCO often works directly with the basic manufacturers.

"One notion that does need to be debunked is that any post-patent product is not as good as the original brand," West says. "Post-patent products are the same active ingredient and almost always the same product. We always want to give our customers more choices so they can use the best product for their situation, but LESCO is not going to put something on our shelves that is not good for the end user. Our position is to add value to the products we offer."

Nufarm: Aiming to provide the best of both worlds

While lawn care companies may soon be noticing more product options to choose from, selecting a supplier boils down to one of three options, says Sean Casey, national sales manager for Nufarm Turf & Specialty, Burr Ridge, Ill. Those choices are a brand supplier, a generic supplier or an alternate brand supplier.



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Casey says brand companies are driven by research, ownership of proprietary compounds and providing full support for their products. Generic companies aim for low cost, buy their active ingredients from other companies and offer limited product support.

Alternate brand companies, which describe Nufarm, aim to be better than brand manufacturers on pricing and better than generic companies in terms of service and product quality.

"Our strategy is to offer a full line of products, improved formulations and products with combinations of active ingredients," Casey says. "Nufarm has the resources to do that because we are global, we own manufacturing facilities, we are basic in phenoxy herbicides and we have a dedicated regulatory department in the United States. At the same time we are known for our formulation expertise with post-patent compounds."

In terms of support, Casey says Nufarm has field sales staff, relationships with university and independent researchers for field and efficacy testing, and is very active in industry association support.

"Nufarm sees the post-patent market as offering a great opportunity for suppliers, distributors and lawn care operators. We think alternate brands offer greater value. Every day we eat alternate food brands, wear alternate brand clothes and take alternate brand medications. Alternate brand pesticides simply give you another choice.

"It bothers me to hear basic manufacturers talk about their post-patent 'defense' strategies," Casey adds. "They need to talk about how to maximize the post-patent opportunities."

Ultimately, Casey says post-patent products will be good for the industry as suppliers work to improve the way they do business, learn to compete in less profitable markets and find new solutions to turf problems.

"New products will come to the market, and some may even come from new and unfamiliar sources. That always has been the history of the industry."

PBI Gordon: Continued focus on formulation quality

New post-patent active ingredients are an opportunity to PBI Gordon, Kansas City, Mo., says Doug Obermann, turf and ornamental products manager. "We specialize in formulating so new active ingredients open up opportunities for us to create new industry solutions."

Obermann does not believe post-patent products will change lawn care buying patterns significantly as long as contractors buy with their own best interest in mind. "In lawn care labor is the most expensive input and then comes the truck. The broadleaf herbicide is one of the least expensive inputs. You can treat 5,000 square feet for about \$1 in herbicide. So, in an industry where there is a labor shortage, and you have to try to do more with less, it just makes sense to use quality products."

Quality products can maintain sales even when not protected by a patent, says Obermann and points as evidence to Gordon's Trimec Herbicide, introduced in 1969. Trimec went off patent in 1986, "but it is still the No. I herbicide for broadleaf weed control," Obermann notes. "We hear that from lawn care operators across the country and it is because of the way we formulate this product."

An excellent formulation is part science and part art, he adds. The science is the inert ingredients used with the active ingredients. The art in formulation technology comes from experience and insight. "You can follow grandma's cake recipe and use all the right ingredients, but without grandma's experience somehow the cake doesn't taste the same," he says.

Post-patent products have created low-ball pricing in agriculture, he adds, but farming is a high-volume business in which lower pricing can make a big difference. However, the cost advantages in the turf market are relative. Quality and performance are more critical to the professional who makes his living on his reputation.

"It's no different than painting," he says. "There is a bottom line price to produce a gallon of paint and every improvement in the formulation adds a little bit to the price. But if you consider the preparation work involved before you paint, does it make sense to buy a paint based on lowest price?"

Sipcam: Post-patent products just now becoming discovered

Bob Yarborough, sales and marketing manager for Sipcam Agro USA's turf and ornamental group, Roswell, Ga., says lawn care operators are just starting to understand post-patent products. In the golf course market superintendents have known about and have been using post-patent products for more than 10 years.

"We introduced a post-patent fungicide in the golf course market under the trade name Echo with the active ingredient chlorothalonil. It got a lot of scrutiny because a superintendent's career depends upon the reliability of the products that he or she uses. University studies and performance of the product on golf courses have taken care of superintendents' questions."

Yarborough says lawn care companies should try post-patent products to see if they can get equal or better performance at a lower cost. Regarding quality, he says EPA standards for product registration mean that a post-patent product has to be "substantially similar" to the original branded product. For that and other reasons, formulators of post-patent products cannot be characterized as fly-by-night operations.

"Sipcam is a family-owned business with more than a 50-year heritage," Yarborough says. "The company is a basic registrant of technical chemistries and end-use formulations."

An increase in post-patent products is a good thing for the lawn care industry because it creates new opportunities for more players and lowers prices. As an example, Yarborough points to Roundup. Monsanto has come up with improved brands, but the price for the original brand product has come down, as there are about a dozen post-patent products available.

An added benefit of post-patent products is taking place in distribution. When basic manufacturers own a large proportion of active ingredients it gives them the ability to influence distributor decisions.

"As more post-patent products become available it empowers distributors, even the small independent distributors, to broaden their product lines and give their professional lawn care customers greater sourcing options."

Syngenta: Bullish on research and the professional turf market

While affected by the loss of patents for some of its proprietary active ingredients, Syngenta's mission to discover and bring new chemistries to market will not change. Driving that commitment for investment is market growth, says Steve Stansell, marketing manager for the lawn and landscape and aquatics business of Syngenta in Greensboro, NC.

"We see professional turf products as a global growth driver for our future," Stansell says, "We believe in particular that the lawn care market could grow significantly. That projection is contingent upon the economy, such as home starts, but our research investment is increasing in turf and ornamental and golf. As a corporation we are also looking at compounds earlier to see if they have turf potential."

The last point represents a shift in the focus of research, says David Ross, Ph.D., turf and ornamental technical manager. Syngenta researchers in the United States and Germany screen more than 500,000 compounds per year. Of that, 100 might make it to the field for stage one testing and of that only one or two compounds will have the potential to become a new commercial product.

A few years ago crop protection ranked higher on the company's research priority list. Today, more emphasis is on professional turf, so initial screening of all new compounds includes 8-9 turf insects, 8-9 turf weeds and 8-9 turf diseases.

Research is yielding results, including the launch of Flagship Insecticide in 2003 for the ornamental market, Monument Herbicide in 2004, and new formulation of Heritage Fungicide (Heritage TL) for golf and lawn care in late 2004.

Research has also been expanded beyond conventional pesticides to products that can help the plant enhance its own health, and plant growth regulators that can improve turf health. Syngenta is also investing in plant genetics and the broader biotech sector.

Syngenta's mission isn't changing, Stansell says. The company evaluates its product portfolio based on customer needs and opportunities. That includes looking for ways to reformulate and improve upon proprietary compounds, even after they have lost their patent protection.

"Syngenta owns excellent active ingredients that are no longer patented but which have value in the marketplace. We continue to invest in them to improve their formulations and uses," adds Ross. "For example, with diquat we are working on improving its purity on new formulations. Prodiamine is off patent but we are not slowing down research on it. We have been doing research on chlorothalonil since the 1960s."

"We are paying more attention to the product life cycle," Stansell says. "Products are born and mature. Our company's expertise is about creating leading edge technologies and enhancing our mature products."

"We don't just offer a container of chemical but also the technology to make it work," adds Ross. "What our customers want is a high quality experience for their own customers, even to the point of putting technical people on the ground immediately if there is problem, pinpoint the issue and make a recommendation to help that customer."

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continued from page 50

"I don't want to micromanage," Hornung says. "But if technicians aren't doing their jobs, we will continue to closely monitor their schedules until they get back on track. Most of the time, they will correct any bad habits because they get tired of us watching them so closely. And once one person does it and gets caught, he spreads the word around to the rest."

For his irrigation service technicians, Hornung got a 5 to 10 percent productivity increase from incorporating software that streamlined the scheduling, estimating and billing process.

In the past, when irrigation techni-

cians would fix a broken sprinkler head, they would handwrite the material and labor details on paper, leave that invoice at the client's house, bring back a copy, and the office manager would input the information into the computer and send an invoice. "Technicians would wait until the end of the day to fill out their paperwork and they weren't billing for the time they drove to the job, billing incorrect times altogether, forgetting parts they used and sometimes even losing invoices," Hornung says. "We didn't have a process for allocating time during the day. We didn't have benchmarks for how may hours certain

reaching goals

Valley Green Cos., Sartell, Minn., sets each lawn care technician's production-per-hour goal at between \$100 and \$135. Most new lawn care technicians start at a production-per-hour goal of \$80, Hornung says. "That's just the newness of the job to this employee." he explains. "We slowly increase it as they become comfortable with the job. We tell them that next week we want to see them at \$85. Most of the time they come in at \$90 because they know we're watching this number. We don't baby-sit them right away because then they'll expect us to solve all of their problems all of the time, but if they get frustrated and run into a roadblock, we are their to assist them and they look at it as we're helping them vs. telling them what to do."

New technicians spend their first two weeks visiting clients with Lawn Care Manager Tony Cauley. "We spend enough time with them to the point when they are telling us they don't want us riding with them anymore – they can handle the job." Hornung says. "We put them in control of their own destiny. We let them make mistakes, but we keep them in a controlled mistake environment. Once they get through this, they can get increases of \$5 or \$10 production-wise every couple of weeks. With some organizational advice, anyone can increase their productivity 30 percent given some time. Before we know it, a person who's been with us for three months will be at \$100 an hour.

"We try to manage them with a one-minute manager mentality," Hornung continues. "We want them to do the job their own way in our parameters. If we give them a cut-and-dry approach, it's too controlling and they get frustrated too quickly. If we provide a layout of what we expect them to do each day, such as being in the office by 6:15 a.m., having their truck loaded, the paperwork together, etc., then they can do it their own way – it all depends on their personal comfort level when it comes to structure and organization."

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cover story

repairs should take to install and how much time should be allocated to each stop."

To alleviate these problems, two service technicians each carry, a PDA and have a printer in their truck. The software costs \$2005 a month for the two PDAs (adding a third, which Hornung may) do in the fall based on how much irrigation winterization work in he gets this year, would add another \$60 per month). The PDAsd costs about \$300 each, and the printers also cost about \$300 dr per truck. "Now, when we schedule a repair, our office manager ab asks the client what's wrong with the system and she schedules w it in. If she isn't sure of the time needed for the repair, she calls a technician to find out how much time to allocate. Instead of service technicians getting done what they can in a day, now we in are selling blocks of time each day. We know when days are full ni and we can tell the homeowner when the technician will be there. within a two-hour window. Before, we'd guess when the technician would be there and then the client would get upset if he didn't come that day. Also, all of the client information is stored on their PDA, so when the technician goes to the job he has all of the information he needs, including the client's address and directions to get there, what type of sprinkler system the client has, any special access codes needed to get to the controller, etc."

When it comes to billing, all of the parts Valley Green uses are recorded in the system with the correct prices so they just have to be selected. Presetting this information in the system took about two to three weeks, Hornung says. Service technicians clock into the job on the way there, do the work, draft an invoice on their PDA, select the parts they used, clock out of that job, print the invoice and leave it for the homeowner. The PDA takes care of all outside paperwork and autodumps information from the road into the office software system."

At the end of each week, Hornung is also able to print out a usage report and order the necessary parts to restock the irrigation service trucks, eliminating excess inventory.

The most important aspect for the system has been being able to bill for drive time to each job, Hornung says. "We used to bill when we got to the jobsite," he explains. "But those 15 to 30 minutes to get to each job was the difference on us not making money in this service. On an eight-hour day, if you aren't billing for drive time, that could add up to four hours of lost time – that's 50 percent of our time. That's part of our profit. Our time is accurate now to the minute and we do not have to look up product cost on every job, which saves time. Mistakes have been cut down as well."

Another high-tech solution that helped cut down on inaccuracies for Valley Green was a new lawn care business-focused software program that was installed in 1999. The program cost \$5,000 to \$6,000 for installation and initial training. Then, last year, Hornung paid \$1,500 for 1½ days of additional upgrade training, which he was able to split among three companies in the Minneapolis area to save on costs.

The reason Hornung switched to a program more adaptable to his business was because of its increasing size. "Our old program was fine for a company with 300 to 500 lawn care fertilization customers because technicians can remember most of the special requests, but once you get over 500 or 600 customers, you may have a different technician doing the job every time so you have to make sure the necessary detail is there, as well as a record of the amount and types of products used so it can all be coded and keep our inventory in line as well as enable technicians to answer clients' questions and what's been done on their properties and when."

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What else did the software enable Hornung to do? "We went from \$250,000 in sales to \$960,000 this year with only one person in the office – that's what it did," he says. "I now have seven computers in the office and everyone uses them. All employees use them to time in and out of the office each day, and they can also use them to double check weather reports or directions to a client's house. I can then type reports every two weeks before I do payroll to make sure employee hours are coded properly and to ask any questions."

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1160 Nicole Court • Glendora, CA 91740 800-735-5566 • 909-592-6272 Fax 909-592-7971 • www.carsonind.com owner's changing role. For Hornung, his personal transition from technician to owner has been challenging. He's been able to do this more smoothly in lawn care, where Cauley has stepped up to handle production scheduling and client requests, but it's been more difficult in irrigation. "I'm doing the irrigation estimates and following up to make sure the system was installed correctly, then I tell clients that if they have any additional questions or need service, they can call our office manager Marci Rich and she can schedule a technician to come out to their properties," he says. "This way I'm setting their expectations and trying to make this transition smooth."

Being able to move from technician to owner also means hiring people who are self-motivated. As such, Hornung looks for employees who take pride in their work and have an owner mentality. Those who don't blend in with this type of culture don't stay long, Hornung says. "How can people learn unless they walk down the same path I did?" he explains. " I try to teach people the job and then allow them to make some mistakes and learn along the way. When people ask me if this is what they are supposed to do, I turn around and ask them, 'What do you think you're supposed to do?' Most of the time they know the answer, but they just lack the confidence. It takes at least one month before we break them of the mentality that I'm the boss and I tell them what to do. I want them to think for themselves."

Above all else, constant improvement is a daily job requirement for Valley Green employees. One way Hornung encourages this in his employees is by asking them for just 1 percent improvement on each job. "I'm constantly reminding them to think about small tasks on the job that impress clients and mean doing the job only 1 percent better than someone else, such as picking up sticks in the yard or helping to carry in groceries – this makes it something that is measurable for them," he shares.

"We never want to let ourselves become complacent. We are constantly looking for better ways to operate." @

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After all, fuel is as critical to landscape work as air and water are to sustaining life. In fact, Message Board participant Kory Ballard says he spends at least \$200,000 annually just on fuel. According to *Lawn & Landscape's* 2004 State of the Industry Report, the cost of fuel is the No. 1 businesslimiting factor contractors expect for 2005. In the report, contractors ranked fuel prices a 7.7 on a level-of-concern scale from one to 10, with 10 being the highest concern.

For the past several months, Message Board participants have kept each other up to date on gas prices in their regions and how they expect them to impact business. For instance, during a March discussion contractors reported diesel prices ranging anywhere from \$2.13 to \$2.70 per gallon. Ballard, president of Des Moines, Iowa-based Perficut Lawn & Landscape, responded to the price-hike complaints by saying, "Guys, surcharge. If you're a maintenance company, surcharge. If you're an irrigation company, then adjust your prices – then surcharge."

by jonathan katz

SURCHARGE IT. When contractor Scott Graham tried to add fuel surcharges to a homeowner association's contract, he says the customer was less than receptive. "I wanted to include something in my contracts this year that if gas prices rise to unexpected levels, I have the authority to charge a small temporary fuel surcharge," says Graham, owner of SG Lawnscape, Glenshaw, Pa. "Well, the community manager e-mailed me back saying that none of his other contractors have ever approached him about this and that the ones in the past who have were 'trash companies.' Am I wrong for doing this?'"

In response, Message Board participant Ronald Barnhardt suggests that Graham include in his contracts an annual price increase for the first three years of the agreement and then lock the customer in for life

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at that price. This way, Graham can establish long-term customers and ensure he's compensated for rising fuel prices, says Barnhardt, president, Barnhardt Landscape, Rockwell, N.C. This is usually the best approach because last-minute, temporary adjustments are more likely to aggravate customers, says Justin Rasmussen, chief executive officer, Urban Lawnscapes, Seattle. "While gas is a big expense for all of us, it is not our biggest," Rasmussen explains. "What if gas prices drop suddenly? Are you going to offer a decrease in rates? Customers like the comfort of fixed rates and schedules for planning and budgeting."

Contractor Matthew Schattner agrees, saying predetermined price hikes can safeguard contractors from customers who demand price decreases when gas prices plummet. "Don't limit yourself to only rising fuel costs for raises," says Schattner, owner, Mat'z Snow & Lawn, Kansasville, Wis. "If anything, say it's the rising cost of doing business. Also, if you do in fact go with the method of only increasing if fuel hits a certain amount of dollars per gallon, then make sure they know it will stay there. Otherwise, you're going to hear questions like, 'Well, fuel went down – does our price go back down?'"

And that shouldn't happen with experienced contractors because gas price increases are inevitable, says Andrew Aksar, president, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md. "We all know gas prices go up," Aksar says. It's been that way since I can remember. I'm respectfully confused as to why it's suddenly an issue for a contractor who is a good businessman or woman. When you write your proposals for 2006, plan for the increase. In 2006, when you write your proposals for 2007, plan for the increase." Aksar recommends a fuel surcharge clause similar to the following: "In the event prices for gasoline and/or diesel fuel reach or exceed \$2.50 per gallon at the pump, a fuel surcharge of \$20 a month will be added to the monthly invoice and will remain until prices go below \$2.50 per gallon."

Such a policy may recover lost profits from rising fuel costs if contractors charge the right price, says Ron Soukup, vice president of operations, Emerald Lawns, Brainerd, Minn. Soukup says he learned the hard way how much underpriced surcharges can impact business. In 2003, Soukup says Emerald Lawns was "burned" by fuel prices because the company factored in a \$1.40-per-gallon surcharge, resulting in an average 13-centsper-gallon loss. The company now charges \$2.75 per gallon.

The additional cost may raise some customers' eyebrows, but contractors can minimize the backlash by explaining why the charges are necessary, Ballard says. His company added a fuel surcharge to more than 1,000 accounts last year. He charged a 1-percent premium to one-time jobs and 3 percent on all maintenance, commercial and lawn care accounts. "We sent a letter stating that we work hard to keep our prices down, but due to the rise in gas and the surcharge applied to all goods supplied to us, we are forced to pass that cost on," Ballard explains. "We have very few complaints on thousands of customers."

Some customers may actually question why the price hike didn't come sooner, says Michael Derrig, a partner with LBMD Landscaping in Rye, N.H. "We did a fuel surcharge three years ago when gas went up from \$1.05 to \$1.70," Derrig says. "Not one person complained – some even said they were wondering when we were going to get smart. When doing 130 properties per week, added gas increases at the pump add up fast. People, in general, see themselves first hand what they are paying at the pump, so because it directly affects them every day, they can

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see how it affects us due to it being one of the largest expenses on the maintenance side of the business."

TAKE INITIATIVE. Landscape contractors can't do much about rising fuel costs, but can they take steps to make themselves more fuel efficient? Some Message Board users questioned whether diesel engines could result in significant savings. Chad Stern, owner of Chevy Chase, Md.-based Mowing & More, says he regrets not purchasing diesel-powered trucks. After making some calculations, Stern says he could have saved some money with a diesel engine. "With gas prices at \$2.20 for regular and \$2.40 for diesel and assuming a gas engine gets 8 mpg and a diesel gets 14 mpg, it would take 49,000 miles of driving before you recover the \$5,000 extra you paid for the diesel engine," Stern explains. "If you plan on keeping the truck for



150,000 miles, then you will actually save a little more than \$10,000 in fuel over the life of the vehicle, even after you recover the cost of the engine."

But not everyone agrees that diesel engines result in savings. Diesel fuel is not always less money than gas, and for some contractors an additional \$5,000 for a diesel engine is a significant investment, says Will Sharp, president, Lawn Dawg Services, Matthews, N.C. Contractors also need to factor in the interest that accompanies the additional \$5,000, Aksar points out.

In another discussion, some Message Board participants wondered whether they can use less-expensive regular gas in their machines or if higher-octane grades are necessary. "I've always used regular gasoline because it's cheap, though I've been told a couple of times recently to use premium in my mowers and blowers," says David Young, owner, Kuebler Landscapes, Salem, Ore. Mat'z Snow & Lawn uses regular-grade gas for its equipment and hasn't experienced any equipment problems attributed to the lower-octane gas, Schattner says. Others say they use mid-grade gas in their equipment for better performance. "We use mid-grade in everything," says Dale Wiley, owner, Landscape Specialty Services, Forest Grove, Ore. "Pickups that tow run better without the excessive predetonation problems with 87 octane." IL



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Stand-on mowers provide many of the same benefits as riding mowers at a lower cost. andscape contractor John Hill replaced his entire mower fleet with stand-on units about five years ago after realizing how much more productive his employees were compared with when they operated riding mowers. Since making the move, Hill, owner of San Antonio, Texas-based Hill Horticulture says he has achieved significant savings, which he attributes to crewmembers who are less fatigued because they can now remain in one position while mowing and have improved maneuverability.

"The guys just don't get as fatigued standing up," Hill says. "When a guy has to sit down and then stand up to pick up debris or whatever and he's on that mower four or five times a day, then that can be fatiguing. A stand-on mower is less fatiguing to them because they have a good standing

by jonathan katz

rest position and a better line of sight than on sit-down mowers. I think having to get up and off that mower is where the fatigue part comes in, so I think that's the biggest difference."

Stand-on mower manufacturers are hoping more contractors, such as Hill, will realize the benefits of these units. Currently, few mower manufacturers produce stand-on units, which comprise less than 5 percent of the total mower market, says Bill Wright, president, Wright Manufacturing, Frederick, Md. But every year more contractors are purchasing stand-on mowers because of their affordability and productivity potential. Sales for Wright Manufacturing's stand-on units have increased 25 to 40 percent in each of the last five years, according to Wright. At Great Dane Power Equipment, 2005 stand-on

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POWER. KNOWLEDGE. GROWTH.

REGISTER TODAY ONLINE AT expo.mow.org or.call 812-949-9200 sales are expected to increase 30 percent from 2004, says Ken Taylor, business manager, Great Dane Power Equipment, Cary, N.C. The company's 2004 sales were up about 25 percent over the previous year, Taylor adds. agile. That trend is what gets people off of a walk-behind and onto a rider."

Taylor agrees that the stand-on market should pick up as contractors become more aware of their benefits, such as the ability to more easily load

"A stand-on mower is less fatiguing because the operator is in a good standing rest position and has a better line of sight." – John Hill

Wright says he expects that trend to continue. "The additional growth in our industry has been with riders," he explains. "The reason they've picked up so much speed is because they're becoming smaller, lighter and more and unload the units from trailers because of their compactness. "It's a learning curve, and perception is reality," Taylor says. "I've had people say, 'I don't want to stand all day. That has to be more tiring than sitting down.' And I come back and say that's a true statement if you're truly sitting all day and cutting for five or six hours, then there's no question a sit-down machine is better. But if a crew is highly mobile and constantly loading and unloading the machine, then I would question that statement."

THE STAND-UP ADVANTAGE.

Why stand when you can sit all day? Price is one reason. Many contractors and manufacturers consider stand-on mowers a go-between for walk-behind and riding mowers. Although more expensive than a walk-behind mower, stand-on mowers provide some of the same compactness and maneuverability as a mid-mount zero-turn mower at a lower cost. A stand-on mower costs about 10 percent less than a zero-turn riding mower and about 10 percent more than a walk-behind mower, Taylor says. Wright estimates a stand-on





mowers/power equipment > >

mower costs \$1,000 to \$1,500 less than a zero-turn rider.

Stand-on units can provide better visibility than riding mowers as contractors maneuver around obstacles because they're standing over the mower deck, says Wes Freeman, brand manager, John Deere Commercial Mowing, Cary, N.C. Adding to the maneuverability is the deck design, which is much like a mid-mount zero-turn riding mower. "By definition, it's a mid-mount in deck design, and it's also much more compact than a zero-turn riding mower because you are standing on it, and because of that, you take up less room on a trailer and it can be less fatiguing to the operator," Freeman says.

The improved visibility has resulted in less maintenance and a longer lifespan for Hill's mowers. With the riding mowers, Hill's crews would often bend the mower's yokes after hitting curbs they



couldn't see. "Most people I compete with here are replacing their mowers every two to three years," he explains. "We're in our fifth year, and I guarantee that I get two more years out of them, and my acquisition cost goes way down."

The stand-on mower's design also makes slopes easier to handle than riding mowers because they have a low center of gravity," Wright adds. With a stand-on mower, the operator is only a few inches off the ground, as opposed to 30 inches or more above the ground with a rider. This lower center of gravity allows contractors to mow steeper hills with less likelihood of tipping, he says.

In many cases, stand-on mowers are replacing walk-behind mowers because they reduce operator fatigue and can maneuver around tight areas.

"Typically, it seems like the stand-on units are being used as replacements for commercial walk-behinds because that's the easiest application for commercial contractors to see the benefits," Freeman says. "If I get a stand-on where I'm actually standing and riding on the machine I can mow faster, increase productivity in highly landscaped areas where I'm doing a lot of trimming or mowing smaller footprint properties." But stand-on mowers aren't limited to cutting just residential properties, Free-





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uying smart is more important today than ever. Fuel costs have risen sharply due to rising global demand and they are not likely to ever return to the relatively low prices of the 1990s. Lawn care professionals face higher direct business costs as a result, as well as

higher fertilizer prices driven by rising natural gas and transportation costs. In this new economic reality it is important to understand your fertilizer options. The right fertilizer buy can reduce the total pounds required, require fewer applications, reduce mowing and maintenance and reduce the environmental impact. The strategic agronomic goal is healthier turf that is more efficient to maintain. The strategic business goal is more profit.

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ment through maintenance. Lebanon offers top NTEP-rated seed varieties, seed establishment mulch, fertilizers, and fertilizer combination products. Lebanon has been a pioneer in developing advanced slow-release nutrients, including Meth Ex 40[®], a superior methylene urea complex; MESA®, an exclusive methylene urea ammonium sulfate technology; and Expo®, the first reacted slow-release potassium sulfate product. All Lebanon products deliver truly superior value through a combination of state-of-the-art science with a deep understanding of turf managers' needs.



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Lebanon innovation delivers more value

PennMulch pellets are superior to straw or other paper pellets. PennMulch is made of recycled paper that breaks down naturally without robbing the soil of nutrients. PennMulch also contains no weed seeds (straw is often contaminated with orchard grass, Timothy or other perennial forage-type weed grasses, which cannot be selectively controlled once they invade new turf!) And unlike straw, PennMulch will not blow off-

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PennMulch is also superior to other paper pellets. PennMulch is the only product on the market with Moisture Cell TechnologyTM. This patented technology puts super absorbent co-polymers into each and every pellet, the same polymer used in baby diapers, so each pellet can absorb up to 400% of its weight in water – making it available to seedlings at the seed-bed level.

PennMulch is also the only product of its kind that includes a full rate of starter fertilizer so everything needed is applied in a single application. Many spreader manufacturers have developed high-volume units that make applying





PennMulch fast and easy. All you need to do is prepare the seedbed as you normally would, sew the seed and lightly rake it in for good seed-to-soil contact, then spread PennMulch at the desired rate and water it.

Feeding Turf Better

The ideal fertilizer offers quick green up, excellent color, long lasting fertilization and is cost-effective. The ideal source of



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ureas are released by soil microbial activity, release is affected by soil moisture and temperature, which means the amount of nitrogen released is more naturally matched to the plant's demand. Advantages of MESA include better color, less surge growth and longer-lasting results:

- Fast response
- Long feeding action
- Brilliant color
- Microbial release
- Reduce or eliminate flush leaf growth
- More cost-effective and efficient than SCU
- No catastrophic release

Lebanon innovation delivers more value

The ideal fertility program should supply adequate nitrogen for turf without allowing the amount of nitrate to exceed demand. Excessive nitrogen can cause turf to grow too fast, and nitrogen that cannot be used can leach and be a source of groundwater contamination.

Of the two forms of nitrogen usable to plants, the nitrate form is prone to leaching which can contribute to non-point source water pollution. In contrast, the ammonium ion form is held on the soil to minimize leaching or volatilization.

Quick-release urea nitrogen fertilizer became popular because of its wide availability and low initial cost. But urea quickly mineralizes in the soil to form excessive nitrate levels. To counter this problem urea granules are sometimes coated with molten sulfur in varying thicknesses to form a sulfur-coated urea (SCU). In theory the advantage is that as the sulfur breaks down the urea will be released more slowly. However, in the real world mechanical damage to the sulfur coating during production, handling and application can result in the catastrophic release of urea. Even the addition of waxes or polymers to make the granules less brittle may not eliminate this problem.

In contrast, MESA does not rely on a protective coating to achieve slow release. The release of methylene urea polymers is through microbial activity, so the release is extended for longer periods and loss to leaching or volatilization is greatly reduced. The bottom line is that half a granule of MESA is still MESA, while half a granule of an SCU fertilizer might be wasted nitrogen!

MESA is also superior to SCU in regard to sulfur. Many turf managers don't realize that sulfur is the fourth-most important nutrient based on plant demand. Use of less refined fossil fuels in the past meant that sulfur was rarely deficient. Use of more highly refined fossil fuels in the past decade means that soluble sulfur may be deficient, and if so it can show up as yellowing of newly-emerging leaf tissue while being masked in the mature leaf.

SCU fertilizers have a small percentage of sulfur (8% or less) and it is not soluble until mineralized over a period of several months. In contrast, the ammonium sulfate used in MESA supplies soluble sulfur to build chlorophyll and related pigments to increases photosynthetic ability without the need to increase leaf area. What you see is brilliant color and a healthy plant with less flush leaf growth!

The major advantage of controlled-release nitrogen is to avoid excessive leaf growth soon after application. In university trials MESA outperforms SCU by posting equal or better turf quality ratings while at the same time producing less leaf tissue. The end result with MESA is healthier turf and lower maintenance costs!

Maintaining healthy turf easier

Confront 3 is a new three-way herbicide combination for controlling tough turf weeds. This new herbicide chemistry incorporates fluroxypyr for control of tough weeds like clover and ground ivy, while the phenoxy component quickly controls dandelion and plantains. Confront 3 is labeled for use on most turf sites, including residential lawns. The new zero phosphorus small particle base enhances foliar contact and control, and the 33% MESA slow-release nitrogen delivers fast response, brilliant green color, and long feeding action. The result is terrific looking turf that fills in fast behind retreating weeds.

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The Woodace product line includes a planting tablet: Woodace® 14-4-6 Tablet 8.0% WIN; and a soluble fertilizer: Woodace 20-20-20 Spray Grow.

Lebanon Turf: Specializing in turf innovation



Lebanon Turf began as a dedicated fertilizer manufacturing facility for Central Chemical, Hagerstown, Maryland. Prior to World War II, the facility was used to produce dry mixed fertilizers for farmers in central Pennsylvania. After the war the company began selling bagged fertilizer to farmers on Long Island, New York, and producing 5-10-5 fertilizer under the Sears private label for lawn and garden use. Lebanon soon also became one of the first companies to formulate fertilizer-herbicide blended products.

Numerous innovations followed. For more than two decades Lebanon produced pesticides for the United Nation's global campaign to eradicate malaria. The company developed a process to make "ureaform" controlled-release nitrogen fertilizers, which made homogeneous lawn and garden fertilizers possible. By 1967, demand for turf fertilizers was booming and the plant was dedicated to producing lawn and garden products exclusively.

In 1993, purchases of the Seaboard Seed Company and Stanford Seed Company gave Lebanon a presence in the grass seed and wild bird food markets, and the company name was changed to Lebanon Seaboard Corporation to reflect the expanded product line. Lebanon Turf Products, the company's professional service division, began to market fertilizer and seed lines. In 1998, Lebanon made the difficult, yet strategic decision to sell its farm division, but purchased two companies to expand its turf business – Pursell Industries and Penn Turf Products – the producer of Penn Mulch, an unique seed establishment mulch.

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man notes. They're effective on certain commercial lots, such as cemeteries, where highly detailed work is required. In other instances, contractors are trading their zero-turn riding mowers cally, the operation of those controls is exactly the same as on a ride-on zeroturn mower, so you push the lever forward and it will control that side's drive tire. If you pull it back toward you, it



for stand-on mowers. In fact, stand-on units are actually zero-turn mowers, Freeman says. "It is a true zero-turning machine and has what we refer to as loop controls," he explains. "And basi-

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high volume, low weight, extreme durability, superior total performance 2-year True Commercial Extra warranty would put that drive tire in reverse." Landscape contractor Andreas Dambakakis switched about two years ago to almost entirely stand-on mowers. His Winston-Salem, N.C.-based company, Yards By Us, made the move because of customer demands. "The reason we went with them is because we're 95 percent residential," he explains. "So anybody who cuts grass knows that a walk-behind will give a prettier cut than a zero-turn mower. It allows you to stripe the yard and make it look good. Other mowers have biggertires and leave wider tracks. The smaller the cut, the lighter the mower, the prettier the cut."

Dambakakis adds that riding mowers are often too heavy for residential yards, resulting in complaints from homeowners who say the mower has torn away turf or left tracks in the lawn. "Most customers, if they had their way, would like us to use a 21-inch push mower, but we can't be efficient that way," Dambakakis says. "So how can we be efficient and still offer the quality of cut that a 21-inch mower provides? That's where these stand-on units come in."



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PRODUCTION POINTS. Many

contractors who have realized success with stand-on mowers say reduced labor and equipment costs and increased productivity are the top reasons they've stuck with the machines. Labor typically accounts for 35 to 40 percent of a contractor's costs, and equipment and service comprise 10 to 15 percent of a contractor's overhead, Taylor says. So contractors can potentially reduce costs with labor-saving equipment, such as stand-on mowers. Taylor estimates stand-on mowers can save a contractor 30 percent in labor costs.

Yards By Us purchased 12 stand-on mowers two years ago for \$7,000 per unit. The company has raised worker productivity 50 percent since switching to stand-on mowers and is cutting with one-man crews instead of two, Dambakakis says. The stand-on mowers are less physically demanding so employees can work longer days, he adds. "Our main thing was to be productive and make sure employees are not tired from walking behind a mower," he explains. "In my opinion, this is where mowers are going in the future."

Hill says his company loses some speed with the stand-on mowers but makes up for that with the improved mobility and the ability to fit an additional mower on his trailers. Hill estimates that has increased productivity by 25 percent with the stand-on mowers and has switched from a five-day workweek to a four-day week, saving him more than \$100,000 in payroll in the first year. "The fact is they're on the mowers less now than before because they can see where they're going and it's easier to maneuver around trees and buildings," he says.

Contractor Daryl Zeka agrees that speed isn't the most important factor to consider when purchasing a mower. Zeka, a partner with Boynton Beach, Fla.-based Palm Beach-Broward Landscaping, replaced many of his riding mowers with stand-on machines because the additional speed wasn't necessary. The company runs three or four mowers per crew with at least two being standons, Zeka says. With smaller zero-lot line properties, maneuverability is more critical, he says, adding, "I can get the same work done with a more maneuverable \$6,000 machine than with a \$9,000 machine, so that's the direction we went to with the crews that maintain those type of properties, and some of those properties do have large turf areas, so we'll put two stand-ons on a crew with another sit-down model." LL

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Check out our July Online Extras section to learn how a stand-on mower can be converted into a riding mower and how you can turn a walkbehind into a stand-on unit with a sulky.





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pesticides/fertilizers

Fire ants present add-on business opportunities for lawn care operators and a customer problem that needs to be solved.

ive years ago, fire ants were hardly on the radar screen for Raleigh, N.C.-based lawn care company Fairway Green, says company manager Kevin Herrmann. That changed in recent years when these pesky and sometimes painful critters moved farther north.

D CTOR ervice Seeding Shrub

For property owners, their new neighbors are nothing but a nuisance, but for Fairway Green, the invasion has resulted in a new business opportunity. The company has been offering fire ant control for more than two years, during which time customer demand has continually increased. "Three years ago we would get maybe one or two calls a year," Herrmann says. "Now, we're looking at 15 to 30 calls a year."

Herrmann estimates that fire ant control is generating only \$10,000 a year in revenue, but in five to 10 years that number by jonathan katz

could increase to \$40,000 as customers become more educated about the problem.

800.4. LAWN DR

Herrmann isn't the only lawn care operator (LCO) whose business has increased from fire ant control inquiries. Pesticide bans and increased media coverage also have boosted customer demand 15 to 20 percent annually for Jacksonville, Fla.-based McCall Service, says Alvin Formella, the company's senior operations manager.

LCOs farther west may also want to take note of Formella's and Herrmann's experience because fire ants have expanded into several western states, including California, New Mexico and the Texas Panhandle. Traditionally, fire ants have limited themselves to the Southeast because they thrive on warm, humid conditions. But in recent years, they've appeared in drier

continued on page 100, sidebar on page 98

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no room for failure

Don't be so quick to blame product failure when fire ant treatments aren't effective because applicator error could be the issue. When spreading broadcast treatments, uniform application is critical or affected areas could be left untouched.

Lawn care operators can accomplish this by making sure their spreaders are calibrated correctly, says Richard Patterson, professor of entomology, University of Florida. Incorrectly calibrated spreaders are usually responsible for fire ant treatment failures at Raleigh, N.C. based Fairway Green, says Kevin Herrmann, company manager. "If you have a failure, generally it's from not putting the material down at the right rate or not hitting all the areas," he says.

Improper product storage can also result in poor control rates. Most baits should be used immediately and stored in a cool, dry space because they're formulated with soybean oil, which is perishable. "Invariably, when contractors say they've treated a yard with one of the commercial baits and they're not working it's because it's been opened and left somewhere," Patterson says. "Use up the material quickly or if you're treating individual mounds, buy the smallest amount necessary."

Technician training can help prevent some mishaps. Jacksonville, Fla.-based McCall Service makes its technicians review proper application techniques with each new product the company receives, says Alvin Formella, the company's senior operations manager. Mc-Call Service technicians are trained on proper spreader calibration to ensure materials are being distributed at the right amounts, what to look for on label instructions and how to properly mix liquids, Formella says, adding that technicians must know some basic math to determine the proper concentration of liquid insecticide.



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continued from page 96

climates, possibly from increasing development, says Charles Barr, extension program specialist, Texas Cooperative Extension, Bryan, Texas. "With irrigation, they can survive in places where they're not supposed to," he explains.

The keys to profiting from fire ant control services are educating customers and accurately assessing job costs. FIRE UP CUSTOMERS. When fire ants are biting, it usually doesn't take much to persuade customers that treatments are necessary. But for customers who have fire ants but haven't experienced their stinging bites, selling the service can be a little more challenging.

Believability is the biggest hurdle LCOs face when marketing fire ant

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control, says Scott Frith, marketing director, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J. Customers often want a quick fix, not realizing that individual mound treatments are usually temporary solutions. "That's where our marketing comes in – to communicate the benefits the service provides and to build that credibility."

Existing customers present the best opportunity for selling fire ant programs because LCOs have already established credibility with them, Frith says. For these clients, Lawn Doctor tries to illustrate the potential problems fire ants can cause by leaving promotional door hangers at their homes. According to Frith, door hangers work because it's one of the first things customers see when they get home.

One Lawn Doctor door hanger features a bare foot just inches away from landing on a fire ant standing atop its mound with a message above the image that says: "Read this before you take another step." The back of the door hanger introduces the company's program, indicates the benefits and provides the company's phone num-



ber. The image is intended to help the customer feel a personal connection with the problem, Frith says. "I like the slice of life type of advertising where the customer can see themselves in that scenario - you're kids want to go out and play on the lawn, but they can't because of this problem or you have a barbecue and you can't enjoy it because fire ants

are there," he explains. "If you can depict that in a way that resonates with consumers and then deliver a believable solution, you should be successful."

Formella depends on brochures provided by manufacturers at no cost and radio or television advertisements to get his company's message across. The brochures explain why fire ant control is necessary, when the fire ant control will take effect, how long the fire ant control will last and provide



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product safety information. Formella spends 3 to 4 percent of the company's total budget on marketing. Sixty to 90-second radio ads range from \$60 to \$95 and television ads of a similar length are \$85 to \$500, depending on the market and time the ad is running. For instance, a television ad during the 6 p.m. news would be closer to \$500. The ads typically include the company name, years in business, the fact that it's family owned and operated and highlights the guaranteed services the company provides. The company will also do a 30-second radio ad in the spring specifically for fire ant control that tells customers that it's a once-ayear, guaranteed treatment.



USE READER SERVICE # 76

MOUNDS OF PROFITS. Pricing fire ant control isn't much different than other lawn care applications. Lawn Doctor, McCall Service and Fairway Green break down their charges per 1,000 square feet. The only exception for Lawn Doctor is large commercial properties, in which case the company prices per acre, says John Buechner, director of technical services, Lawn Doctor. The main difference between pricing fire ant control and other lawn care applications is that the entire yard, including beds and other non-turf areas, must be taken into account for thorough control. When treatments fail, it's often because a non-turf area was missed, Herrmann says.

Like Fairway Green, McCall Service surveys all potential fire ant sites before providing an estimate. "You should always measure your bedding areas in addition to turf areas to get good control and price properly," Formella says.

McCall Service includes its materials cost, labor and other overhead costs, such as licensing, administrative and insurance, plus an estimated 10-percent markup in its fire ant control price, Formella says. Materials cost will vary depending on the customer's budget. For instance, a treatment with yearlong residual costs about \$275 per acre, Barr says. Faster-acting insecticides cost \$30 per acre but require multiple treatments. "You could put down baits at 25 or 30 percent of the cost, but the cost is the same in the long run because you do more applications," Formella shares.

Fairway Green charges \$25 per 1,000 square feet for its broadcast treatment. The company pays \$2.40 to \$2.80 per pound for the insecticide and uses 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Any baits technicians apply are included in the \$25 per 1,000-squarefoot charge. The treatment is about 10 percent more profitable for Fairway Green than traditional lawn care applications, according to Herrmann.

For McCall Service, fire ant control yields the same profits as other treatments, Formella says. Treatment efficacy can determine whether LCOs achieve their maximum profits, he notes. Fire ants can initially be eradicated, but re-invasion is always possible, even with the most effective broadcast treatments, because rainfall can break

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down the material, Formella warns. As a result, follow-up applications could be necessary. That's why Formella prefers using a material with a longer residual effect. "If it's done right, you cut your callbacks down, and certainly if your callbacks are down, then your account becomes more profitable," he says.

Indeed, callback frequency can impact profits, Barr says. Baits are

necessary for customers who want immediate results. But they typically require return visits. A bait/preventive treatment combination is ideal, but the client must be willing to pay a higher upfront cost, Barr says. This is where educating the customer is key. During the sales process, McCall Service sends customers educational materials that explain how the fire ant control works and what the customers should expect from it before the actual application. A sales representative will then follow up with the customer in person and reiterate some of the points made in the marketing materials. "With the use of verbal communication and literature, you have more of a chance of getting the message through to the consumer," Formella says. 44

ire ant control strategies

Fire ants are "smarter" than many people think. On the surface, some fast-acting contact treatments appear to eliminate the problem. Lawn care operators (LCOs) sometimes use them to appease stressed homeowners who want the pests gone instantly. But if any survivors are left, the ants own survival mechanism tells them to move on and more mounds can pop up, which is why many LCOs opt for a combination of broadcast and mound treatments.

Mound treatments can be made in the form of baits, mound drenches or powders. The baits consist of insecticides mixed with soybean oil on processed corn grits. They work by attracting worker ants that take the bait back to their colonies and pass it along to the queen, which dies or becomes infertile if the bait is an insect growth regulator. Some newer baits produce up to 90-percent control within 24 hours, but a problem might still exist, says Richard Patterson, professor of entomology, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. "If you treat an individual colony and the ants move to another locale, they may not be subjected to the toxic bait and set up shop somewhere else, and then you just chase ants around the yard," he explains.

Entomologist Charles Barr calls baits "a oneshot deal." "For speed, that's the one to go with," says Barr, program specialist, Texas Cooperative Extension, Bryan, Texas, adding that fast-acting baits can be more than double the cost of some slower acting baits. "It cleans the ants out and gets good control in a short time – close to 100 percent. But the area is open for reinvasion."

Because mound treatments are viewed as temporary fixes, broadcast applications are becoming increasingly popular. Barr says. Certain broadcast treatments are more expensive than other fire ant controls and take about one month to produce results, but they can be effective for more than a year. However, the one-month waiting period is too long for many customers. In this case, Barr recommends mixing bait with a broadcast insecticide. That's the approach technicians working in Lawn Doctor's southern locations take. Technicians there will bait active mounds and apply a broadcast insecticide as a curative method, says John Buechner, director of technical services for the Holmdel. N.J.based company. "If there are active mounds, we use the bait because the customer sees the mounds go down quicker." he explains. "Some baits can knock down the ants in a day or two, but there may be other undetected mounds that you don't see, and that's why you broadcast, so you get season-long control."

Technicians at Raleigh, N.C.-based Fairway Green place baits near hard surfaces, such as sidewalks, driveways and the structure's foundation, says company manager Kevin Herrmann. "We never do any job where we just put down a broadcast treatment and don't use any baits because if you have a fair amount of activity, they're more than likely under a sidewalk or a driveway or along the roadway," he says. "It's an insurance package for us because we guarantee our services for a year, so we don't want to go back."

Jacksonville, Fla.-based McCall Service uses several methods, including growth regulators, broadcast applications and mound drenches, says Alvin Formella, the company's senior operations manager. The company does mound drenches less frequently than other treatments because they only kill 50 percent of the population, and the other half will move to other locations. Formella says. When the company does apply liquid treatments, they're usually done in combination with a bait or granular broadcast treatment. Baits must be applied more often than broadcast treatments, but Formella says if the product includes a growth regulator they're very effective.
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Dollars in Drip

Irrigation contractors are discovering that drip irrigation is more than just a way to save water. rom a water conservationist's viewpoint, drip irrigation could be considered the ideal system for watering plants. After all, drip irrigation is 50 percent more efficient than traditional overhead systems, says Mike Stoll, market manager for Netafim USA's landscape and turf division, Fresno, Calif. Water savings is good news for drought-stricken regions where water has become a valued commodity. But for irrigation contractors, the system must also deliver business for them to consider it a worthwhile endeavor.

Contractors' success with drip irrigation systems may depend on how well they can sell drip's additional assets. Water efficiency is the system's most obvious benefit, but by targeting specific plant material, drip irrigation may also result in less weed growth,

by jonathan katz

lower water bills and faster plant growth. Besides, in the future contractors may have no choice, as more municipalities will require low-volume irrigation. "You have water management districts telling people that just because you buy water doesn't mean you have a right to waste it, and because the greatest portion of summer water is used outside, they're going to start imposing bans to save water," Stoll says.

So by exploring drip irrigation now, contractors can get a step ahead of their competition, says Janet Reilly, marketing manager for Rain Bird Corp.'s Landscape Drip Division, Glendora, Calif. "It's a good way for contractors to differentiate themselves and tell clients, 'I can install drip, save you water and still give you healthier plants," Reilly says.

Apparently, more contractors are doing



just that. Low-volume irrigation sales have increased 20 to 25 percent annually in the last five years while traditional irrigation systems have been rising in sales by nearly 6 percent each year, according to Stoll. "The significant increase we see on the low-volume side shows that more contractors are moving away from sprays and rotors," he says. A HEALTHY DRIP. Property owners typically purchase irrigation systems because they want lush, green lawns and healthy plants. Although drip irrigation is distributed in low volumes, that doesn't mean plants will be underwatered and dry up. In fact, drip irrigation is said to make plants even healthier than overhead systems because

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they're designed to meet each plant's irrigation needs, whereas traditional systems distribute water over a wider area. Often referred to as point-source irrigation, this type of drip system features emitters the contractor would place at the plant's root zone. By placing the emitters exactly where the water is needed, the plants should receive more uniform coverage, resulting in quicker plant growth and less wasted water. "It's targeted, so there's no overspray or runoff," Reilly says.

As a result, drip systems can grow plants 50 percent faster than overhead systems, Stoll says. "Increased plant growth comes from putting the water at the root zone where it's needed," he explains.

Drip irrigation also contributes to plant health by reducing weed growth because the water isn't distributed to other areas where weeds may germinate, says Don Hendrickson, president, Hendrickson Bros., Corona, Calif. In addition, the water is being distributed underneath the mulch, whereas an overhead system wets the mulch, which could promote weed growth, Stoll says.

When irrigation contractor Larry Gross markets drip systems to potential clients he often points out how the system lowers landscape maintenance costs by reducing weed growth. "You put 3 inches of mulch down on it, and we experience 80 percent less weeding as a result," says Gross, general manager of Sunshine Nurseries, Riverside, Calif. "Weed growth is minimal – maybe two or three breaks a year."

Contractors who are trying to irrigate a wider range may opt for line-source or broadcast drip irrigation. This is where the emitter is premanufactured into the drip line every 12 to 18 inches, Stoll says. "This is good for dense planted areas where your plants are close to each other, so you're going to irrigate most of the ground," Reilly says. Because of its wider application range, line-source systems could be considered a replacement for conventional sprinklers, Stoll says. "We simply radiate the water through the soil and use the soil's capillary action, whereas a sprinkler uses water pressure and gravity to throw the water through the air," he explains.

In the long run, Reilly says contrac-

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tors' clients will likely realize more savings from point-source irrigation because it's less wasteful. "This is because you're actually designing the system for each plant," she says.

LABOR DEMANDS. Contractors who are researching the drip-irrigation market may get mixed opinions regarding the system's required installation time. The type of pipe a contractor uses and the amount of digging involved impact how much labor is necessary. "It depends on the application," Reilly says. "It can be a lot easier to install if you're running polyethylene tubing and you have an odd-shaped area because you're not digging trenches and gluing all the PVC together."

Polyethylene tubing is more flexible and can be connected above ground so no trenching is required, Reilly adds. Stoll agrees that tubing can result in less labor. "For the most common application, which is putting the tubing into a garden area around a house or building, it's significantly easier," he says. "You simply roll the tubing out, staple it down and you're done."

However, polyethylene tubing isn't as rugged as PVC and may be more susceptible to damage from shovels or vandalism, which is why contractor Seth Rutherford says drip irrigation isn't always the ideal system. Rutherford uses overhead spray systems as much as possible because drip systems require too much maintenance from broken tubing and 25 percent more labor than traditional systems to install, he says. "I like drip for a fixed hedge or fixed hydrangea bed, but it tends to be a service problem," says Rutherford, president of Waterworks of Nantucket, Nantucket, Mass. "If a gardener is in there cultivating the beds, drip tubing just gets poked and poked because it all has to be buried a few inches down,

and he doesn't see it."

Gross estimates that drip irrigation requires 15 to 20 percent more labor to install than overhead systems because there are more components involved. such as valves and clocks. But contractor Bill Jenkins says drip irrigation is less labor intensive than traditional sprinklers. "Where you might need a fairly large number of zones with a spray system just to water a given number of plants, drip can do the same with fewer valves, so it's very cost effective," says Jenkins, president, Think Green Irrigation, Scottsdale, Ariz. It's going to be simpler to trench and install, which means it will take less time and labor."

CONSERVATION COSTS. Like labor, personal experience will probably dictate whether drip irrigation is more expensive or less costly to install than traditional irrigation systems. Drip irricontinued on page 114, sidebar on page 112

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drip directions

The number of emitters required at each plant will vary depending on the soil type and plant root zone or canopy area. Contractors should base emitter quantity on irrigating 50 percent of the plant's canopy area, according to information provided by Jennifer Waxman-Lloyd, a marketing analyst with Longwood, Fla.-based Antelco Corp. Emitter location is also critical. Emitters should be equally spaced around the plant center and at the same discharge rate. Contractors should keep in mind that as plant root areas expand, longer application times will be necessary. The information provided by Waxman-Lloyd recommends the following guidelines for emitter quantities:

Potted plants – One emitter

 Shrubs – One emitter for shrubs up to 3 feet in canopy diameter and two emitters for shrubs with
 3- to 5-foot canopies – one on each side of the plant with one emitter facing the prevailing wind direction.

• Trees – Three emitters for trees with 5-foot to 10foot canopies, four emitters for trees with 10- to 20foot canopies and six emitters for trees with canopies more than 20 feet in diameter.

• Ground cover and flower beds – For sandy soils, one emitter per 7.5 to 10 square feet. For sandy-loam soils, one emitter per 10 to 12.5 square feet.

For emitter placement, the company suggests:

Potted plants – Place at the base of the plant

• Shrubs, trees – Place at the base for shrubs up to 3 feet in diameter. For shrubs and trees more than 3 feet in canopy diameter, equally space the emitter 25 to 30 percent from the plant's center to its canopy perimeter. For example, trees with a 20-foot canopy diameter would have emitters spaced equally around the tree 2.5 to 3 feet from the center.



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irrigation

gation is 25 percent less expensive than overhead systems, according to Bill Hutcheon, president of drip systems manufacturer Antelco Corp., Longwood, Fla. Hendrickson estimates drip irrigation is 10 to 15 percent less costly than overhead sprinklers.

But installation costs can vary depending on the area being irrigated. "With drip, it's difficult to say because planting beds are different, and you have different types of plant spacing," Reilly says. On average, Gross says he spends 25 percent more for drip components than he does for overhead systems. The higher cost means Gross must charge more for drip irrigation than other systems, but he says the client can easily recoup the added expense from water savings. "If they're spending \$5,000 a month on water with an overhead system, they could be spending \$200 a month on drip," he says.

Gross works mainly with develop-

ers who prefer that he break down the price per square foot. He first figures what his materials costs are and then adds a 30-percent markup. His fees are about \$1 per square foot for a typical drip project compared with 60 to 70 cents per square foot for overhead systems. For smaller projects, less than 15,000 square feet, his average price is \$4.50 per square foot, which is comparable to an overhead system. The narrower the area, the more cost effective a drip system will be in comparison to an overhead system because traditional spray systems require more heads spaced closer together, which is more labor intensive to install, Stoll says.

In the end, profitability on drip irrigation installations is about the same as other systems, Gross says. Jenkins agrees, saying, "All the work we do is bid to be profitable, and drip is certainly efficient to install, but it doesn't stand out as being any more profitable

than any other type of system."

Many manufacturers and contractors point out that drip irrigation represents more than just profits - it's sometimes the most sensible solution. "We're choosing a system not just because it's cost-effective but because it's the most appropriate," Jenkins says. "In the Phoenix area we don't use overhead irrigation unless there are some extenuating circumstances. In other markets, overhead irrigation is popular because they're used to installing it that way. But with everyone being concerned about water usage, the benefit of drip irrigation is that you're using water efficiently," LL

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Check out our July Online Extras section for more tips on proper operating procedures for drip irrigation systems, as well as information on disk and screen filters.



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That's where Lawn & Landscape's Growing Your Business Seminars, featuring industry consultant Jack Mattingly and sponsored by John Deere, can make a big difference. Starting this August and running through March 2006, contractors around the by lauren spiers

country will have the opportunity to attend these interactive seminars.

"We've averaged about 45 attendees for each seminar," Mattingly says. "There are a lot of businesses out there whose main concern is that they don't know

how to grow and they don't have systems in place to figure out where they are at from a job or a financial standpoint. Those are some of the topics we cover." Mattingly says the majority of attendees are owners or managers of businesses less than \$1 million, though there are always a few owners of \$1 million-plus businesses, proving that companies of all sizes can benefit from the experience, which includes information on estimating, managing labor, tracking hours and more. This year, Mattingly says attendees will also be able to purchase additional tools including a CD-ROM video of how to create a schedule board, and a disk of production forms that contractors can customize to their own businesses. Every month in his operations column for Lawn & Landscape magazine, Mattingly touches on these topics, but Growing Your Business Seminar attendees have his full knowledge, expertise and attention during the course of the day-long seminars. "The attendees can also learn from each other as we elaborate on the information together through their questions and comments," he says. "As a networking opportunity, all of these business owners can share ideas about how these systems have worked for them or the best ways to implement them in their businesses." Visit www.lawnbizseminars.com for more information on the Lawn & Landscape 2005-2006 Growing Your Business Seminars, including a schedule of cities where the seminars will be held. To register, call the Lawn & Landscape conference division at 800/456-0707 or contact Michelle Fitzpatrick at mfitzpatrick@gie.net. u

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When it comes to lawns, there's nothing clients like less than weeds and insects. Let the *Lawn* & *Landscape* Weed & Insect Management Seminars help you build your pest management skills

Profiting from Pests

ccording to *Lawn & Landscape* research, anywhere from onehalf two two-thirds of contractors perform fertilization, weed, disease or insect control on their clients' lawns. That means the chances are fairly good that your company can benefit from some educational opportunities focused on these types of services.

This August, Lawn & Landscape is extending an invitation to you, your managers and your technicians to attend the Lawn & Landscape Weed & Insect Management Seminars. We've been able to create two-day events featuring some of the industry's most well-respected researchers and professional lawn care operators (LCOs), along with prominent business-management speakers.

What's more, *Lawn & Landscape* has listened to its readers and past conference

by lauren spiers

attendees, and turned last year's three-day Weed & Insect Summit into two two-day seminars geared specifically to Northern U.S. and Southern U.S. contractors' needs.

Session presenter Rick Brandenburg, professor of entomology at North Carolina State University, is looking forward to gearing his presentation specifically toward Southern U.S. LCOs. "Last year's event in Chicago included a lot of great information for attendees," Brandenburg says. "The challenge was that the audience was from all over the United States, and at times only a portion of the attendees had a stake in the presentation at hand. I'm really encouraged by the North/South approach that Lawn & Landscape is taking this year because it means I can create a longer presentation that's geared specifically toward warm-season pests and I think the Southern U.S. attendees will

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really be able to get a lot out of that."

This year, Brandenburg says his presentation is going to focus on major warm-season pests, such as fire ants, mole crickets and chinch bugs, as well as other nuisance species like earthworms and moles. He says services like mole management are becoming more popular among lawn care companies, creating a new revenue opportunity.

As such, Lawn & Landscape has not neglected the business aspect of lawn care, including several sessions focused on sales and marketing. Keith Rosen, founder of business consulting firm Profit Builders, will be making a presentation called "Taking Charge of Your Sales" at both the Northern and Southern U.S. Weed & Insect Seminars. "I've worked with many business owners over the years and one thing I've found that's similar from industry to industry is challenges in making the most of your sales opportunities," Rosen says. "I'm really looking forward to helping attendees work out the best ways to tackle their sales issues. Conferences like this one also do a great job of bringing together like-minded professionals who can offer new ideas to each other."

Beginning with the Northern Weed & Insect Seminar to be held in Cleveland on Aug. 3-4, attendees can look forward to the following session speakers and topics:

 "The Dirty Dozen: Six Mistakes to Avoid, Six Steps to Succeed in Lawn Care." Phil Fogarty, Weed Man

 "What's Bugging You? An Insect & Grub Control Update." Dave Shetlar, The Ohio State University

 "Keeping Lawn Care Customer Retention High." Chris Senske, Senske Lawn & Tree Care

 "Understanding Microorganisms" Lee West, Novozymes

Southern LCOs get their fill of industry education two weeks later

from Aug, 17-18 at the southern Weed & Insect Seminar in New Orleans, La. In addition to Brandenburg's presentation, LCOs have the following learning opportunities available:

 "Customizing Lawn Care Services
 Increased Revenue." Kevin Cooper, Cooper's Landscape Management

"The Art of Perfection in Lawn Care." Karen Novosel, Massey Services
"Building a Lawn Care Business Be-

yond \$1 Million." Sam Morgan, Weed Man

 "Weeding out the Problem: Tips for Effective Weed Control." Tim Murphy, University of Georgia

More information is available at www.weedinsectseminar.com, as well as details on the seminar locations, schedules, registration and sponsor information. Ready to sign up? Call Michelle Fitzpatrick in the *Lawn & Landscape* conference division at 800/456-0707 or e-mail her at mfitzpatrick@gie.net.

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- Produces 815 cfm at 205 mph
- Weighs 20.9 pounds
- · Features a right-hand throttle
- Comes with a two-year commercial warranty
- Tanaka 888/482-6252, www.tanaka-usa.com

Circle 217 on reader service card

Vandermolen Windmill 960BTx Backpack Blower

- Powered by a 60-cc Kawasaki engine
- Air volume of 860 cfm at 225 mph
- Net weight is less than 22 pounds
- An ergonomic back plate with a quick

release waist strap keeps the blower against the back with no side sway movement

 Vandermolen Corp. – 877/992-8506, www.vandermolencorp.com

Circle 218 on reader service card



Toro Hand-held Ultra Blower/Vacuum

- Produces a maximum 225 mph stream of air
- Features a magnesium impeller
- Air speed can be set from 90 to 225 mph
- Weighs 7.3 pounds
- Can easily convert to a vacuum
- The Toro Co. 800/595-6841, www.toro.com

Circle 219 on reader service card



Efco BP162 Backpack Blower

- Equipped with a 61.3-cc, 4.5-hp engine Dry weight of 20.7 pounds
- Large-capacity fuel tank, multipoint anti-vibration system, large surface area pleated air filter and an air-purge primer/choke control
- 75-decibel sound level (at 50 feet per ANSI B175.2)
- Produces a maximum air volume of 706 cfm and a maximum air speed of 201 mph
- Includes backrest and shoulder straps
- Tilton Equipment Co. 800/447-1152, www.tiltonequipment.com

Circle 220 on reader service card

Kawasaki KRB300A Backpack Blower

- Weighs 13.2 pounds
- Powered by a Kawasaki TJ27 engine
- Features one-pull,
 easy-start technology
- Maximum air volume of 490 cfm and maximum air velocity of 150 mph
- Four-point rubber engine mount system isolates vibration
- Padded backrest and wide shoulder harness
- Plastic engine shroud and fan casing and a muffler with glass wool lining reduce noise
- Kawasaki Power Products 877/529-7697, www.kawpowr.com

Circle 221 on reader service card

Echo PB-651 Power Blower

- Equipped with a 63.3-cc Power Boost engine
- Air speed of 620 cfm and 205 mph at the pipe
- A diaphragm carburetor ensures the proper mix of fuel and air
- Features a see-through, 68-fluid-ounce fuel tank and a 74 decibel noise rating
- Tube or hip-mounted throttle positions
- Padded backrest
- Echo 847/540-8400, www.echo-usa.com Circle 222 on reader service card

> > > product spotlight

Solo 471 KAT Backpack Blowers

- Powered by a 53-cc, 3-hp, two-stroke engine
- Equipped with a catalytic converter
- Meet CARB II and EPA2007 exhaust emission standards; weighs 20.5 pounds
- Anti-vibration system
- Padded backrest and shoulder straps
- Noise level of 64.5 decibels
- Solo 757/245-4228, www.solousa.com

Circle 223 on reader service card

Jonsered JB50 Backpack Blower

- Has tube-mount controls with a pistol grip throttle and a cruise control engine speed block
- Produces 183 mph air speed and an air volume of 400 cfm at pipe end; 70-decibel noise level
- Dry weight of 19.4 pounds

- Air purge primer and choke, aluminum impeller, translucent fuel tank
- Padded backframe with adjustable harness
- Jonsered 877/693-7729, www.usa.jonsered.com

Circle 224 on reader service card

Little Wonder SHO Blowers

- Engine options: 5-hp Honda or 6-hp Briggs & Stratton
- 5-hp model weighs 110 pounds; 6-hp model weighs 115 pounds; composite impeller design
- 12-inch pneumatic rear wheels
- A side discharge system

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 Optional swivel wheel kit allows 360-degree turning and control



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product spotlight

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Hanes Industries Landscape Fabrics

- Line of professional-grade landscape fabrics
- Designed for weed control, erosion control, ground cover, frost blanket, soil separation, filter fabric and other applications
- Standard roll lengths of 120 and 300 feet, depending on the application
- Custom roll sizes available upon request
- Discount available for volume purchases
- Hanes Industries 828/464-4673, www.hanesindustries.com

Circle 226 on reader service card

Finn Corp. HydroSeeders

- Feature hydraulically driven mechanical agitation systems with large steel paddles that operate forward and backward at variable speeds
- Mid-sized machines are powered by a 33.5-hp Kubota diesel engine with a directdrive pump and shoot hydraulic mulch up to 180 feet
- Eight different models range from 300 to 3,300 gallons
- The 300-gallon T-30 HydroSeeder is designed for entry-level applications
- The 3,300-gallon T-330 handles large-area applications, such as highway construction work
- Finn Corp. 800/543-7166, www.finncorp.com Circle 227 on reader service card



compiled by kathleen franzinger





Fiberweb Typar Premium

- Helps prevent weeds by separating weed seeds from the soil
- One-time installation of the light weight and flexible fabric is said to work for years
- Made of continuous polypropylene fibers permanently bonded by heat and pressure to create a uniform and porous nonwoven fabric
- Resists punctures, unraveling and tearing
- Packaged in a variety of sizes starting at 3 feet by 25 feet up to 151 feet by 300 feet
- Can also be used for soil retention behind retaining walls and around blind drains, as weed control under decks, to support brick or block walkways, for soil retention in

planters and pots, as well as an interceptor trench drain

 BBA Fiberweb - 800/321-6271, www.typarlandscape.com Circle 228 on reader service card

North American Green SedimentSTOP Filtration System

- Protects against erosion and sediment loss
- Consists of a straw and coconut fiber matrix reinforced with a 100-percent biodegradable netting
- Netting is rolled from edge to edge to create a temporary, water-permeable 3D sediment filtration structure
- NPDES Phase II compliant
- North American Green 800/772-2040, www.sedimentstop.com

Circle 229 on reader service card

Easy Lawn Contractor Series Hydroseeding Units

- Feature mechanical agitation
- Spray up to 240 feet
- Available in mulch capacities from 950 to 3,300 gallons
- Equipped with stainless-steel tanks and mulch grinder
- Powered by a 50- to 170-hp John Deere diesel engine
- Digital control panel available on some models
- Zero daily maintenance
- Easy Lawn 800/638-1769, www.easylawn.com

Circle 230 on reader service card





Turbo Technologies H5+56 Hydroseeding System

- Powered by an Ut-Inchiner
- per energio group romiti-s yol-a A Hag G3 tome
- Fourtures a custom molded lan increase for easy loading
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 - Turbe Technologies 800
 www.turbolium.com



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july 2005

Profile Products Hydro-Blanket BFM

- Bonded Fiber Matrix offers erosion control on steep slopes susceptible to heavy rains
- Combines Thermally Refined wood fibers and multidimensional tackifiers
- Conforms to the soil when dry to form a breathable, built-in-place blanket
- Hydraulically applied
- Environmentally safe and biodegradable
- Profile Products 800/207-6457, www.profileproducts.com

Circle 231 on reader service card

www.lawnandlandscape.com

lawn & landscape

137

product spotlight > > >

Turbo Technologies HS-500XPW Hydroseeding System

- Powered by an 18-hp Kohler Command engine
- A 4-by-4-inch pump offers an output of 640 gpm and 63 psi
- Features a custom molded tank with a bale hopper for easy loading
- Includes a second lid for fast loading
- Removable 6.5-gallon fuel tank
- Turbo Technologies 800/822-3437, www.turboturf.com

Circle 232 on reader service card

Jacklin Overseeder II Bluegrass and Ryegrass Mix

- Blend of advanced Kentucky bluegrasses and perennial ryegrasses
- Broad environmental tolerance for turf areas damaged by necrotic ring spot, summer patch, poa annua infestation and traffic
- Contains a proprietary mix of Award, Everest, NuBlue and Liberator bluegrasses with Accent, Top Gun and Caddieshack perennial ryegrasses
- Now contains EverGlade Kentucky bluegrass, which is said to offer a strong high-temperature endurance
- Jacklin Seed 800/688-7333, www.jacklinseed.com

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Avented in Log



Pennington Seed Penn Tac and Penn Dye

- Penn Tac is a hydroseeding tackifier and mulch binder
- Can be combined with Penn Dye, a multi-purpose marker dye
- When used with dye, Penn Tac quickly adheres to seed for a visually appealing and effective growing period
- Pennington Seed 800/286-6100, www.penningtonseed.com

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PRODUCT INFORMATION

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A Design of the local division of the local	the second se
1. What is your primary business	G. Landscape Lighting
at this location? (choose only one)	7. Hardscape Installation
I. CONTRACTOR or SERVICES	8. Water Features
1. Landscape Contractor	
2. Chemical Lawn Care Company	Landscape Maintenance
(excluding mowing maintenance service)	9. Landscape Renovation
3. Lown Maintenance Contractor	10. Turf Fertilization
4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service	Q 11. Turf Aeration
5. Irrigation Contractor	12. Tree & Ornamental Care
🖬 6. Landscape Architect	13. Tree & Stump Removal
7. Other Contract Services	
(please describe)	14. Irrigation Maintenance
(precise described)	15. Erosion Control
and the second second	Pesticide Application
II. INHOUSE LAWN/CARE	16. Turf Disease Control
MAINTENANCE	17. Turf Insect Control
8. In-House Maintenance including:	18. Turf Weed Control
Educational Facilities, Health Care	19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application
Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks &	- 17, nee a container non resilicite Approvioi
Military Installations, Condominium	Other
Complexes, Housing Developments,	20. Mowing
Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial	21. Hydroseeding
Parks	22. Snow Removal
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III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER	23. Interior Landscape Services
9. Dealer	24. Structural Pest Control
10. Distributor	25. Holiday Lighting
11. Formulator	26. Other
12. Manufacturer	
	3. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?
IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:	
13. Extension Agent (Federal, State,	
County, City, Regulatory Agency)	
14. School, College, University	4. What are your company's
15. Trade Association, Library	approximate annual gross revenues?
Others (please describe)	1,Less than \$50,000
	2.\$50,000 to \$99,999
	3 \$100 000 to \$100 000
2. What services does you business offer?	4.\$200,000 to \$299,999
1. Landscape Design	5.\$300,000 to \$499,999
Contractor T. T. T. Sec.	6.\$500,000 to \$699,999
Landscape Installation	7.\$700,000 to \$999,999
2. Seeding or Sodding	
3. Turf & Ornamental Installation	8.\$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation	9.\$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999 20 10.\$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999 20 20 20 20 20 20 20 20 20 20 20 20 20
5. Irrigation Installation	
at 5. migunon mananonon	11.\$7,000,000 or more

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> > product spotlight

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Bring the beauty of gardens anywhere your customers want with this selection of landscape planters.

Seibert & Rice Italian Terra Cotta Critter Pot

- Handmade in Impruneta, Italy
- Terra cotta offers a unique pink color, good detail and durability
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Champa Ceramics Metal Line Planters

- Eight colors available
- New distressed finishes
- Heights range from 2 to 40 inches
- Come in four shades of copper, aluminum, gold, bronze and violet
- Champa Ceramics 206/762-8395, www.champaceramics.com

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compiled by kathleen franzinger

Architectural Brass Zeki Rust Patina Planter

- Solid steel cone planter with weighted square base
- 36-by-36 inches and custom sizes available
- Exterior rust patina finish with clear protective coat
- Fiberglass spray-in liner for direct planting
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www.architecturalbrass.com

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july 2005



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North Seminar August 3-4, 2005 Cleveland, Ohio South Seminar August 17-18, 2005 New Orleans, Louisiana

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August 3-4, 2005 Cleveland, Ohio

Wednesday, August 3, 2005

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Registration

8:45 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. **Taking Charge of Your Sales** Speaker: Keith Rosen, Profit Builders, Inc.

10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. **Maximizing Equipment Efficiency** Speaker: Bob Ottley, Weed Man/ One Step Tree & Lawn Care

11:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Keeping Lawn Care Customer Retention High Speaker: Chris Senske, Senske Lawn & Tree Care

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Group Lunch

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. The Dirty Dozen: Six Mistakes to Avoid, Six Tips to Succeed In Lawn Care Speaker: Phil Fogarty, Weed Man

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Emerging Regulatory Initiatives: Evolution, Not Revolution Speakers: Tom Delaney, PLANET Frank Gasperini, RISE

3:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. **Time = Money: Why Job Costing Is Critical In Weed + Insect Management** Speaker: Ed LaFlamme, Grass Roots Consulting

4:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. **Understanding Microorganisms: The Next Frontier in Turf Care** Speaker: Lee West, Novozymes Biologicals

5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Reception

Thursday, August 4, 2005

8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Registration

8:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. What's Bugging You? Insect & Grub Control Update Speaker: Dr. Dave Shetlar, The Ohio State University

10:00 a.m. – 10:50 a.m. **The Latest Trends In Disease Control** Speaker: Dr. Rich Buckley, Rutgers University

10:50 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Weeding Out The Problem: Tips for Effective Weed Control Speaker: Dr. Karl Danneberger, The Ohio State Universaty

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Facility Tour

Hotel Information: Cleveland Airport Marriott Phone: 216.252.5333 or 800.228.9290

Group Room Rate: \$109 per night (single/double) Reservation Deadline: July 22, 2005

August 17-18, 2005 New Orleans, Louisiana

Wednesday, August 17, 2005

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Registration

8:45 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. **Taking Charge of Your Sales** Speaker: Keith Rosen, Profit Builders, Inc.

10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. Training Equals Productivity

11:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **The Art of Perfection in Lawn Care** Speaker: Dr. Karen Novosel, Massey Services

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Group Lunch

1:15 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Customizing Lawn Care Services = Increased Revenue** Speaker: Kevin Cooper, Cooper's Landscape Management 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Emerging Regulatory Initiatives: Evolution, Not Revolution Speakers: Tom Delaney, PLANET Frank Gasperini, RISE

3:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. Building A Lawn Care Business Beyond A Million Dollars Speaker: Sam Morgan, Weed Man

4:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. Understanding Microorganisms: The Next Frontier in Turf Care Speaker: Shawn Semones, Novozymes Biologicals

5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. Reception

Thursday, August 4, 2005

8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Registration

8:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. Weeding Out The Problem: Tips For Effective Weed Control Speaker: Dr. Tim Murphy, University of Georgia

10:00 a.m. – 10:50 a.m. Trends In Disease Control Speaker: Dr. Bruce Martin, Clemson University

10:50 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. What's Bugging You? Insect & Fire Ant Control Update Speaker: Dr. Rick Brandenburg, North Carolina State University

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Facility Tour – Dan's Landscaping & Lawn Care

Phone: 800.456.0707 www.weedinsectseminar.com

Hotel Information: Renaissance Arts Hotel Phone: 888.364.1200 or 800.228.9290 Group Room Rate: \$95 per night (single/double) Reservation Deadline: July 18, 2005

TO REGISTER:

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- · Three new shapes, unique texture
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Garden Art International Greek Pottery Vase

- 16 to 30 inches tall
- Handmade
- Matching saucer available
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www.gardenartinternational.com Circle 239 on reader service card

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- Made of solid teak
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- Add color and texture to indoor and outdoor spaces
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- Lightweight
- Constructed of pure polyethylene
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- Available in a variety of solids or new granite colors
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Tuscan Imports Calice a Campana Planters

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Tournesol Siteworks Lightweight Planters

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- Available in round, square and rectangular shapes
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- Tournesol Siteworks 800/542-2282, www.tournesolsiteworks.com

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Bayer TopChoice Insecticide

- Contains the active ingredient fipronil
- One broadcast application is said to provide 95 percent control of fire ants for up to one year
- Controls imported fire ants, mole crickets, fleas, ticks and nuisance ants
- For maximum fire ant control, pair a broadcast application of TopChoice with Bayer's Ceasefire for use in hard-to-reach areas, such as landscape beds, parking lot islands and areas near water
- Bayer Environmental Science 800/331-2867, www.bayerprocentral.com

Circle 244 on reader service card

Rootgrow Organic Biological Soil Amendment

- Is said to transform poor soils into fertile growing environments
- 90 species of beneficial bacteria, 55 species .of fungi, 30 species of protozoa, 10 species of nematodes
- Organisms are alive and fresh
- Can be used to enhance compost or used directly out of the bottle to apply to turf, trees and shrubs
- Has a range of endo and ecto mycorrhizae spores, as well as sea kelp and liquid humus
- Turf care kit can be surface applied; tree care kit can be deep-root injected
- Rootgrow 866/766-8476, www.rootgrow.com
- Circle 245 on reader service card

J.J. Mauget ArborFos Fungicide

- Developed specifically for trees
- Encapsulated injectable fungicide labeled for Sudden Oak Death, as well as other Phytopthora species, including P. cinnamomi, P. palmivora and P. cactorum
- Also controls such diseases as anthracnose, apple scab and bacterial blight
- Carries a caution label; has a target-specific application that eliminates drift, spills and groundwater contamination
- J.J. Mauget 800/873-3779, www.mauget.com
- Circle 246 on reader service card

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Earth & Turf Model 24D **TruFlow Topdresser**

> products

- Push-type topdresser for dry, flowable materials
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- 24-inch-wide spreading pattern
- Adjustable front gate opening
- Simple, four-wheel design
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 - www.earthandturf.com

Circle 247 on reader service card



Yanmar Compact Vertical **Air-Cooled Diesel Engines**

- Three direct injection models available: L48V, L70V and L100V
- Intermittent horsepower ratings are 4.7/3,600 rpm, 6.4/3,600 rpm and 9.1/3,600 rpm
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- Counterbalanced for high-speed operation
- Recoil and electric start options
- Multiple PTO shafts available
- Yanmar America Corp.
 - 847/541-1900,
 - www.yanmar.com
- Circle 248 on reader service card



products > > >

Harper Industries SB3500 Goossen Straw Blower



- Mulches four to eight bales per minute with a 360-degree range of operation
- Powered by a 31-hp Vanguard gas engine with electric start
- Features heavy-duty chain flails, quiet operation and easy access to blower and all drive systems
- Includes automatic belt tensioning, eliminating gearboxes
- Optional features include high-density poly blower liner and a two-wheel, 6 by 10-foot trailer
- Harper Industries 800/835-1042, www.goossen.com

Circle 249 on reader service card

Pine Hall Brick Old Mill Paver

- Genuine clay paver
- Features earth-tone color range of gray and brown tones with a touch of darks
- Meets ASTM C902 requirements
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- Water absorption of 5 to 6 percent
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Circle 250 on reader service card

Kawasaki Mule 3010 Trans4x4 Off-Road Utility Vehicle



- Four-passenger vehicle can be transformed into a two-passenger vehicle with an extended cargo bed
- · Equipped with a quiet, air-cooled industrial V-twin engine
- Choice of 2WD or 4WD
- Wheelbase measures 85.2 inches
- Fuel capacity of 6.4 gallons
- Cargo capacity is 400 pounds in four-passenger mode and 800 pounds in two-passenger mode
- Vehicle can tow up to 1,200 pounds with optional towing hitch
- Kawasaki Motors Corp. 800/661-7433, www.kawasaki.com

Circle 251 on reader service card

Ferris Industries 2005 Catalog

- Highlights the specifications and features of the full line of zero-turn, three-wheel riding and walk-behind mowers
- Includes four new commercial mower models: IS 4500Z, IS 3000Z, IS 1500Z and the HydroCut 36
- Also provides information on new bagging systems for the IS 3000Z and IS 1500Z models
- Includes details on company's IS Independent Suspension



Ferris Industries
 – 800/933-6175,

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www.ferrisindustries.com

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how we do it

Getting the Most Out of Trade Shows

Trade shows can be fun and exciting ways to showcase your products and services in front of other local businesses and homeowners, both of whom may be potential clients. As an irrigation company, Daily Rain, Ann Arbor, Mich., takes part in the local Home Builder's Association (HBA) Home Improvement Show, which was a big success this year. More than 200 exhibitors took part in the March 2005 show, which attracted 6,000 attendees.

This year, we were positioned among some of the area's best landscape contractors whose booths consisted of beautiful brick patios, wood decks, hot tubs and even 10-foot waterfalls. While they were all attractive, these displays took lots of material and time to build and were expensive to set up. With a little creativity, we found that it's possible to build a great trade show booth that will not break the bank. At Daily Rain, we took our marketing motto, "Fun, Cheap & Different," and created a booth that showed exactly who we are and demonstrated precisely what we do.

Daily Rain met with the HBA three months prior to the show to discuss booth space and location. Our booth was 16 by 25 feet and, because of our previous involvement with HBA, we were able to choose a prime space just off the center aisle where traffic was high. We spent a week before the show procuring materials and setting up the booth. The "landscape barn" where we were situated had a dirt floor, which allowed us to dig trenches and build a working irrigation system complete with landscaping. The show floor was open to exhibitors three days before the show, which gave us time to make our design concept a reality by trenching, building displays, installing plant material, painting and creating our slide show.

- 5 Ways To Make the Most of Trade Shows
- 1. Cooperate with or become a member of one or more trade associations and keep informed of when the organizations will be hosting shows.
- Work with trade show coordinators early to secure adequate, well-placed booth space. A booth closer to the main aisles of a trade show will yield more traffic.
- Trade publicity for complementary booth accessories to keep costs down. Ask companies you subcontract for or work closely with if they would be interested in supplying materials in exchange for advertising at your booth.
- 4. Create a memorable booth that represents what your company does. An indoor or outdoor installation does more than a simple booth and project photos.
- 5. Mingle with attendees. Remember that homeowners, builders and other green industry companies are all potential clients when your company can be hired as a direct service provider or subcontractor.

The author is director of business development and installation manager for Daily Rain, Ann Arbor, Mich., and can be reached at 734/302-7246.



This under-construction shot shows how Daily Rain was able to incorporate a working imgation system into their trade show booth, along with landscape plants and a video screen.

We developed our design when we first decided to have our own booth at the show. In past years, we shared a booth with a local landscape contractor by setting up some landscape lights and a few small irrigation displays, which primarily accented the landscape contractor's work. This year, we decided to spend the \$1,000 for our own booth. In order to offset other display costs, we used materials from around the shop and enlisted the help of a local nursery to donate plant materials. In return, our display and slide show told attendees "Landscape materials were provided by Lodi Farms." Overall, we spent a total of just \$250 on accessories and our booth space was as creative and eye-catching as those of the contractors who spent thousands of dollars on displays. Moreover, many exhibitors had to pay their staff members for time and labor in order to get their booths built in time for the show. Because two salaried Daily Rain employees took care of our company's display, the extra expense was averted.

Our trade show experience taught us that thinking creatively can really help you stand apart from other companies trying to attract business – and it doesn't have to cost a lot. The Daily Rain booth displayed an underground, indoor sprinkler system – real sprinkler heads, real water and a great sound of spraying water that echoed throughout the entire landscape display barn. We projected pictures of past jobs onto a 16-by-12-foot screen. Our logo was displayed as part of the slide show and was also painted on the floor for branding. We used yard signs to pull Photo: Daily Rain

people into the booth and present our marketing materials. Thinking like a potential client also will help you generate an idea that is sure to make a lasting impression on them when they are ready to make a decision regarding your services.

Some companies believe trade shows are a waste of time and money, but in reality these shows help build your business. They put your name and image in front of thousands of potential clients and they're a great way to network with other local businesses. Over the three-day event, Daily Rain built relationships with many local builders and landscapers who will likely utilize our services as an irrigation company. Keeping our name and faces in front of these potential clients has proven that when it's time for them to make a decision on a subcontractor. they will choose Daily Rain for their irrigation projects.

Additionally, trade shows have created a long list of clients who hire us for installation and service and, better yet, refer us to their neighbors, family and friends, generating great wordof-mouth marketing for us.

From this year's show, Daily Rain was able to sell a dozen new installations and gain roughly the same number of service clients – all in a long weekend and for less than \$300. In fact, we're still getting calls from attendees who saw us at the show and are finally getting around to irrigation system installation after finishing up other home-improvement jobs. Generally, we'd be hard-pressed to sell two or three jobs in the same time period.

The opportunity to participate in trade shows is one of many benefits of being a member of a green industry or related association. As a member of the HBA, we were informed of the trade show early on and we receive similar updates from other industry associations, such as the Irrigation Association and Professional Landcare Network. With information about upcoming shows and a little creativity and time, we're able to create a lasting brand for our company. - David Price ⁽¹⁾

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