



Lawn & Landscape

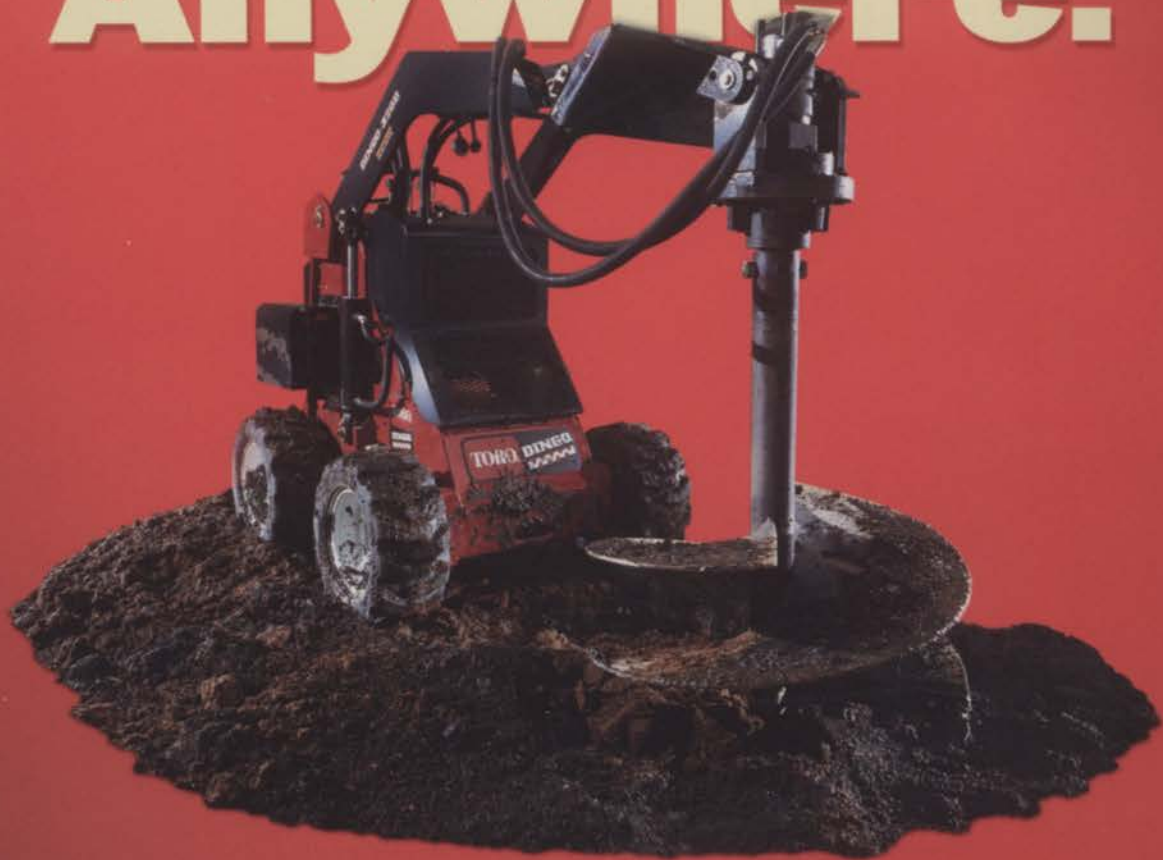
04 06

WORK SMALL, THINK BIG

John Gachina learns to let go of the day-to-day to better run his business.

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MANAGEMENT

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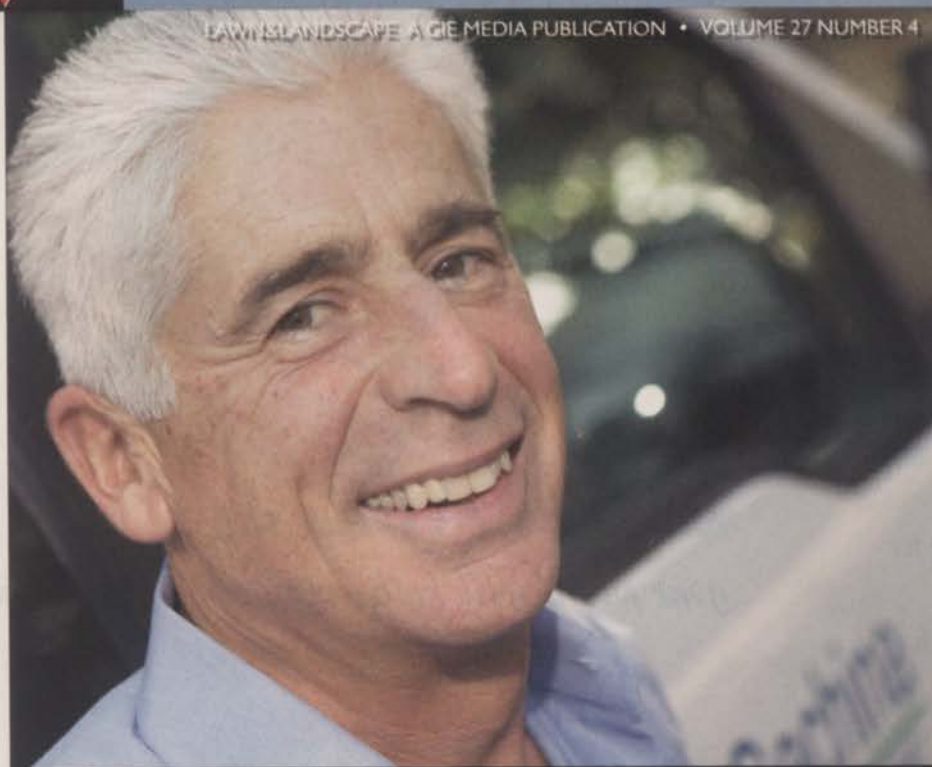
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USE READER SERVICE # 11





Cover Story – Work Small, Think Big

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Successful business owner John Gachina has learned to trust his people, let go of the day-to-day and run his business.

Cover Image by David Sandberg

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Where there's smoke there's certainly controversy nowadays in the issue of whether business owners should prohibit cigarette smoking among their employees. *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board users share their tips for dealing with cigarette breaks and workplace smoking.



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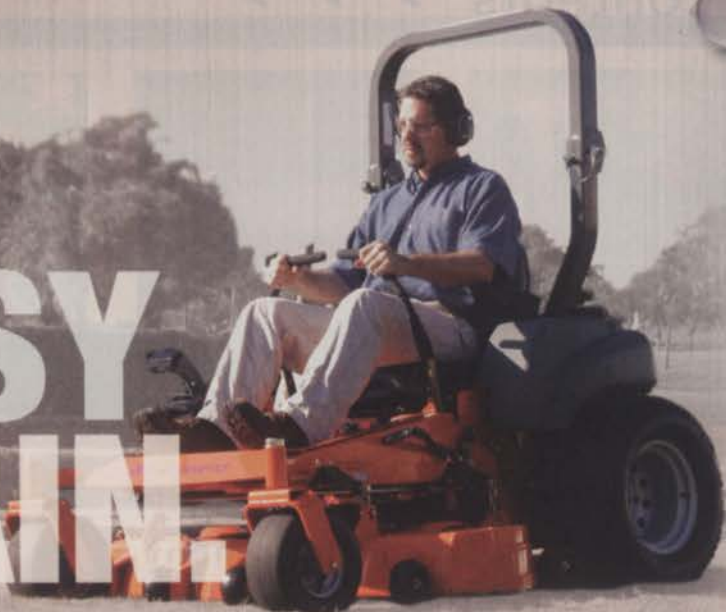
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Changes in the marketplace bring additional products, driving value in them and everything that comes with them.



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CASE

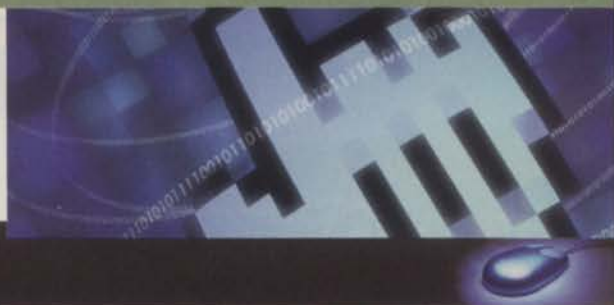
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best of the web

Many lawn and landscape contractors say one of the best things about their jobs is that they get to work outside in the fresh air every day. But is the air really that fresh for employees that smoke?

Over the last several months, numerous news articles have highlighted a trend among businesses to have their smoking employees check their tobacco at the door or give up smoking completely, regardless of whether they're on the job or not. In a recent *Lawn & Landscape Online* Poll, 53 percent of respondents said they've stopped hiring smokers altogether and another 7 percent say they don't allow smoking at all during business hours.

Always ready for a good debate, *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board participants recently picked up on these news items and discussed the topic themselves. Read about their viewpoints and tips for dealing with smoking breaks during the workday in this month's Best of the Web feature on page 56.

If you have a topic, question or insight to share about the green industry, be sure to visit the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board to post your thoughts. See you on the Web!

Good Form!

Spring is well underway and while you spent most of the winter planning for your success this season, there always seems to be more information to keep track of than you thought. Whether it's sending out client communication, keeping up with employee progress reports or finding a better way to write up a service contract, *Lawn & Landscape* is here to help. Our Business Forms section has recently been updated to include dozens of new forms submitted by your green industry colleagues. These forms are completely free to download, giving you the chance to easily acquire the paperwork you need and tailor it to fit your own company without the gruntwork or cost of developing your own forms.

To access the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Business Forms section, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com, choose the Resources menu and click on Business Forms. From there, download and print forms from these five categories:

- Accounting & Job Costing
- Fleet & Safety
- Personnel
- Production
- Sales & Estimating

Have a helpful form of your own that you'd like to share with other *Lawn & Landscape* readers? E-mail electronic copies of forms to nwisniewski@gie.net, including a description of how you use the form and why it's helpful to your business. Or, send hard copies of your forms or marketing materials to:

Nicole Wisniewski, *Lawn & Landscape*
Business Forms
4012 Bridge Ave
Cleveland, OH 44113



online poll

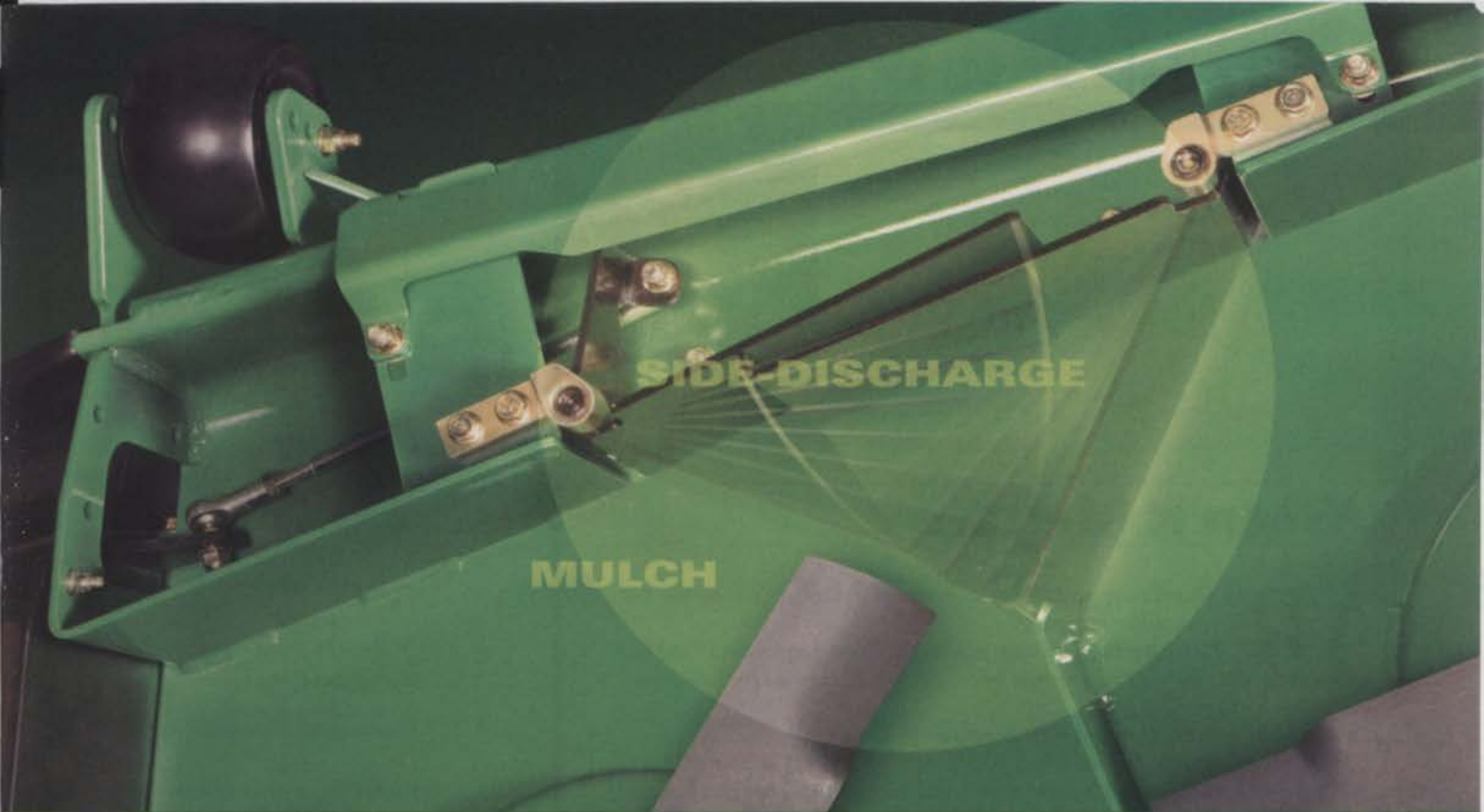
Many companies have found that loading vehicles the night before a job helps crews get out the door faster in the mornings, thereby saving time and money. Let us know how you approach this daily task in the April 17 *Lawn & Landscape* Online Poll where we ask, "At what time of day do you load your trucks with equipment and materials?" The poll will run from April 17 to 23. Look for the results of this and every weekly online poll in the *Lawn & Landscape* e-Newsletter.

industry
buzz

business is buzzing!

Last month, *Lawn & Landscape* Online debuted Industry Buzz, our online-exclusive weekly column that brings you professional advice and insight in four categories every Monday. Each week, log onto www.lawnandlandscape.com for the latest Industry Buzz on legislative issues, water use, business and air/noise pollution issues. Or, have Industry Buzz delivered right to your e-mail inbox in the *Lawn & Landscape* e-Newsletter. To subscribe to the e-Newsletter, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com, choose the News menu and click "E-Newsletter" or e-mail nwisniewski@gie.net with your e-mail address to be added to our database.

Read *Lawn & Landscape's* Industry Buzz column every week, then visit the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board to share your thoughts on the weekly topics. Have a question or topic you'd like our columnists to address? E-mail nwisniewski@gie.net with your suggestions. Let's get buzzing!



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Mike Dykstra, Dykstra Landscape Services Inc., Grand Haven, Michigan



7IRONII™

See more of what Mike Dykstra has to say at www.mowpro.com



JOHN DEERE

USE READER SERVICE # 14

cindy code



When it Matters

Rick Girard takes his business seriously. Most business owners do. But Rick is a different sort. Rick started his landscape business in 1989 when he was 19 and full of dreams. Six years later he was forced to close it. He filed for bankruptcy and let 30 workers go.

His experience was not what dreams are made of.

Not one to wallow in defeat, Rick picked himself up, borrowed \$1,000 from his father-in-law, bought a truck and started over. He didn't find the right formula until 1998 when he and his brother Randy formed Girard Environmental Services based in Sanford, Fla., outside of Orlando. In seven years, they built the company into a \$16-million operation.

They didn't do it alone. They did it with the help of family and determination. Rick is chairman and CEO. Randy is president and COO. Two brothers operating a business together could clash. But Rick said there's too much on the line to haggle. They've got employees and customers who depend on them.

Rick focuses on the vision and financial side of the business while Randy's energies are spent on day-to-day operations.

Their father, Leo, is the company's executive vice president. He spends a lot of time in the community, sits on local boards and delights in planning the firm's annual customer appreciation event. The yearly affair is held in recognition of their top 20 customers.

It's also an opportunity for Girard's customers and vendors to mingle together in rural Florida testing their skills at skeet shooting. Customers eagerly await an invitation to this unique experience.

As a skeet-shooting participant this year, I was awed by the genuine respect between Girard's employees and customers and the camaraderie among the Girard's team. They work hard and stay true to their roots.


They also count on loyal employees. Brian Weatherby, now senior vice president at Girard's, is an employee from the first landscape business who put his hurt and distrust aside and returned to focus on building Girard's into a reputable business. "Trust and work ethic are a big deal to them," he says.

Rick also is grateful for loyal customers. Some of his best clients are former creditors from his days of bankruptcy. Although his debts were discharged under Chapter 7, he repaid most of his creditors.

It's not easy operating a business in the same town that you failed. Rick was too entrepreneurial to work for another business. He wanted the name "Girard" on the door.

Today the company provides full-time employment to more than 220 people. It operates a fleet of 85 vehicles. Its two primary operating divisions are construction services and management services. They also operate a wholesale nursery and have future plans to expand into garden centers and a pool and patio operation.

Business bankruptcies are more common than you think. But clawing your way back and landing on top is no small feat. Rick and Randy want vendors and clients to know that they can count on Girard's "when it matters."

Those three words are the company's new slogan. They're serious and they never take their success for granted. 

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USE READER SERVICE # 15

 **NEW HOLLAND**

Dear Editor,

The staff here at Clean Energy Maintenance Inc. have been reading the articles in your magazine for quite a few years now, and we want you to know how much we appreciate and "put to use" your information and advice. Our company has been in business for 14 years and we have been working with you most of this time.

At times, when we read through the pages of the magazine, we feel as though we are spending a moment with a friend – sharing ideas and realizing the challenges ahead. After reviewing the information, we always feel more in tune with our job performance, our scheduling procedures, communication skills and also with the changes that so often take place in and with our environment.

We are a complete facility maintenance company. Our lawn care, landscape and hardscape divisions have a reputation of quality workmanship and we pride ourselves in the services that we provide.

Your magazine has given to us good advice on products that are available, communication skills that can be shared and the procedures that could be applied.

We speak highly of your *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and the influence that you have been to all of us here at Clean Energy Maintenance Inc.

We applaud you for your in-depth coverage on the necessary information that you bring to those of us in the green industry.

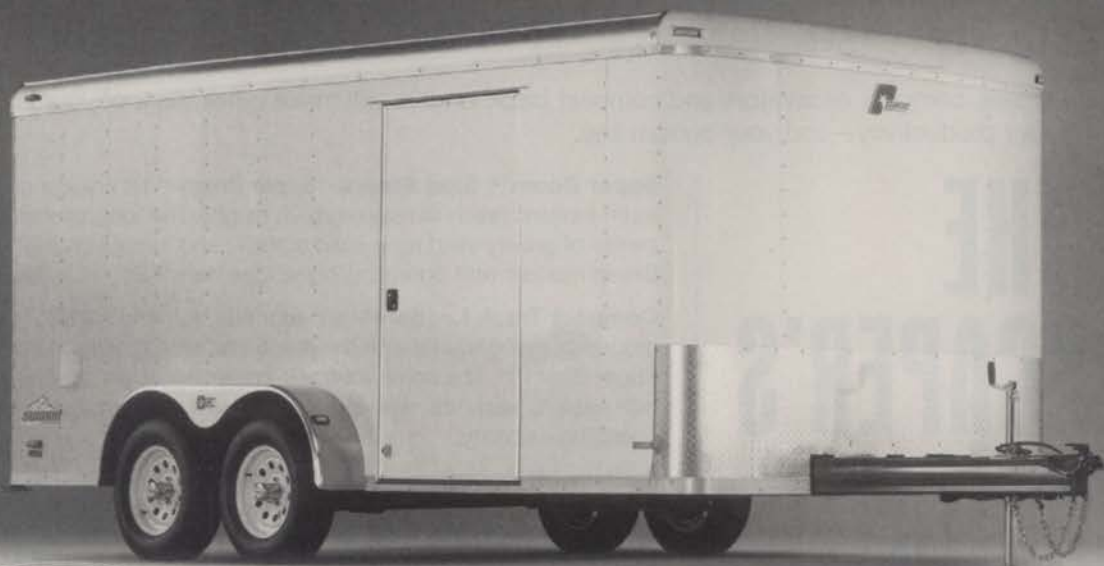
Thank you,
 Steve Weaver, President
 Clean Energy Maintenance Inc.
 New Holland, Pa.
www.cleanmrg.net



letters

Lawn & Landscape magazine welcomes letters from its readers. We feel that your honest feedback about our publication – whether it's positive or negative – is crucial to our future success. We take your comments very seriously and are always willing to respond or answer any questions you might have. To submit a Letter to the Editor, please send the letter via mail to Nicole Wisniewski's attention at 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113, or e-mail it to her at nlwisniewski@gie.net. You can also call her at 800/456-0707.

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USE READER SERVICE # 16



**They say many
hands make light work.**

**What they don't say is
how much a bunch of
hands goes for
these days.**

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Fact is, hand-weeding can strangle your profits in no time. Maybe that's why so many nursery operators are opting for the proven, long-lasting weed control of Gallery* specialty herbicide. Gallery effectively controls 95 species of broadleaf weeds – including chickweed, spurge and oxalis – for up to eight months. And Gallery can be used on 440 field-grown and 230 container-grown ornamentals. Gallery can also be applied in an over-the-top application on more than 400 ornamentals. This year, take a hands-off approach to weed control with Gallery.

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Setting Sales Goals

One of the best ways to improve sales is to set goals and then manage them. Sounds easy, right? Well, it isn't, but it doesn't have to be difficult, either. Well-managed sales can propel a company on to great things.

I believe very strongly that sales – or, more specifically, backlog (i.e., work waiting to be done) – is the key to all green industry companies. When you have work lined up, you can run your company with much more confidence and a great deal less uncertainty. Let's consider some sales strategies that have consistently proven effective.

First, establish specific sales goals. Do this by creating a chart, such as the one on the right.

A simple table helps everyone see what is expected of them. It quantifies and clarifies your year-end goal and thus enables you to hold weekly sales meetings in which you can assess your company's progress and setbacks. These meetings should provide a forum in which everyone can speak, trade ideas and strategize for the weeks and months ahead. But don't lose sight of the prime purpose of these meetings, which is to hold your team accountable, push them to improve, and reinforce your expectations of them. And no matter the size of your sales force, meetings should not last more than 45 minutes – 30 is even better. Why? Because when meetings run long people tend to lose interest and focus. Moreover, every minute your team spends sitting around a table talking is a minute less not selling. Hold your meetings weekly and you'll find you can run them much more efficiently and effectively. Lastly, try to inject some levity. You don't want your sales team to dread these meetings.


Here are five more tips for improving your sales.

1. The head of the company must be involved in the selling process. Sales are to a company what gasoline is to a car – without them you're not going anywhere. And while you can delegate many tasks, managing sales goals is not one of them. Get involved and stay engaged.

2. Have a method – preferably a computer software program – that tracks leads. These programs keep your prospects top of mind and help steward them along until a deal is in place.

3. Manage results, not activities. Set team goals, instruct them on the best way to close sales and provide support when needed. But if a salesperson has a different way of doing things and it works and your clients are happy, then let them do as they wish. If their way doesn't work, exert your authority and explain how you want it done.

4. Be candid. Rid your company of under-performing people. I'm not advocating heartlessness, but you cannot afford to employ people who can't sell. If you do not have another job for them within your company, then politely show them the door.

5. Recognize great performers. A good salesperson is one of the hardest employees to find. If you've hired one, then keep him or her happy and motivated. And while money is a great motivator, so are words of praise, handwritten notes and public recognition. Remember how you felt when you were in grade school and the teacher singled you out for your work? No matter what, we still like recognition for our successes. 

2006 Sales Goal	\$1,300,000
Landscaping	\$400,000
Hardscaping	\$200,000
Maintenance	\$400,000
Backlog (for 2007)	\$300,000
2006 Individual Sales Goals	
Jay	\$700,000
Tim	\$600,000
2006 Monthly Sales Goals	
January	\$80,000
February	\$60,000
March	\$100,000
April	\$200,000
May	\$215,000
June	\$50,000
July	\$100,000
August	\$100,000
September	\$80,000
October	\$75,000
November	\$90,000
December	\$50,000

marty grunder

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

Reaching New Heights



Weed Man®

In the landscape industry, growth opportunities are plentiful. Adding new services to increase business from your core customers is one opportunity to drive expansion and help turn employees into your company's future managers and leaders. Other reasons to diversify a business include:

- To boost stagnated growth and create a long-term growth strategy for your core business.
- To enhance customer satisfaction.
- To become more competitive against local, regional and national companies.
- To increase revenue and profit margins.
- To create efficiencies from a new service offering.
- To improve customer and employee retention.

But when companies diversify they also face many challenges. For instance, if done poorly, diversification can increase chaos and confusion to the core business and ultimately decrease revenue and profits.

Aware of these potential obstacles, Landscape Contractor Brian Light purchased a Weed Man franchise so he could establish a lawn care business with a recognized system for success. "I knew I wanted to make a change, so I researched different options and came across Weed Man," says Light, president, Luminary Landscapes, Knoxville, Tenn. "They have proven systems that work, they give me the guidance I need, and I'm doing it on my own, so there's a profit motive there as well."

PLANNING AHEAD. Successful businesses usually begin with a vision and goals. Weed Man provided Light with the foundation the company needed to reach its profit potential. "Most franchises don't provide any kind of budgeting for you," he explains. "Weed Man sat down with us and came up with true numbers that we knew were attainable from an income and expense report, and we are 98 percent on track with our first-year budget."

Weed Man's business planning system even detailed all of the company's expenses, including the number of computers and desks needed to get started, says Light.

HIGH-TECH HELP. The computer system provided by Weed Man to its franchises has played an integral role in the growth of Light's company. With the click of a mouse, Light knows how much product his technicians are applying, the square footage of

all of his lawns and how many clients are in a particular zone. "It's very easy to use," he says. "If you need customer information, it will quickly pull up what you need."

Scott Hall has also realized success with the Weed Man computer system. "It's the best I've ever seen," says Hall, owner, Classic Landscaping, Frederick, Md. "Our whole business wraps around that software. It does take some time to learn and utilize, but once you learn it you can know what your business is doing at any point in time – even by the hour."

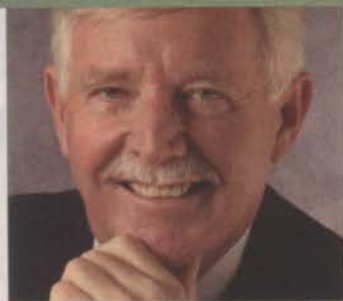
SUPPORTING CAST. Once a Weed Man franchise has been established, the subfranchisor provides invaluable support to the company. Whenever Hall has a business or technical question, he says the company can turn to the subfranchisor for immediate advice. "They're terrific," he says. "I call them all of the time and ask them questions, and I don't know of any other franchise system where you would get that kind of support."

Hall also schedules weekly conference calls with his subfranchisor and meets regularly to review his franchise's financial performance. "There's a constant stream of e-mail support, information and tips," he says.

TRAINED FOR SUCCESS. Without Weed Man's startup training sessions, Light says he doubts his franchise would have achieved its current success. The subfranchisor reviewed fertilizer formulations, weed identification, customer service practices and estimating and billing procedures with Light and his employees. "You can't beat on-the-job training, but if we didn't have that advanced technical training in the beginning, we wouldn't have been as successful as we are now," he shares.

THE RESULTS. Weed Man has become more than just another new business opportunity for Light – it's helped his landscape maintenance division increase revenues by 20 percent. He says, "When we market to our Weed Man clients, they say, 'Since you did such a great job on my yard with lawn care, would you also be available to take care of our landscape mowing and trimming needs?'"

Weed Man franchise opportunities are available by calling 888/321-9333 or visiting www.weed-man.com for more information.



Spring into Spring

The sap is rising and so are clients' expectations. Are you ready? This is the time when we need to get off on the right foot and set the stage to provide clients the optimum in quality and customer service. Here are a couple of tips:

1. Think about last year. Did you accomplish what you wanted in 2005? Do you need to reposition your company or departments to take advantage of the future? If changes are needed, develop a game plan with specific completion dates.

2. Aggressively seek improvements. Think efficiency and lower costs. Solicit ideas from your employees. Develop a simple form that enables them to give their opinion in two areas: list the things we did well last year; provide suggestions to improve efficiencies and lower costs.

For best results, these responses should remain anonymous. Then, gather your key people and share the information. As a group, determine the action to take. Make a person responsible for each improvement, determine a completion date and hold that individual accountable.

3. Solicit qualified referrals from existing clients. Supervisors and managers should call each client, or preferably, stop by and see him or her in person. The call might sound like this: "We're planning for the spring and have a couple of openings for one of our crews. Would you know anyone interested in our services?" Your objective is to increase business and sign new agreements before spring.

Further, track sales efforts with a wall chart listing clients, who makes contact, results/comments and the date. This holds managers accountable.

As the owner or the account manager, you must develop a schedule to visit each client. Shake their hand and look them in the eye. If they are a maintenance client, ask if they would like to walk the site with you and discuss the service menu.

What a great time to fully understand their expectations for this season. And please, do not go away without a proposal for "extra work."

4. Set expectations for selling extras. Once a month, provide every client with an unsolicited proposal to enhance their landscaping. Remember, the client hired you because you're the expert. They expect you to recommend how to improve the appearance of their lawns and landscapes. Be proactive. Add-ons should be your highest margin work.

You should also track and display your upselling efforts by posting the number of proposals made by each individual, each month. A little peer pressure never hurts.

Someone from your company – the owner, account manager or supervisor – should visit the client each month. If not practical, at least call the client monthly to check in and ask if there is anything else you can do for them. Understand this client is receiving calls from competitors hoping to steal your business. You need to be No. 1 in their minds. Remember, out of sight, out of mind.

5. Quash overtime. With the spring rush, it's easy to get trapped in the cycle of working overtime. Don't let this become a habit. You know how many hours of overtime are acceptable and you're responsible for keeping employees within those hours. Create a policy to have all overtime for the previous week reported to you by Tuesday mornings to help you keep on top of it.

Your primary focus should be labor hours and quality. These areas will get you in trouble with either the client (quality) or the owner (hours). This tool is absolutely necessary if you are to manage the labor.

6. Fasten your seat belts. Spring will kick your butt if you're not prepared. Make this the year that you make a few changes, increase your sales, find a mentor and make more money than last year. ☺

jack mattingly

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



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USE READER SERVICE # 18



Seeking Truth in Employment

Just when we thought we had our arms around contemporary business concepts such as “Truth in Lending” and “Truth in Advertising,” we receive the latest – “Truth in Employment.” Here’s how it may affect small and large landscape business owners and their employment practices.

Several years ago, a Texas resident accepted a position as project manager with a California-based company. She sold her home, bought a new place in California and moved. Everything was going great. She liked the job, the project was exciting, the people she worked with were friendly and she was adjusting to a new life. Then it all came to a screeching halt.

After less than six months of employment, the woman’s boss informed her the project had been cancelled and she was being terminated. Shocked and angry, her first reaction was to blame herself for giving up her old job in Texas to accept this position.

After a while, however, her anger became directed at her employer. “How dare they lie to me? How could they entice me out of a good job and into one that they knew was short-lived?” She decided to sue.

The discovery process revealed an internal memo dated prior to the woman’s employment, declaring the project was to be discontinued. Hearing this evidence, the court ruled in her favor. She was awarded \$100,000 for her pain and suffering, continuation of benefits and relocation expenses to move back to Texas.

This case is an important example that could set precedent for similar lawsuits. What can employers do to avoid this?

- Insist your recruiters, department heads and other hiring authorities have the same information. If a company is not going to go forward on a project or plans

to eliminate an open position, the hiring manager for that department should be the first to know. The position should be canceled as well as the recruiting effort.

- Make sure those involved in the interview process, i.e. department heads, recruiters and hiring managers, are trained in appropriate interviewing techniques.
- Don’t oversell the job, the location, the assignment or the company. Be factual. Avoid making claims you cannot substantiate. Misleading statements or speculating financial or operational growth is unfair and could get employers into trouble.
- Put your offers in writing. State only the facts. Quote salaries in weekly figures, not annual dollars. State that you are not guaranteeing employment and employment can be terminated without notice.

Likewise, any employment offer should include:

- Salary quoted as an hourly amount for non-exempt employees, and either a monthly or pay period amount for exempt employees.
- If there is bonus potential, indicate that it is not guaranteed and they must be employed at time of bonus pay-out to receive a bonus (if that’s your policy).
- Avoid statements that imply “permanent, long-term employment.”
- A signature line for them to return the letter signed. Keep the returned original in the confidential personnel file of the employee, and give them a copy.
- Start date, job title, department name and hours they will be working.

Smart management and positive personnel management work well together to achieve profitability for your business.

The concept of “Truth in Employment” may help you create better, more efficient hiring practices and promote positive employee relations throughout the organization. ^{LL}

larry fish

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Soil Testing Basics

The best turf care professionals understand the value of a little science. For example, science comes in particularly handy when evaluating customers' soil. By learning the basics of soil pH levels, lawn care professionals can earn themselves a Ph.D. in customer satisfaction.

A PERFECT 7! All soils have a pH level, which describes their acidity. When the goal is a healthy lawn, you want a soil pH between 6.5 and 7.5. When the soil pH falls in the desired range, turf roots effectively use the nutrients present in the fertilizer, which leads to green, healthy turf. When the soil pH is too low (the soil is too acidic) or too high (the soil is too alkaline), problems occur.

However, few lawn care companies conduct soil tests, despite their potential for additional revenue and differentiating their company from the competition. Most companies dismiss soil pH until they see signs that something is not right.

The most obvious sign is turf that does not respond to fertilization. The fertilizer is not the problem. Rather, the turf does not green up because the nutrients in the fertilizer are locked up in the soil and never reach the roots. The result is a wasted fertilization.

But instead of conducting a simple \$10 to \$35 soil test, some landscape companies respond to client complaints by sending out a technician to make another application. That second application will not deliver results. Basic fertilization cannot change poor soil pH.

Certain turf weeds or diseases are other indications of poor soil pH. In particular, red sorrel, wild carrot and henbit often mean a soil's pH level is too low.

PROBE FOR ANSWERS. The best way to get the real dirt on your dirt, er, soil is to use a soil probe to collect 10 3- to 5-inch-long samples from the property. When collecting, be sure to pull plugs from different areas of the property since soil pH may vary. In addition, if you are collecting samples in a northern climate where ice melt products are used, avoid areas near concrete since ice melt can influence soil pH. Remove any turf or thatch from the samples and put all of the soil into one bag. Then either send this bag to a soil testing facility or take it to your local fertilizer supplier – they should be able to test it for you. Results should be available in roughly two weeks.

Armed with test results, you can develop a turf program that makes sense for your customers and their lawn. This may include new sales opportunities for you. If the soil pH is too low, that calls for an application of lime, while a sulfur application makes sense for soil with a pH level above 7.5. These are simple, profitable, one-time applications. Plus, the customer may be interested in an application of iron to help the turf green up while you wait for the lime to improve the soil pH (one application does the trick, but the pH takes a few months to adjust).

And don't forget about add-on revenue opportunities associated with the soil testing, which the customer should pay for. Lastly, collecting samples provides great insight into a lawn's thatch condition – can I interest you in a lawn aeration, Mrs. Jones?

Even if you don't act on these sales opportunities, feel confident that you have demonstrated the value of your service to your customer. Instead of being some guy behind a spreader, your customer will see you as a true turf expert – someone who uses science to back up their service. **ll**

j.b. toorish and michael steve

are part of LESCO's Tech Services Department. They can be reached at techguys@lesco.com or at 800/321-5325 ext. 3150 to answer technical questions.

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Celebrate Lawns & Landscapes in April

With the official start of spring just days away, the green industry is gearing up to educate and energize professional service providers and their clients around the country. April has been named National Lawn Care Month by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and also National Landscape Architecture Month by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). Both organizations have events planned to celebrate their causes.

PLANET is preparing for National Lawn Care Month by educating the industry on its own rapid growth. The association hopes to spend April encouraging homeowners to work with their lawn and landscape professionals on developing healthy lawn care programs and communicating the benefits of turf.

"Americans realize the importance of well-cared for lawns," says PLANET President John Gibson. "In addition to being beautiful, lawns have a positive impact on our environment. They trap dust and dirt in the atmosphere and convert large amounts of carbon dioxide to oxygen. Lawns also provide a natural filtering system for rainwater as it soaks into the ground. Additionally, healthy lawns provide a cooling effect in summer months, which can save homeowners on energy costs."

In 2004, PLANET conducted a national Harris Survey that reported that homeowners spent \$11.6 billion on their lawns in 2003, up 12 percent from 2002. These same homeowners projected that they'd spend even more on their lawns in 2004. Landscape professionals can help consumers realize that healthy lawns play an important role in home sales and they have a huge impact on "curb appeal." Realtors report that homes with beautiful lawns and landscapes can increase property values by 15 to 20 percent, and that homeowners can realize returns on their investments of 100 to 200 percent. Lawn care and landscape companies also provide a large number of jobs across the United States.



"Homeowners can be proactive in April by putting together a lawn care program with their lawn care professional to ensure that their lawns will be healthy and beautiful throughout the year," Gibson says. "It's important to maintain and even increase property values."

The American Society of Landscape Architects has announced the theme of "Discover

Landscape Architecture" for this year's celebration of National Landscape Architecture Month. April was chosen for the celebration because it encompasses both Earth Day (April 22) and the birthday of Frederick Law Olmstead, founder of the landscape architecture profession in the United States (April 26).

Each week will focus on a different aspect of landscape architecture, including:

April 1 to 8: The landscape architect's role in security design and disaster preparedness

April 9 to 15: Encouragement of students to explore career opportunities in landscape architecture

April 16 to 22: Green building and sustainable design

April 23 to 30: Residential landscape architecture – dollar for dollar, the best home improvement investment

"National Landscape Architecture Month is a great opportunity for Americans of all ages to learn more about how landscape architecture can improve our communities, increase property values and protect our environment through creative, sustainable design," says Dennis Carmichael, president of ASLA.

Be sure to visit *Lawn & Landscape Online* frequently throughout the month of April for coverage of both National Lawn Care Month and National Landscape Architecture Month. For more information on upcoming events for both celebrations, visit www.landcarenetwork.org or www.asla.org. – Lauren Spiers Hunter

ValleyCrest Acquires Two Landscape Architect Firms

CALABASAS, Calif. – Two landscape architecture firms are finding new homes under the umbrella of ValleyCrest Cos. The company announced that it has acquired the assets of Orange County, Calif.-based HRP LanDesign and Fairhope, Ala.-based Site Works.

The firm's expertise in landscape architecture drew ValleyCrest's attention. The company says it has been following a noticeable increase in customer demand for design/build landscape services. "We believe that, similar to trends in other sectors of the construction market, design/build will play an increasingly important role in the landscape industry in the next several years, which is why we decided to move forward with the acquisitions of these two landscape architecture firms," says Richard Sperber, president, ValleyCrest Cos. "Customers understand the value of working with a single firm and are choosing this avenue more frequently."

Advantages of the design/build process include faster time to market, heightened accountability, reduced administrative burden, and a clearer and earlier understanding of overall project costs, the company notes.

While integrated design/build services are now available to ValleyCrest Cos. customers, services like landscape architecture, landscape installation, as well as lawn and landscape maintenance will continue to be sold separately, as well.

HRP LanDesign was founded by Jim Hogan in 1974. Hogan and his current management team, reporting to Sperber, will continue to lead the firm and will oversee a staff of 50 HRP employees.

In the southeastern United States, Site Works is a 25-year-old firm run by landscape architect Lois Shindelbower. Shindelbower's mother estab-



Richard Sperber, president, ValleyCrest Cos., and Jim Hogan, senior vice president, HRP LanDesign.

lished the company and Lois joined her mother in 1988 to expand the business. Shindelbower will continue to run the operation from Alabama reporting to William Leathers, vice president of ValleyCrest Landscape Development, Florida.

Leathers says he sees tremendous opportunity for ValleyCrest in the Southeast, particularly in Florida, and will look to realize those opportunities utilizing Site Work's resources.

HRP LanDesign and Site Works will continue to operate as independent landscape architecture studios using their existing names under the ValleyCrest umbrella. Financial details of the transactions were not disclosed. For more information, please visit the landscape architecture-design/build section at www.valleycrest.com.

INSECT ID



One Grub May Be Taking Over the Sunshine State

ORLANDO, Fla. – Are grubs a new enemy of Florida lawns? "Probably not," explains Greg Pagano. "But we may have been taking care of grubs while we were controlling other types of insects in the soil, so we didn't notice them as much."

But according to Pagano, lawn and landscape market specialist, Bayer Environmental Science (www.bayerprocentral.com), Research Triangle Park, N.C., a newer grub is proving more difficult to control than the other 54 species that attack Florida lawns – the sugar cane beetle, which has lived through the closing of sugar cane fields. Many of those fields were turned into sod farms and so now the grubs are showing up in customers' lawns, Pagano said. At the

Orlando, Fla. Bayer Environmental Science Annual Summit Series: Healthy Lawns, Healthy Business, Pagano gave more than 70 attendees the details about this tough insect:

- The sugar cane beetle has been seen in the Orlando market.
- Damage is specifically severe in coastal areas.
- Damage occurs from August to November and even into January, meaning the insect is a bit more tolerant of cooler weather.
- The sugar cane beetle completely consumes the root system of many turf species.
- At this point, Pagano says researchers still believe this insect has a one-year lifecycle.

continued on page 26



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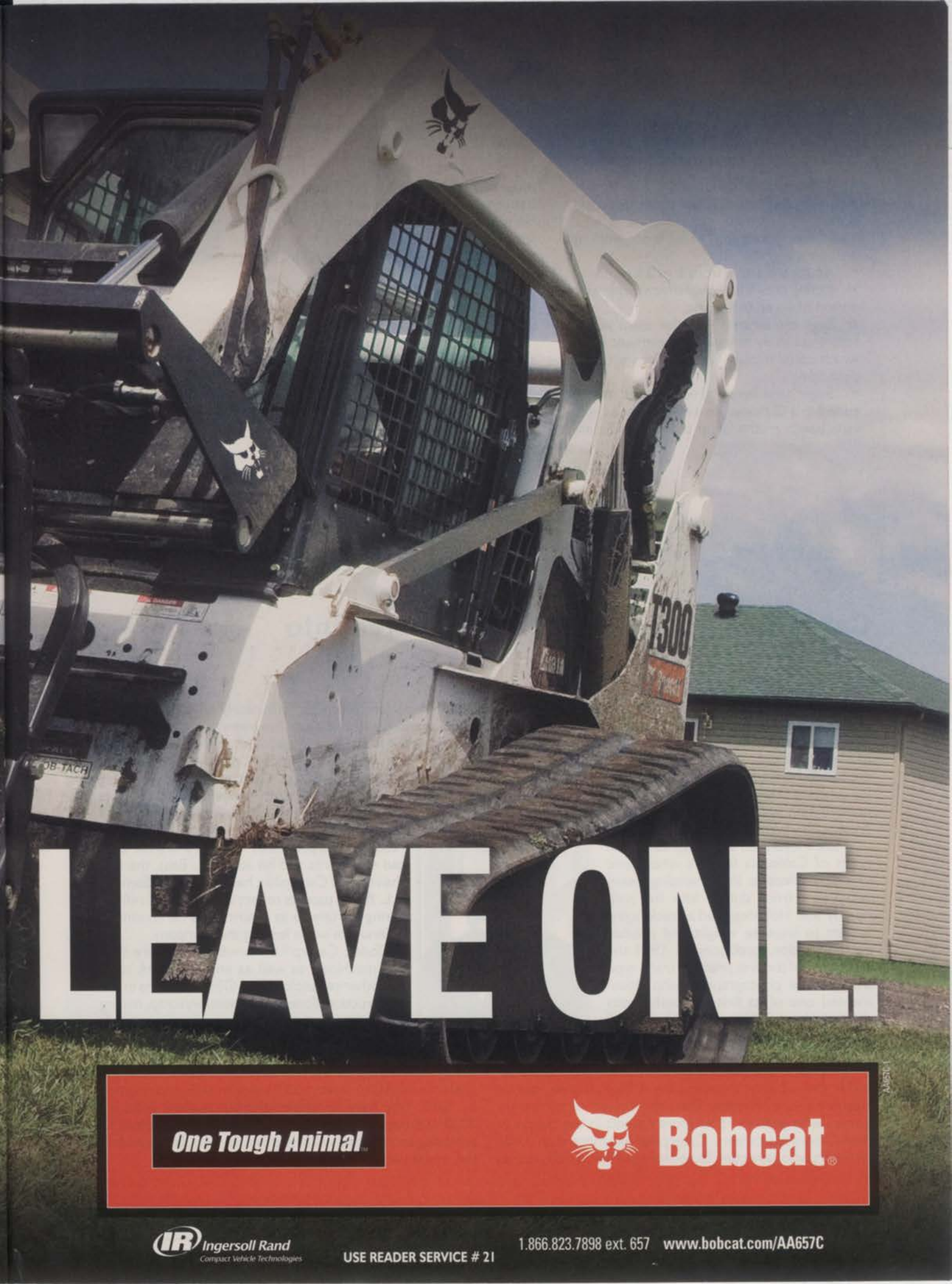
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continued from page 23

One Grub May Be Taking Over the Sunshine State

- Third instar grubs are more than 2 inches long, which are much larger than most other grubs.
- Preventive control, so far, is not working well on this grub.
- Adults are active from 1 to 3 a.m.
- Mating occurs in the soil after a maturation period of seven to 10 days.
- Eggs are located 4 inches deep in the soil, most likely below the treatment level, which could explain why they are escaping pesticides.
- Sugar cane beetle grubs are not always curled in a C shape. An average-sized sugar cane beetle grub is larger than a quarter, an-

other reason control may be challenging. The trick is to get control before the grubs get big, but it's hard to find these smaller grubs on the surface.

- By mid-summer, lawns affected by sugar cane beetle grubs look dried out.
- Populations of these grubs don't have to be as high as other grubs to cause severe damage.

Think your Florida-based clients' lawns are infected with the sugar cane beetle? Contact a Bayer Environmental Science sales representative. The company offers a service where if you mail in a grub, they will pay for its identification, a \$70 value, points out Pagano.



Greg Pagano

MANUFACTURER MINUTES

Caterpillar Founding Father Inducted Into Inventor Hall of Fame

PEORIA, Ill. – One of Caterpillar's founding fathers is being recognized for his ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit with induction into the National Inventors Hall of Fame. At a news conference in Washington, D.C., the Hall of Fame announced that it is posthumously honoring Benjamin Holt for ushering in the modern era of mechanized farming and construction with his "Traction Engine" (Patent No. 874,008).

Holt's invention was inspired by the plight of California farmers who found wheels ineffective in preventing heavy equipment from sinking into the soft, muddy soil. Holt designed a track-laying system to disperse weight and provide better traction, producing in 1904 the prototype of the first practical track-type tractor. The photographer who documented one of its first successful tests dubbed the machine the "caterpillar," inspiring the company name and launching the Caterpillar brand.

In honor of the continuing inventive spirit at Caterpillar and in the industry, the company is beginning an internal inventor award program. The program will recognize engineers who acquire 15 or more patents in the course of their Caterpillar careers. Caterpillar has more than 3,800 inventors who have contributed to more than 6,800 granted

U.S. patents for Caterpillar, with nearly 1,200 U.S. patents alone granted within the last five years.

The Holt Mfg. Co. merged with competitor CL Best Tractor Co. in 1925, forming the Caterpillar Tractor Co., predecessor to modern-day Caterpillar. Both founding families set in place the tradition of innovation that continues today. Benjamin Holt achieved 47 patents in his name; his nephew Pliny Holt had 38 patents. Fellow Caterpillar Inc. founders Daniel Best had 42 patents and his son C. L. Best, the first chairman of Caterpillar, had 27 patents. Some of C.L. Best's patents reflect inventions he refined during his tenure as chairman as he continued to innovate while leading the company.

Today, Caterpillar manufactures more than 300 machines, as well as engines, work tools and other technology and OEM solutions in the construction, forestry, demolition/scrap, mining and marine industries. The company recently announced 2005 revenue of \$36.34 billion.

Caterpillar CEO Jim Owens recently presented a new enterprise strategy for the year 2010 and beyond, one of the goals of which is to achieve \$50 billion in sales and revenue by 2010. "We have set challenging but realistic goals for 2010 and beyond," Owens says, "and are committed to achieving success that will reward customers, stockholders and employees."



Ben Holt

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U.S. Patent 6,316,199 and pending pending. © 2005 Permagreen Systems, Inc. LESCO is a registered trademark and LESCO Service Center is a registered service mark of LESCO Technologies LLC. All rights reserved.

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▼ industry news > > >

IN THE NEWS

RISE Announces New Grassroots Program



WASHINGTON, D.C. – RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) announced the creation of a new grassroots program for managing local pesticide and fertilizer issues.

“Our goal is to strengthen and build alliances in towns and cities across the country and to increase public awareness of the benefits of our industry’s products. Pesticides go beyond beautifying our surroundings – they play a vital role in protecting people, animals and the environment,” RISE President Allen James says. “This new grassroots program will help us to tell our story in hundreds of communities across the nation, ensuring an informed public and a balanced public policy debate about the use of specialty products.”

RISE has committed to a significant expansion of its grassroots action and is hiring a grassroots manager. Also, RISE is encouraging industry associations, state and local chapters, individual members and distributors

to get involved. “The new grassroots program will help us to speak with one voice and to communicate one message – our products are safe and necessary to sustaining public health and the environment,” James says.

RISE Communications Director Karen Reardon says that, when hired, the grassroots director will be responsible for “going out into communities where issues are brewing and would impact the industry at a local level. We’re already very successful with many allies and industry folks at the federal and state levels. This program is really designed to give our industry another set of hands to work at that local level.”

SPANISH LESSONS



Considering that more landscape contractors are employing Hispanic or H-2B workers, improving communication is becoming more crucial to ensure quality work done right the first time.

In an effort to aid in lawn care professionals communication efforts, *Lawn & Landscape* will be running a few phrases each month in English and Spanish, including a pronunciation guide, courtesy of the book *Spanish Phrases for Landscape Professionals* by Jason Holben and Dominic Arbini. To inquire about ordering the book, which costs \$23.99, contact Stock Pot Publishing, Attn: Order Desk, P.O. Box 18343, Denver, Colo. 80218-0343.

1. ENGLISH: Do you have landscaping experience?
SPANISH: Tienes experiencia en ajardinar?
(T-N-ehs x-peer-n-c-ah N ah-har-deen-ahr?)
2. ENGLISH: Fill out these forms.
SPANISH: Llena estos formularios. (yeah-nah s-toes for-moo-lar-e-ohss)
3. ENGLISH: When can you start?
SPANISH: Cuando puedes empezar?
(Quan-doe pway-thays emp-eh-sahr?)
4. ENGLISH: You must be on time. Call ahead if you will be late.
Call this number.
SPANISH: Debes llegar a tiempo. Hay que llamar si vas a llegar tarde.
Llama a este numero. (Deh-behs yeah-gar ah tea-m-poe. I k yam-mar see bahs ah yeah-gar tar-deh. Yah-mah ah s-tay noo-mare-oh.)

CORRECTIONS

Lawn & Landscape would like to make a clarification pertaining to "Lessons in Pricing" in its February 2006 issue. Scott Fay's company is technically named Treasure Coast Irrigation & Landscaping, not to be confused with another company called Treasure Coast Irrigation located in the same area of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

In the story "Regulate Your Workload with PGRs" in the February 2006 issue of *Lawn & Landscape*, Keith Reid is listed as a lawn care operator from Florida. He is actually from Bioscapes Integrated from Virginia Beach, Va.

The Web site listed with the Paramount Solutions Spreader Rack in the Products section of the March 2006 issue of *Lawn & Landscape* was incorrect. The correct address is www.paramountglobalsolutions.com.

Lawn & Landscape regrets these errors.

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USE READER SERVICE # 23

Cover Some Ground



Vinca minor, a ground cover for shady areas in Zone 4, has persistent roots so it establishes quickly and can grow to 6 inches. Photos: Dan Tenaglia, www.missouriplants.com (above) and Jill M. Swearingen, USDI National Park Service

Using ground cover plantings in landscapes is becoming increasingly popular, and spring is a good time to plant them.

Areas planted with ground covers establish an effect in the landscape that is impossible to create with grass – and they generally require less maintenance. Ground covers provide variations in height, texture and color that enrich their surroundings.

Planting ground covers now will provide them with a chance to settle in and become somewhat established before hot weather arrives.

The term ground cover is applied to low-growing plants, other than turfgrass, used to cover areas of the landscape. Most often, contractors use perennial, evergreen plants that have a sprawling or spreading habit and are less than 12 inches high.

In addition to their beauty, ground covers also have lots of practical uses. Since most people are reluctant to walk through ground covers, the plants provide barriers to foot traffic and actually can guide traffic movement through a site. Because they don't have to be mowed, ground covers reduce landscape maintenance. They also are useful where mowing would be difficult, such as on steep slopes, under low-branched trees and shrubs, where the roots of large trees protrude and in confined areas. They are the best solution to areas under trees that are too shady for grass to grow.

Contractors must talk to clients about the characteristics they would like the ground cover to have (height, texture, color and so forth) when making a plant selection. They also need to consider the growing conditions where it will be planted, especially whether it is sunny or shady.

In addition, look at the size of the area to be planted. Only the most reliable, fast-spreading and reasonably priced ground covers should be considered for large areas. Monkey grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*), creeping lily turf (*Liriope spicata*) and Japanese ardisia (*Ardisia japonica*) are good choices for shade to part-shade. Asiatic jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*) and lirioppe (*Liriope muscari*) are excellent for part-shade to sun.

Proper preparation of the planting area will help ensure good establishment and fast growth. First, remove all existing unwanted vegetation, such as lawn grass or weeds from the area by hand or with a nonselective herbicide.

Next, till the soil to loosen it. After the soil is broken up, spread 2 inches of organic matter (compost, peat moss, etc.) over the surface and work it in. If necessary, 2 to 3 inches of additional blended soil mix may be added.

Finally, sprinkle a general-purpose fertilizer over the area – following label directions – and thoroughly blend everything together. Then a crew can install the ground cover plantings.

For coverage in the shortest time, plant the ground cover plants at the proper spacing. This varies with the type chosen, so check with the staff at a nursery or a local extension office. Although the recommended spacing will provide quicker coverage, you may need to charge clients more because your cost will increase.

After the area is planted, be sure to mulch at 1 to 2 inches to help prevent weeds. Once you've put down the mulch, water the area thoroughly to settle things in. To promote establishment and growth, remind clients to continue to water regularly whenever rainfall does not occur for one week.

Plant ground covers now to take advantage of the cool, moist, spring weather – it will encourage successful establishment. Fertilize in May and again in July with the same fertilizer you used in bed preparation to promote rapid growth. – Dan Gill, LSU AgCenter, www.lsuagcenter.com



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7 Ways to Keep the Client Front & Center

CHICO, Calif. – Customers today have infinite choices – any product or service they desire is within their reach. What's more, today's customer is smart, savvy and well-educated. With so many companies ready to serve, he or she could choose any company – you have to give that client a good reason to choose yours.

Quality expert Craig Cochran suggests that the key to keeping your business running in high gear is to focus all of your attention and efforts on the customer.

In his new book *Becoming a Customer-Focused Organization*, Cochran outlines the seven steps necessary to build or rebuild a company that meets the needs and demands of the customers who are responsible for its existence.

1. PLAY "FOLLOW-THE-LEADER." Cochran believes that an organization's leaders set the tone for everything, good or bad, that takes place within the company. "Leaders have followers," he says. "It is important that the leader keep his focus always on the customer, rather than internal politics, ego gratification and other typical distractions within an organization."

2. REMIND EMPLOYEES OF THEIR MISSION. Leadership must sincerely and regularly remind workers of the reason they have jobs. A quick daily meeting can establish the tone of the workweek and be a source of inspiration. Employees have many distractions in the workplace and a constant conversational reminder will ground them in their primary cause within a company.

3. SHINE A SPOTLIGHT ON EMPLOYEES. One of the best ways to improve all-around customer service is to give employees the attention they deserve. If the workers are consistently well-trained, motivated, mentored and equipped with the proper tools to serve the clientele, they will show outstanding passion for their job and, thus, do it well.

4. RECOGNIZE OUTSTANDING SERVICE. "One of leadership's most important jobs is to honor individuals who go beyond their job descriptions and delight their customers," Cochran says. By identifying exceptional workers in a dignified manner, leadership sets the pace for other peers to follow.

5. REALIZE THAT SMART ORGANIZATIONS LEARN FROM THEIR MISTAKES. If an organization fails to deliver excellent customer service, leadership must be honest and open with both customers and employees about the mistakes that were made. Mistakes are important because they lead to innovation. Management must outline clear actions that will remove the causes of the organization's failures and then take steps to alleviate the problem.

6. CONSIDER USING A FOCUS GROUP. A focus group brings together a small, carefully selected group of people to explore perceptions about a certain idea, service, policy or product. "The power of a focus group lies in its ability to leverage multiple channels of communication and thought," Cochran says. "When you buckle down and really explore the many facets of a possible innovation to the organization, you are more able to make well thought-out decisions."

7. INFORM CUSTOMERS OF IMPROVEMENTS. When an organization improves their services, it must be communicated to the customers. They are the ones, after all, who demand the evolution. Cochran insists, "If customers don't realize that there's been an improvement, there's no improvement."





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CALENDAR

Calendar Note

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APR. 18 – 20 Environment Virginia Symposium, Lexington, Va.
Contact: spearsja@vmi.edu, www.environmentva.org, 540/464-7750

APR. 19 – 23 California Seed Association Annual Meeting, Maui, Hawaii.
Contact: csa@calseed.org, www.calseed.org, 916/441-2251

APR. 22 Fifth Annual Field Days Exposition, Nevada Nursery & Landscape Association, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: nlnfo@nevadanla.com, www.nevadanla.com, 800/645-9794

APR. 29 – MAY 1 American Society of Irrigation Consultants, San Diego, Calif.
Contact: www.asic.org, 508/763-8140

MAY 3 – 4 Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association Annual Meeting, Napa Valley, Calif. Contact: www.toca.org, 952/758-6340

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USE READER SERVICE # 28



Start Them Up

Photos: Rain Bird

Successfully integrate irrigation start-ups into your service mix.

In regions that experience months of cold temperatures, proper irrigation maintenance includes shutting the system down for the winter and starting it back up again in the spring. Even in southern states, a spring checkup keeps the system properly maintained and in solid working order. Contractors not inspecting clients' irrigation systems and reviewing operational procedures are missing out on a highly profitable service offering, says Steven Krieger, president of Water-Tech Irrigation, St. Louis, Mo.

SPRING INTO ACTION. Every April and May, contractors appear in homeowners' yards to wake irrigation systems out of dormancy and ready them for the summer months. "It's basically taking the system out of hibernation," says Jeff Carowitz, vice president of marketing, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif.

Starting in April, Eric Guttenberg, owner of Traverse Outdoor in Traverse City, Mich., has service specialists visit irrigation clients. In this northern state, a properly maintained irrigation system has been flushed of its water for the winter,

by heather wood



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so it's up to Guttenberg's crews to get the water flowing again.

The start-up procedure Traverse Outdoor follows depends on whether the system is linked to a pump from a lake or a domestic water supply. Lake pumps need to be reinstalled in the spring, however, whereas systems fed from well or city water sources only need to be turned on, usually from the basement, Guttenberg says.

Pressurizing the system's main line is another step. Carowitz advises to slowly let air into the system. "If you don't, you could get a surge of pressure that could damage the components," he says. Next, perform a zone-by-zone inspection of the system to identify any damage caused by snow plows or other factors during the winter, he adds.

In the southern U.S., where winter freeze is less of a factor, a spring check-up addresses any system glitches. Some irrigation systems are shut down in the winter due to dormant



lawns, however, they are not flushed of their water. Service those systems in the spring, too, Carowitz says.

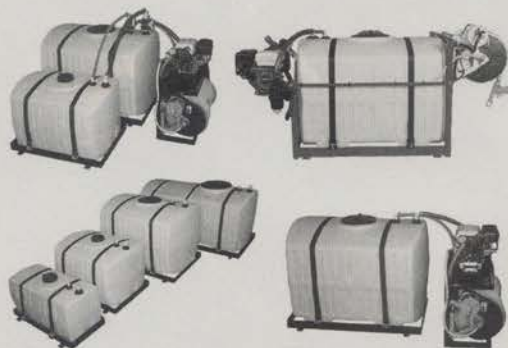
SERVICING PAYS. Jim Lewis, owner of Lewis Landscape Services, Tigard,

Ore., charges \$55 per system for winterization and \$65 for a spring start-up, which includes a zone-by-zone inspection. Repair work, not including materials, costs \$90 for the first hour and \$65 for each additional hour.

Lewis gains about 150 start-up accounts per year. To retain them, he offers five-year warranties on systems with the stipulation that his crews perform the start-ups and shut-downs. He has two three-man crews for this.

This year, in an attempt to make his maintenance service more efficient, Lewis will have a full-time repair technician, as opposed to a \$65 per hour part-timer. Repairs are the profitable part of the business and he expects to be even more successful with a full-time technician on staff.

Guttenberg's technicians are full-timers who work about 55 hours per week for about 33 weeks per year. He uses six technicians for winterizing, five for start-ups and three on staff for summer maintenance and repairs.



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USE READER SERVICE # 30



tools of the trade

Eric Guttenberg doesn't want his technicians to get caught at a service stop without the proper equipment. "Each service vehicle is fully stocked when the technician goes out," says the president of Traverse Outdoor, Traverse City, Mich., adding these extra parts include sprinkler heads, fittings, controller valves and pipes, should the need arise for a replacement on an irrigation system. Technicians then keep track of the remaining equipment after jobs, Guttenberg says, so anything can be found in the truck.

To make things easier for the technician performing start-ups, Jeff Carowitz recommends a service employee carry a remote control. "A remote control reduces the wear and tear on an employee," says the vice president of marketing at Hunter. This keeps the technician from walking back and forth from the con-

troller to check sprinkler heads. This saves the technician time, which is precious when there are several start-ups scheduled and little time to do them.

Carowitz also recommends other irrigation tools that may be needed from time to time. For example, simple hand tools are helpful, he says. In addition, shovels, compactors, valve keys and spare parts can come into play at some point and should be carried just in case, he says.

Both Carowitz and Guttenberg say most irrigation system components are compatible with other brands. There are times when the brand of a spare part that is carried is different than the brand of an installed system. Many manufacturers offer equivalency charts so technicians can see which parts are compatible, Carowitz says.

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Guttenberg sees benefits in spring irrigation maintenance services and makes money doing it. Servicing systems generates profit because it is a labor-based service, he adds, and rates generally are higher for service than for installation.

Despite the almost guaranteed profit from servicing irrigation systems, Guttenberg says many companies in his region offer installation but not servicing. This is likely because they lack the employees, he says. He's not complaining, though. It means more potential work for his firm.

Companies who offer only installation shouldn't jump into offering maintenance, Carowitz warns. "If you offer this service, be prepared not only for start-ups but also for other services and problems that come up," he says. "Once you are in the service business, be ready for that commitment."

The crew Lewis hired six years ago had experience in the industry and, at that time, knew more than he did

about the trade. "Bringing experienced employees into the business is a big, big part of it," he says. "I learned from employees who have been doing it a long time."

Lewis' annual revenue from residential start-ups has grown to about \$10,000, with an additional \$8,000 for fall shut-downs. These numbers increase each year, he says.

TOO FEW HANDS. Guttenberg's company does about twice as many winterizations as start-ups. "Everyone needs their systems turned on at the end of April," he says. "After a few nice weekends, people turn them on themselves. There are so many people to get to in that small window that you won't get to everyone." Plus, winterization is "inexpensive insurance" for the customers because if any problems arise in the spring, they are fixed for free, he says.

Guttenberg continues to lure new service customers because servicing

irrigation systems is the most profitable aspect of his landscaping and irrigation business. Because of this, he markets it more than the other services. He advertises through direct mailers and television, radio and *Yellow Pages* ads. He also pushes for continued education of his crews.

Like Traverse Outdoor, irrigation is part of Lewis' business. He markets the service with door hangers and upsells with his landscaping customers to make them aware of the irrigation services he offers. He also gets a lot of mileage out of Internet advertising.

Krieger picks up as many as 200 new customers per year, and says many of those are former customers of competitors who have become unhappy with their service. "We determine what the problem is and correct it," he says.

The company offers solid service, and they don't need to rely on giveaways or specials, Krieger says, reputation brings in the most business. **LL**

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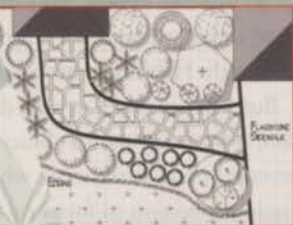
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USE READER SERVICE # 35

by nicole wisniewski

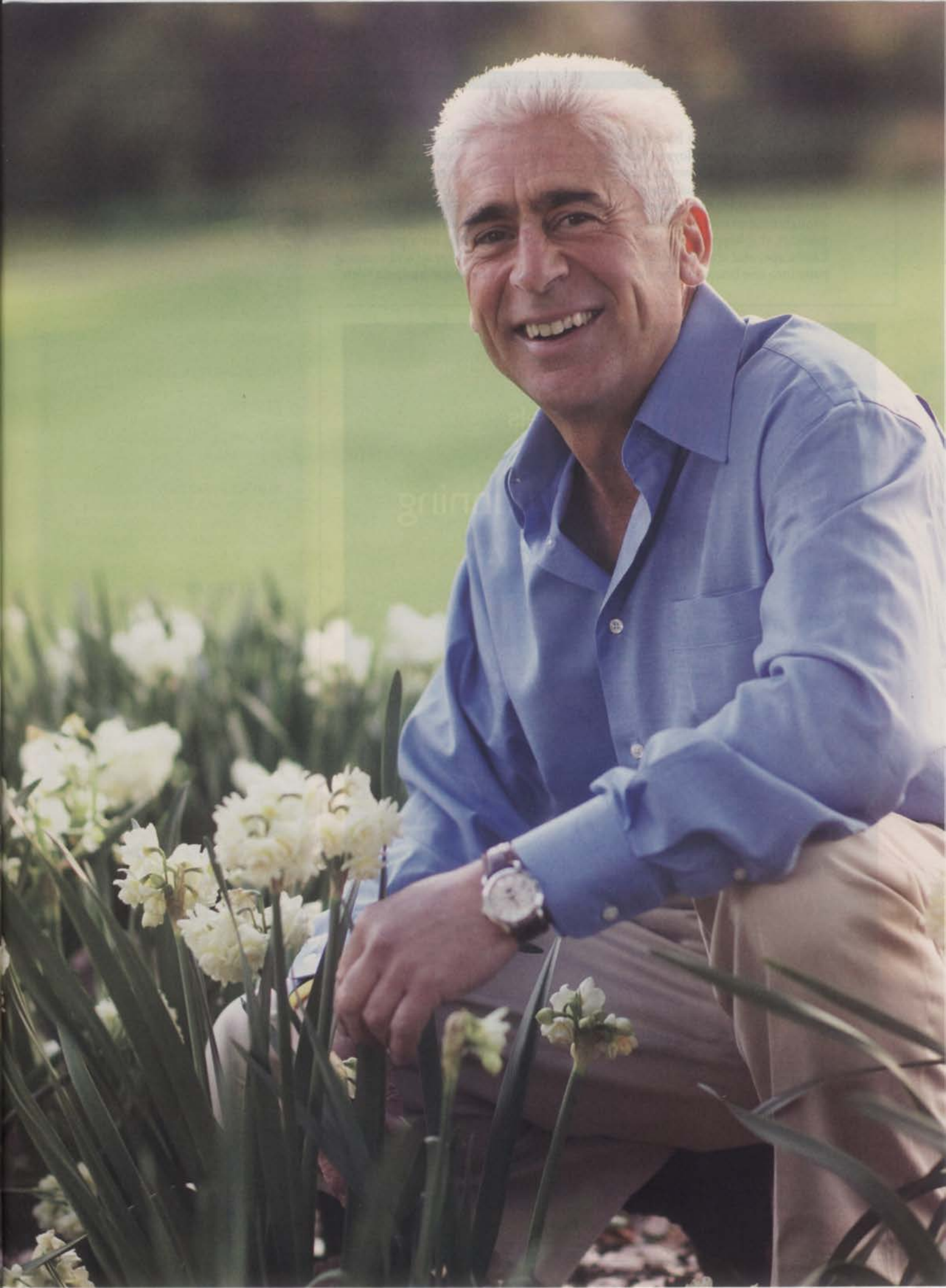
Work Small, Think Big

Successful business owner John Gachina has learned to trust his people, let go of the day-to-day and run his business.

Photos: David Sandberg

Forget for a moment that Gachina Landscape Management is a \$15-million company. John Gachina, president of the Menlo Park, Calif.-based company, is a landscape contractor just like you. He started the business from scratch and has had his fair share of ups and downs. He's micromanaged his people. He's pushed them too hard. He's moved too fast. He hasn't moved fast enough. He's made mistakes.

But what makes Gachina different, and where you can learn something from him, is by studying his ability to let go. He took a hard, honest look at his own strengths and weaknesses when he started the business in 1988, and made the conscious decision to focus on his strength, which was selling work, and hired people to entrust his weaknesses, such as operations and accounting. Sure, passing on these responsibilities and letting people make mistakes is easier said than done, but Gachina's formula of promoting from within has also had the double benefit of building employee loyalty, making seeking out labor less of an issue. In fact, his employees responded to an anonymous survey recently that helped rank the business the 33rd Best Place to Work in San Francisco.



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But big growth can have its toll on not only your employees, but your customers as well. However, the beauty of focusing on your business is that you can recognize these changes in enough time to correct problems. Last summer, this happened to Gachina Landscape, and after splitting the company into five branches, the business is

benefiting from the best of both worlds – big business benefits mixed with small company attention to detail.

STARTING OFF RIGHT. With 13 years of experience behind him, including working for a golf course, a maintenance company and running a previous landscape business with

a partner, Gachina had the luxury of learning from previous mistakes he made, as well as how other green industry business owners he worked

gachina landscape management

OWNER/PRESIDENT: John Gachina

HEADQUARTERS: Menlo Park, Calif.

FOUNDED: 1988

EMPLOYEES: 260 at peak season; 90 percent Hispanic workers

SERVICE BREAKOUT: 62 percent maintenance/mowing, 26 percent installation only/enhancements (no design), 6 percent irrigation services, 6 percent tree and annual color services.

CLIENT BREAKOUT: 60 percent commercial (office parks, hospitals, educational facilities, etc.), 32 percent commercial residential (condominiums, apartment buildings, etc.), 7 percent government/municipal and 1 percent golf course.

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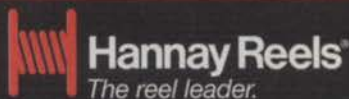
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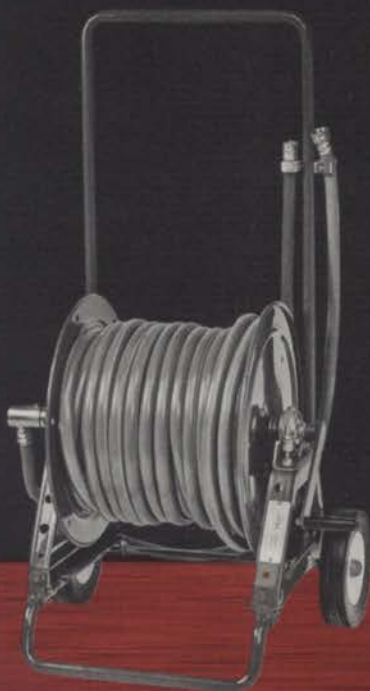
Check out the April issue online for more information on Gachina Landscape Management, including its safety program.

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with operated. Instead of starting Gachina Landscape Management as a one-man show like many contractors do, Gachina took a look at his strengths and weaknesses and realized he needed help. Before work was sold, he hired two people – one to set up business systems and accounting and the other to manage operations. “We got organized, and when we opened our doors, I had two employees and no business,” Gachina says. “So I had to do my job and get us some work, while the other two prepared their departments for the next step.”

He afforded this strategy with a combination of the money he received when his old business partner bought him out combined with a \$100,000 bank loan he was able to secure to get his business off of the ground.

Hiring people before finding work was important to Gachina, who realized he didn't want to be doing the work all day, and getting the estimates done and returning phone calls at night – a seemingly miserable way to end up, in his opinion. “I went through a time in my previous business when I believed no one could do it as good as I could,” he says. “But I made myself crazy. I realized I wasn't getting anywhere because I couldn't do it all. I knew I had to give people opportunities and that I had to trust them. It's a big risk. And mistakes happen – some are expensive in dollars and reputation and that reflects on me. We just do our best to fix them when they happen. All I ask is that people own up to their mistakes and help fix them.”

The company culture of promoting employees from within started from the beginning, according to Will Rogers, the company's regional director. Rogers, who's been with the business for 14 years, started with Gachina Landscape as an account manager, becoming construction manager within the first year and then general manager five years later. This is not an unusual story for the company. An investment in employee training and development breeds employee loyalty at Gachina Landscape, Rogers says. “Half of our management team came from the field,” he says. “They've broken through the glass ceiling, developed their skills and have become managers. The new employees who come in see that and know we're not dangling a carrot in front of

them that they can never reach.”

Gachina gives them the tools but employees must take the initiative to make this journey. At Gachina Landscape, new field employees are brought in at a certain level based on their skills and experience. Then they are given a list of positions and competency skill sets required to ob-

tain raises and grow in responsibility. The company's skill sets and training programs are based on the state's certification programs so as employees grow they can obtain these documents. Employees are told that in order to advance they must review this information and take ownership of

continued on page 50

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continued from page 47

their own growth. "The employee has to be interested in self development," Rogers says. "They can't come to me asking for a buck more an hour without me asking what they have learned in the last year based on the required skill sets needed to move to the next level, whether it's how to apply fertilizer or how to program an irrigation controller. Once an employee pursues this training with their crew leader and accomplishes these goals, then he or she is eligible to be promoted."

Managers are equipped with the tools to help their employees succeed in a manual the company calls the Thrive Guide, says Human Resources Director Denise Ritch. "We wanted it to be more than an employee manual," she says, adding that the guide took about 10 months to put together. "It includes policies and procedures, explains the company culture and safety procedures and is a training tool."

The company also offers regular workshops after hours for certified

landscape technician test preparation. "After the first 90 days, field workers receive a performance review," Rogers says. "Those first three months is where they can prove their skill sets. This sets off the starting point for the employee so they understand how they can advance here."

RECAPTURING A SMALL MIND-SET INTERNALLY. But even with the best programs in place, staying on top of a growing business as its needs adapt is crucial. A classic example for Gachina Landscape is in 2005 when after years of 15 to 20 percent growth, the company experienced only a 1-



percent increase. On top of that, customer retention fell below the company's usual 95 to 98 percent range to 90 percent. And, to make matters worse, a higher level of employee turnover, including some people who had been with the company for a few years and had become solid employees, made Gachina Landscape managers take notice.

"Six years ago, we branched our offices in two, so we had our main office in Menlo Park and a second in San Jose, and half the company ran out of one and half out of the other," Gachina says. "It was working fine until last summer when we realized there was too much happening at each office. Each office was so big that we were losing some efficiencies – there wasn't enough communication, we were stressing people out because they



limit winter lay-offs

Losing employees in the cool, rainy months as business slows only to have to rehire again in the spring when work picks up is a scenario many landscape contractors go through annually. To avoid this common situation, Gachina Landscape Management incorporated a leave of absence policy that allows employees to take up to 12 weeks off during the winter months.

According to John Gachina, the company's president, this program was implemented early in the company's history as a means of retaining trained employees as well as enabling some of his 90 percent Hispanic employees to visit family each year.

In the cooler months of November through February, Gachina's maintenance crews on basic routes are reduced from three to two people. As enhancements grow, more work, such as installations and planting, is becoming available during this rainy time. Enhance-

ments currently make up 30 to 35 percent of the company's work, but the plan is to grow this to 40 percent. Enhancement work is also more profitable – garnering 10 to 15 percent profitability per job vs. the 5 to 10 percent maintenance brings in – so it also benefits business growth.

Despite this continually growing supply of extra work, keeping 260 people busy when work slows can still be challenging. Though the leaves of absence are unpaid, many employees try to merge some of their accrued vacation time with the leave so this is easier for them to take, Gachina says.

The ultimate benefit is being able to maintain most workers as full-time year-round employees. Says the company's Human Resources Director Denise Ritch, "We've done a good job minimizing winter layoffs the past four years because of this program."

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were working harder than ever and not feeling good about it, and we lost a bit of work. We hit a wall."

And with the two branches the company still operated off of one company-wide profit-and-loss statement. "So performance-wise, we could look at how we were doing but it was harder to find out the specific

cause of a problem," Rogers explains.

Gachina wanted to return the business to its state from a decade earlier, when revenue was about \$4 million and the number of customers and employees was manageable.

So Gachina sat down with his management team, which includes Rogers, who was general manager at

the time, Ritch, Dee Sanders, who was operations manager at the time, and Jennifer Nix, business process engineering and headquarter staff manager, and they divided the business up into five branches that bring in \$2 and \$5 million in volume each and are all within a 30 minute drive from each other. Besides the customer and employee connection benefits, the other main reason for branching out was to create more problem-solvers in the company via branch managers. "When fixing a problem, too much burden would fall on me or John or Dee," Rogers says. "With more than 260 employees and 464 customers, we aren't close enough anymore to know what the root source of all problems are. With branches, each manager is in charge and in touch with their specific issues, having more control of problems so they can quickly fix them."

To split the company into branches, they looked at their client base and crew location – trying to maintain stability since they didn't want to

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quick tip

To improve communication with commercial customers, Gachina Landscape Management provides several of its larger accounts with an e-mail address at the company, i.e. client@gachina.com. The e-mail comes to everyone in the company who is involved with that customer, such as the sales contact, account manager, branch manager and, in some cases, the company president or regional manager. "This is easy to set up, clients love it and it keeps everyone involved in the project updated," says company President John Gachina. "It also means the client is always in contact with more than one person at Gachina. That way if one person from the team is out of the office, someone else on the team can quickly handle the customer inquiry."

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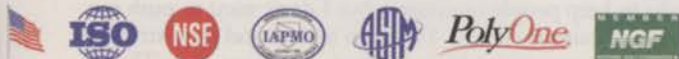
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disrupt their customer service. Though with the company's current volume four branches would have been enough, they chose to split into five branches because they would need the fifth in place within a year anyway based on the company's growth plan. "We looked at our current teams that work well together," Rogers says. "That helped draw natural lines. Then we saw where each branch fit from a volume standpoint."

The branches vary quite a bit, depending on market area and the experience of each managing individual. Each branch manager wrote three-year growth goals for each branch and those vary as well. For instance, one manager is planning on 50 percent growth, while another is set on 5 percent. Rogers and Sanders assumed new roles of regional directors, overseeing the growth of the branches as well as developing the branch managers. "It's risky because we're putting a lot of faith in very different people – some who have been with me for a long time and have a lot of experience and others who have less experience and are newer to their positions, so they need more support and guidance," Gachina says.

The trick was matching the right branch with the right manager. "We have our most experienced branch manager running our largest branch in a dense market," Rogers says. "It's a 15-mile diameter and probably one-third of our business is in that market. There is still plenty of growth there but it comes to us by referral and just answering the phone because our trucks and crews are everywhere.

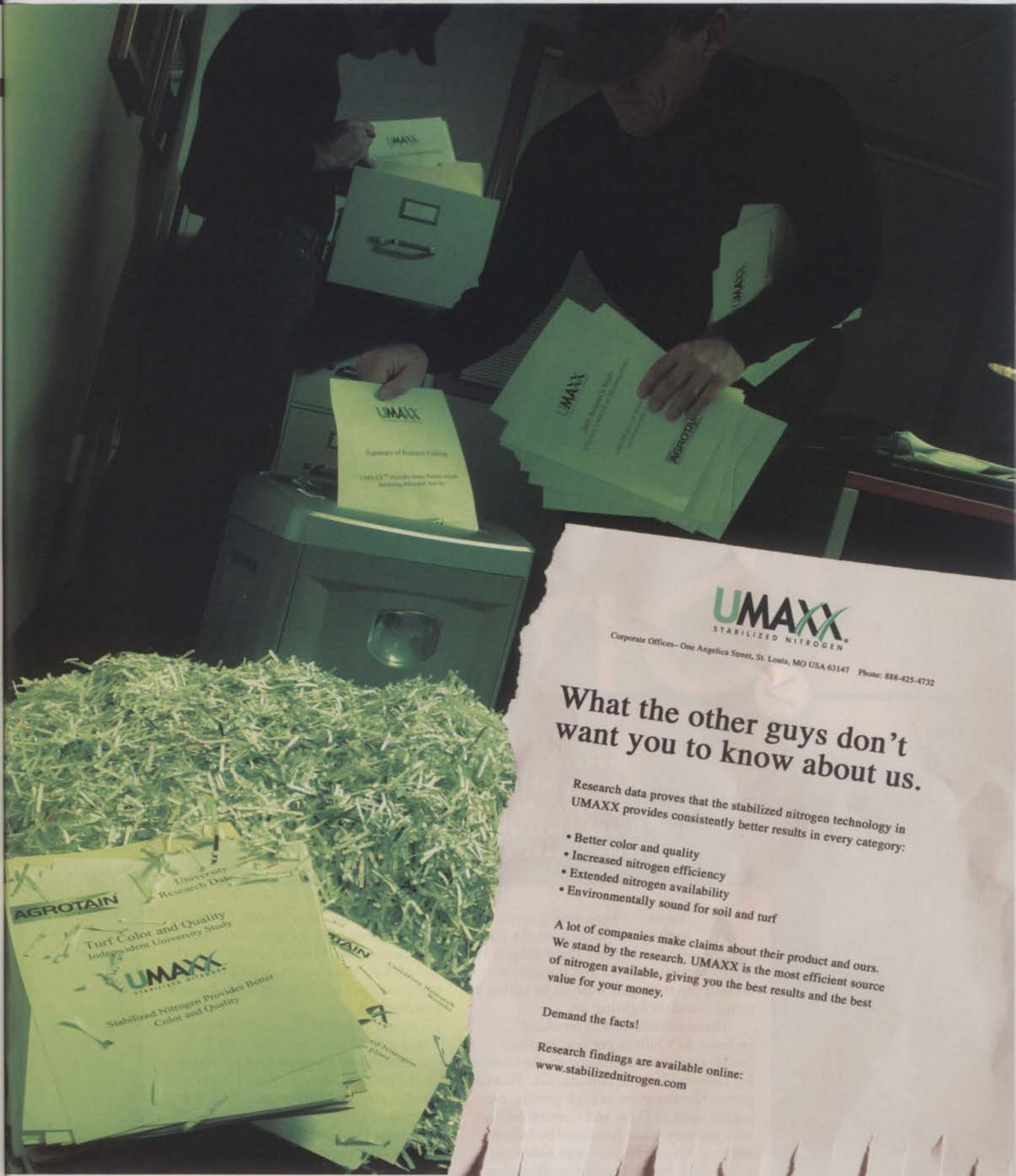
"Another area – the East Bay – is the largest geographically but the smallest in terms of density and customers," Rogers continues. "We have one of our newest branch managers in that market and he's a go-getter – he wants to pursue business, so this was the best fit for him."

The most challenging part of separating the company into five branches was dealing with real estate in the San Francisco Bay area. Since large lots, complete with offices and storage yards are not common, Gachina said they had to get creative in terms of where to kick-off branches in each region.

In addition to using creative spaces such as large fenced-in parking lots as temporary solutions, one way Gachina Landscape alleviates these issues is via onsite crews that report directly to their jobsites daily, where their equipment is also stored. However, jobs need to be large enough and require enough work to warrant a daily crew. These sites are typically 20-acre corporate campuses or Homeowners' Association properties. Twenty to 30 percent of the company's work is currently made up of this type of business.

If there are smaller jobs near these onsite locations, Gachina will also talk to the property managers there and, in some cases, has benefited from these relationships by being able to store additional equipment and have additional crews report to these sites. "It makes these property managers feel that we have additional onsite presence there and are better able to watch their properties," Gachina says.

In three to five years, Gachina plans to expand to eight total branches, with expansion mostly taking place in the East Bay and Central Coast. The goal is to continue to create additional business opportunities, become denser in the markets the company serves, and create more growth potential for its current and future employees. "As a business owner, I need excitement and change," Gachina says. "At the same time, I want to keep people motivated, but I don't want to push too hard and burn them out. I want to understand their strengths and weaknesses and achieve the best we can together. The intent on all levels is for everybody to have an opportunity for a career path. I think that's what we're doing here."



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Up In Smoke

Where there's smoke there's certainly controversy nowadays as the debate of whether business owners should prohibit cigarette smoking among their employees heats up. *Lawn & Landscape Message Board* users share their tips for dealing with cigarette breaks and workplace smoking.

Allowing or prohibiting smoking in the workplace or on the jobsite has become the management topic du jour and business owners and top managers seem to be taking a tough stand on lighting up.

The economic cost of smoking includes \$75 billion per year in direct health-care costs, according to the Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Ga. This has gotten the attention of high-profile companies, such as Pepsi and General Mills, who recently made headlines by informing employees who smoke to either quit or pay high health insurance premiums.

Even within the landscape industry, the trend is to snuff out those butts.

Marysville, Ohio-based Scotts Co. made national news with its aggressive cost-cutting campaign – Project Excellence – that included eliminating smokers from the company's payroll in an effort to control health-care costs.

In fact, *Lawn & Landscape Message Board* user Mark Sager believes it is unprofessional for employees to smoke on the jobsite. Sager, owner of Sager Landscaping in Wadsworth, Ohio, has designated company trucks as no-smoking zones. However, he wonders if it's an unrealistic expectation.

"I don't want employees smoking at all on the jobsite," Sager posts. "But I think I'm being unrealistic. I could never



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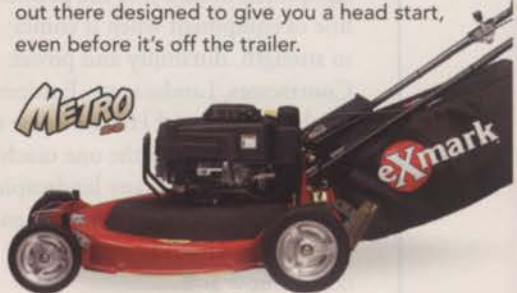
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monitor that and some of my crew leaders are smokers. When I've suggested a smoke-free workplace they were extremely unhappy."

Message board contributor Andrew Aksar, president of Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md., disagrees, adding the no-smoking policy is too stringent a rule to impose on workers in the field. "They're outside," Aksar

posts. "Cigarette smoke is no worse than that diesel exhaust blowing out of a skid steer ... just make sure they don't throw the butts around."

Message board participant Andy Novelli, Four Seasons Landscape, Washington, Pa., concurred. "Smoking is allowed," he says. "But if I find a butt, they eat it."

In the eyes of the client, smoking

on the job portrays a negative image of the landscape company, voiced some of the participating contractors. "As far as our company's smoking policy is concerned, our company displays a professional image; and smoking at residential or commercial properties does not display that," Sager says.

Landscape Kory Ballard agrees with this assessment on professionalism. "Simple, no smoking on job-sites," says the owner of Perficut Lawn & Landscape, Des Moines, Iowa. "We monitor our crews closely. If you don't – big or small – it will reflect on your image and quality over time."

"Smoking looks tacky on the job site," Ballard adds. "When I see another landscape company and their guy is standing in the front lawn smoking, I cringe."

"Most people think smoking is bad," adds Chad Stern, owner, Mowing & More, Chevy Chase, Md. "You cannot do a whole lot to change that perception. If they see you smoking they will associate you with something negative in their minds. I am sure there are lots of people who are very courteous about smoking, but that does not change public perception."

The correlation between jobsite smoking and poor work is an unfair characterization, says Sal Mortilla, owner of Landscapes Unlimited, Long Island, N.Y. In his 39 years in the industry, he says only one customer complained about workers smoking on the property. He complied with the client's wish and directed his crew to smoke in the street.

"Smoking is not a crime or a sin," Mortilla says. "It's a personal choice. Your customers have no more right to judge you for your personal choices than you do to judge them. Image projection is an absolute in any business, but when taken too far, as I see it being done, can cause a reverse effect and make you look like a phoney."

But if the overriding concern among contractors is the presence of discarded butts on jobsites, John Palasek, owner of JonKar Design Group, Yaphank, N.Y., says landscapers should focus their policies on workers picking up after themselves, regardless of whether it's a cigarette butt, a soda can or a candy wrapper.

"I smoke, and if I'm in an area where I can't simply discard the butt I just knock the head off and put the butt in my pocket, Palasek says. "Later, when I get to the truck, I put

continued on page 61, sidebar on page 60

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Smoking on the job can make the smoker susceptible to other, often more dangerous, workplace health hazards, according to the American Lung Association. Some to be aware of include:

Contaminated cigarettes. Cigarettes may actually help to carry toxic substances into the body. As a person holds and smokes a cigarette, toxic substances may enter the body through breathing, taking them in through the mouth or skin absorption. Examples of workplace chemicals that can enter the body of workers smoking contaminated cigarettes include dusts, lead, mercury and formaldehyde. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommends that cigarettes not be kept on a person in the work area and if a person must smoke their hands should be washed before smoking.

Increasing toxicity. The heat generated by burning tobacco can transform workplace chemicals into more harmful substances. An example of this type of "heat-generated" transformation is the conversion of chlorinated hydrocarbons, such as trichloroethylene, into highly toxic phosgene gas.

Increased accident rate. Smokers have twice the accident rate of nonsmokers on the job. Suggestions about the reasons for this include loss of attention, the fact that a person's hands may be busy with the activity of smoking, irritation of the eyes and coughing. Higher carbon monoxide levels caused by smoking may lower alertness and reflex speed. Smoking can also contribute to fire and explosions in occupational settings where flammable and explosive chemicals are used.

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it or them in the ashtray.

"I can't see how smoking on a jobsite, unless it's indoors, has any impact on either the job or your appearance," Palasek continues. "With all the engine exhaust and dust created by our equipment, I hardly think that a cigarette would make that much of a difference. If your issue is with your guys throwing butts on clients' properties, then that has more to do with them being slobs than with them being smokers. They'd be just as likely to discard a candy wrapper as a cigarette butt."

Mortilla says jobsite smoking and project quality is an apple and oranges sort of comparison. "How does it affect professionalism or are we talking about the projection of a professional image?" he asks. "I would argue that image is projected in the quality of your work."

Stern adds, "I am sensitive to the judgements people make about others' character. If someone can project


professionalism with a cigarette in his mouth, more power to him."

Aksar agrees and adds cigarette butts may be the scapegoat for contractors frustrated with untidy crews. "Is someone smoking in the outdoors who picks up his butts any different than someone who munches on a big bag of cheese puffs all day long?" he asks. "Heck, my guys have a nasty habit of leaving their morning coffee cups laying on the ground. It drives me up the wall."

If public perception is the main issue, Chuck Twist says the ban should include all tobacco products, including smokeless. "I think it looks bad to be dipping and spitting in view of a customer," says Twist, the president of TNT Landscaping and H.O.L.A. Labor Consultants, Stillwater, Okla. "I also think it looks bad to be sucking and puffing in view of a customer. Like it or not, people will judge you."

College student Jeff Patterson says for the past three summers he worked

for a party rental company, which he considered analogous to the work schedule of a landscape company. He offered an employees perspective to the forum. "I was the only guy who didn't smoke on the crew," Patterson posts. "I hated the fact that the other guys smoked in the trucks because I didn't want to breathe it. From a smoking employee's standpoint, being able to smoke in the trucks reduced the urge to smoke on the jobsite."

"For longer jobs, the rule was don't leave your butts on the ground," Patterson adds. "Other than butts left on the ground, customers could have cared less that the guys were smoking as long as it wasn't inside the house. The guys who smoked had no problem cleaning up after themselves." 

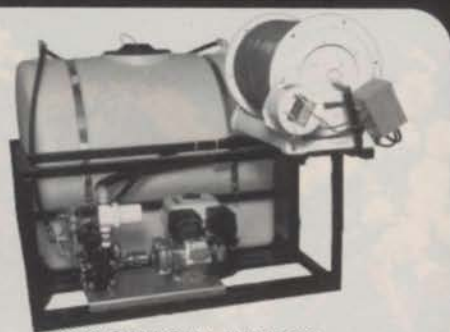
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Enhancing Efficiency

Despite some challenges lawn care operators faced in 2005, they are proceeding into 2006 armed for growth.

by nicole wisniewski

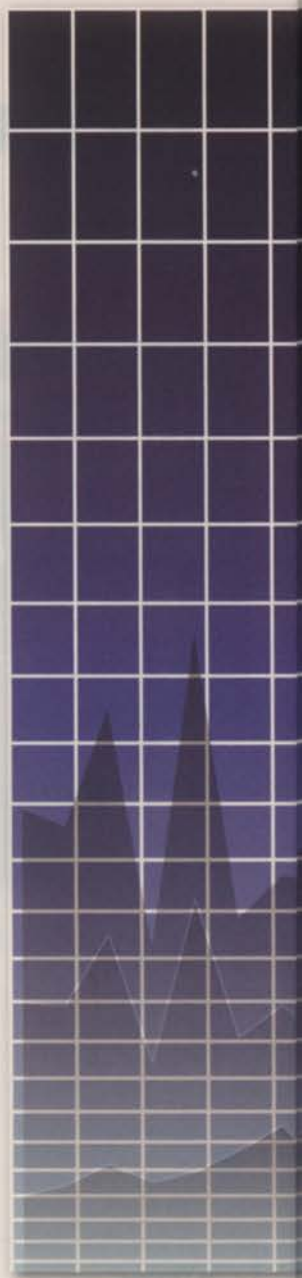
When reviewing the past year's pros and cons and looking into 2006's success potential, most industry professionals in the chemical lawn care business are quoting higher growth but lower profit margins.

In fact, approximately 60 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey, conducted by Insight Express, said their chemical lawn care business increased in 2005. But the past few years have also brought a handful of challenges, such as costs rising in the double-digits. For lawn care operators, the theme this year seems bittersweet – the benefit of good growth is only overshadowed by continually increasing fuel, fertilizer, insurance and other business expenses, meaning margins aren't as good as expected. Therefore, balancing rising prices with improved efficiency and new business opportunities and marketing methods is the game plan for most lawn care businesses in 2006.

THE GROWTH STATE. The good news is the lawn care universe continues to expand, meaning the service is still highly requested among consumers. This should continue as the Baby Boomers age and "demand more Do-It-For-Me vs. Do-It-Yourself services," says Mike Daly, director of marketing, turf and ornamental, Bayer Environmental Science, Research Triangle Park, N.C.

Pesticide manufacturers say growth in the industry in general has been between 4 to 6 percent each year. "And we're just on the edge of the Baby Boomers starting to retire so you're seeing an increase in people desiring better outdoor spaces and thinking more about how they can improve the quality of their lawns," says Steve Stansell, market manager for lawn, landscape and aquatics, Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, N.C.

Bob Yarborough, business manager, turf and ornamental, Advan LLC, Roswell, Ga., agrees. "As the Baby Boomers retire and get second homes in Florida for the winter, they don't want to mow the grass or go back regularly to maintain their place up north," he says. "So you're going to see more of these people turning over their places to the lawn care service industry."





In fact, some research reports predict an impressive doubling in the number of prospective lawn care customers in the marketplace. "The industry had 25 million potential lawn care customers in 2004, but with these changes in the market research is predicting we will have 52 million potential customers by 2014," explains Terry Kurth, director of development, Weed Man USA, Middleton, Wis.

When confirming the 2006 *Lawn*

& *Landscape* figures with LCOs from across the United States, double-digit growth numbers seem realistic in many markets. For instance, Kurth says his Midwest business grew 37 percent in 2005, and he's planning 25 to 30 percent growth this year.

In the Southern U.S. markets, lawn care operators are experiencing an average 10-plus percent growth, reports Kathie Kalmowitz, market development specialist, BASF, Raleigh, N.C.

Others experienced challenges based on their specific market difficulties. Though he budgeted for 10-percent growth, Tim Doppel, president, Atwood Lawncare, Sterling Heights, Mich., says he only grew about 5 percent in 2005, and he's lowered his expectations for 2006 to be about the same. "We had double-digit growth for 10 years, so for us not to be there was bad," says Doppel, blaming the Michigan economy for some of his loss



because it was hit hard by the layoffs in the automobile industry.

On the other side of the country, Gavin Vitt, co-owner, Lawn Doctor, Colorado Springs, Colo., had a flat 2005 business year due to the 14,000 job cuts in the area's technology industry over the past five years, as well as the continued implementation of watering restrictions despite the fact that drought was less of a problem. "We lost a quarter of our customers from the job cuts alone," says Vitt, who is planning for about 5 percent growth this year.

Though growth numbers run the gamut based on the company and its local economy, not many LCOs are reporting decreases and "the general feeling of the industry is good," says Mark Urbanowski, senior marketing specialist, turf, ornamental and technical products, Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind.

Kalmowitz agrees: "Though economists worry about the housing market and we all wonder when the bubble will burst, growth has been tremendous."

"LCOs just have to stay ahead of the game," Urbanowski adds.

THE CHALLENGES. Though LCOs boast an average 27.06 percent profit in their chemical lawn care divisions, 43.3 percent of respondents say this isn't higher than other services they offer. Part of this can be attributed to the escalating costs of doing business.

All LCOs say the rising cost of fuel has been and will continue to be a major concern, and 24.5 percent of survey respondents say it's the most challenging issue facing their businesses. Many report dramatic increases since last year's devastating hurricane season, which raised gas prices across the country. Though prices came down a bit in the fall, they were at their peak during the busy season and did not return to pre-hurricane levels in late 2005 and into this year. For example, Vitt says his fuel cost increase in 2005 was more than 25 percent.

The hardest part about this jump was that many LCOs sold their 2005

services in November of 2004 at a set price based on fuel cost expectations, and no one predicted them to jump as much as they did.

In addition, chemical costs, specifically fertilizer, also hit LCOs hard in 2005 and are still increasing into 2006. LCOs report a range of increases for fertilizer – all in the double digits. Phil Fogarty, master franchiser for Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York, Weed Man USA, and owner, Crowley's Vegetation Control, Euclid, Ohio, says fertilizer prices went up a total of 35 percent in the last 18 months for his company. Doppel's fertilizer costs went up 17 to 18 percent in 2005 and John Buechner, director of technical services, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J., says his fertilizer prices increased 10 percent in 2005 and 20 percent in January of this year. When looking at the typical cost of fertilizer for his business over the years, Kurth says compared to two years ago, fertilizer prices are up 50 percent. "Fertilizer prices have gone up four times since the fall of 2004," he says.

Herbicide costs also increased approximately 5 to 6 percent, according to Fogarty. For 2006, Kurth is seeing a 10 percent increase in herbicides, which he says is because some herbicides have an oil-based carrier.

When it comes to chemical costs, Bob West, director of marketing, LE-SCO, Cleveland, Ohio, agrees that the average fertilizer price increase was 15 to 20 percent in 2005 and another 15 to 20 percent in 2006.

But these prices may not continue increasing for long, West adds. "Urea is the driver for fertilizer and is typically on a 10-year cycle of highs and lows," he says. "Fertilizer prices could soften at the end of this year and into next year."

In terms of business expenses, Fogarty reports a health care increase of approximately 12 percent and a liability and fleet insurance hike of less than 5 percent.

Marketing costs also continue to climb, mainly because of continued telemarketing restrictions. Eighty percent of the people who live in Kurth's



What is the most challenging issue facing your chemical lawn care service in 2006?

ISSUE	% OF LCOs
Increasing fuel prices	24.5%
Pesticide restrictions/government regulations	18.8%
Increasing fertilizer prices	17.1%
Lack of qualified technicians	16.4%
The economy	10.7%
No time to train technicians properly	6%
Other*	5.7%
Telemarketing restrictions	.7%

*Other includes pressures from competition and weather-related concerns.

Which marketing/sales tactic makes up the most of your efforts in terms of selling chemical lawn care services?

MARKETING METHOD	% OF LCOs
Other*	49.7%
Advertising (Yellow Pages, newspapers, etc.)	25.5%
Direct Mail	22.5%
Telemarketing	2.3%

*Other includes word-of-mouth, direct client contact and door-to-door sales.

Source: Lawn & Landscape via Insight Express

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USE READER SERVICE # 51

service area are on the Do-Not-Call List. Fogarty isn't doing any better – he's only able to telemarket to 23 percent of his local population. He predicts telemarketing will be totally out of the picture in a year or two.

Comparing this year's *Lawn & Landscape* survey to one conducted in 2004, fewer people use telemarketing as a sales tactic – from 3.7 percent of respondents to 2.3 percent. As a result, LCOs are experimenting with other forms of marketing, including direct mail and door-to-door sales, where applicable. The survey reports that advertising in the *Yellow Pages*, newspapers, etc., decreased from 56.3 to 25.5 percent, showing that LCOs don't consider it an effective replacement to telemarketing. But direct mail increased from 7.9 to 22.5 percent and other methods increased dramatically from 15.2 to 49.7 percent, revealing that LCOs need to become more creative to obtain new customers. Other marketing methods mentioned included word-

of-mouth, direct customer contact and door-to-door sales.

But these varied marketing techniques come with a price. "This is the first year we're not using telemarketing," Doppel says. "As a result, getting new accounts has become more expensive and time consuming. We're budgeting that it'll be about 15 percent more expensive to get a new account. We're experimenting with several new systems like door-to-door sales, which isn't restricted too much in our area, this year to see what works best for us."

"Twenty five years ago, we could probably get a new customer for \$40 to \$50," Kurth adds. "Now if I can get one for \$90 to \$100, I'm happy."

THE SOLUTIONS. With all of these increases, making a profit can seem daunting. Many LCOs have had to raise prices to make ends meet, with many trying not to exceed 5 percent. "That's as much as we dare go up," says Fogarty, realizing his customers are experienc-

ing the same fuel and cost-of-living increases he is.

Typically, Kurth has to raise prices 2 to 3 percent per year, but he increased that to 5 percent this year to cover some of his costs. Doppel quotes a similar figure. "We've tried to keep our average increase to 5 percent, but this year we've been more specific and looked up each individual account and if they are underpriced, we are raising them more than 5 percent," he says. "I'm concerned it may not be enough."

Vitt says an every other year increase of about 6 percent is typical for his company. They try to do this in 3-percent increments each year, one year for new customers and the next for current customers to make it easier for all clients to swallow.

To help improve some efficiencies in terms of pricing, more contractors are moving toward prepay discounts to encourage early cashflow, as well as including automatic renewals in their contracts to increase their customer

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1.00% Sulfur (S)	8.00%
IRON (Fe) Total	
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focus on purchasing

Despite rising costs, lawn care operators responding to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey said they spent an average of \$14,232.68 on pesticide expenditures in 2005 and 75.2 percent said they expect this to increase in 2006.

"We purchase our pesticides and lawn care equipment based on expected need and due to wear and growth," explains Tim Doppel, president, Atwood Lawncare, Sterling Heights, Mich. "Purchases this year are no different than in years past. You have to have equipment and products to do business, regardless of the pressures."

According to the research, 22.5 percent said their expenditures would be the same this year as last year and 2.3 percent said they would decrease.

Phil Fogarty had a couple of flat years in terms of spending, specifically on equipment, but said he's

doubling what he spent in the past couple of years in 2006. "Over a period of time, it's natural that you grow and spend more to replace and add equipment and buy more product."

Only a few lawn care operators said they were restraining from buying lawn care equipment, but this didn't seem to affect their product purchasing.

When asked what three factors most influence their pesticide purchasing decisions, 66.4 percent of survey respondents said cost, 34.6 percent said dealer suggestions/salesperson recommendations and 32.2 percent said supplier location. Closely trailing and tied at 30.5 percent each were efficacy and safety, while 27.2 percent of respondents said manufacturer reputation swayed their buying decisions and 22.5 percent said technical support for the product is what ranked as a top priority to them.

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But with double-digit increases in expenses and raising prices only in the single digits, LCOs still have to do more than this to cover these rising rates. That's where improving efficiencies comes into play.

More LCOs are starting to incorporate advanced technologies, particularly GPS systems, into their businesses to increase productivity and cut costs. The reason Kurth implemented GPS systems into his company's trucks is because of the wasted fuel being used when his technicians would let their trucks idle, sometimes on to boot, at jobsites while they were working. "We monitor this now with the GPS system and saw a \$10 to \$20 savings per truck per week, which for us could have been \$80 to \$100 a week wasted if we didn't do anything about it," he says.

Another trend to increase efficiency is through the use of combination products – doing two things at once to maximize fuel and labor costs. With the technology advancing as quickly as it is, Kalmowitz says LCOs may even see more products erupting onto the scene with more than one active ingredient on fertilizer, so they can take care of three lawn problems at once.

For this reason, granular products continue to grow in popularity. "We'll never lose the need to spray," Yarborough says, "but gone are the days of the big tanker spray trucks and hoses. Everyone wants to spread granular products now – they are so much more

convenient to store and carry on a truck and you can take care of more than one thing at a time using them."

One more way to cut down on

control is already wrong. It's about the customer's expectation vs. what you are going to deliver. The smart lawn and landscape company doesn't walk in there with the perfect solution for a customer's backyard. They evolve with the landscape and delight customers with continued, professional service."

Stansell agrees, adding that he believes customer communication will continue to improve as well in coming years. "You have to set customer expectations properly," he explains. "And I can't help but think LCOs will start looking at new technologies, such as e-mail, when it comes to the best and most efficient way to communicate with their customers about the services they are providing. The adoption of this could be slow, but I think it'll be big down the road."

Training is another area LCOs are continually trying to improve for the sole purpose of ensuring their technicians are doing the job right the first time and don't incur the added expense of revisiting properties to fix problems, Kurth says.

Despite rising business costs and the adaptation required to ensure a profit at the end of the day as a result of these costs, LCOs maintain a positive outlook. "Sure, there are lots of changes happening in the lawn care industry right now, but people are settling into these changes and I hear a lot of very optimistic people out there and that they've got good plans to move forward," Fogarty says. "The economy is slowing down a bit – this gives us a chance to catch our breath and get a better handle on staffing. I think we're at a good place. Best of all, the pendulum is swinging back to the middle where we can operate efficiently." ■

What were your approximate annual pesticide expenditures for 2005?

AMOUNT	% OF LCOs
Less than \$2,000	22%
\$2,001 to \$5,000	27.1%
\$5,001 to \$7,500	13.7%
\$7,501 to \$10,000	7.9%
\$10,001 to \$20,000	10.7%
\$20,001 to \$50,000	10.4%
More than \$50,000	8.2%

When do you make the majority of your pesticide purchases?

TIME OF YEAR	% OF LCOs
Year-round/As Needed	41.9%
Quarter 2 (April-June)	28.9%
Quarter 1 (January-March)	18.8%
Quarter 4 (October-December)	5.7%
Quarter 3 (July-September)	4.7%

Do you prefer to use liquid or granular applications?

APPLICATION TYPE	% OF LCOs
Both, but more granular than liquid	41.3%
Both, but more liquid than granular	19.5%
All Granular	17.1%
An equal mix of both	14.8%
All Liquid	7.4%

Source: Lawn & Landscape via Insight Express

labor and fuel costs is by doing everything possible to decrease customer callbacks, Urbanowski says. Some ideas include using products with longer efficacy and making accurate promises to customers. "If you provide the customer with an accurate percentage of control vs. promising a total elimination of the pest or weed, that should reduce your amount of complaints."

"You can only control diseases, insects and weeds – you don't eliminate them; they are still there," Daly says. "Anyone who guarantees 100-percent

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Seeking New Opportunities

LCOs explore additional revenue-breeding services to garner growth from their current customers.

by nicole wisniewski

Offering customers more service options to grow business in new ways is a continuing trend in the chemical lawn care industry.

"Niche products still have a place in all companies' portfolios," explains Kathie Kalmowitz, market development specialist, BASF, Raleigh, N.C.

But what service areas are the most profitable for lawn care operators

(LCOs) to invest in and explore? LCOs from across the country, as well as pesticide manufacturers and suppliers, share their insight.

GRUBS, MOLES and FIRE ANTS.

Tim Doppel, president, Atwood Lawncare, Sterling Heights, Mich., says his most profitable service by far is grub control due to the perceived need for it by his customers as well as the company's ability to sell it at a good price. "We price our extras aggressively

because of the rising pressures of the cost of doing business," he says. "With my basic program, I'm not as profitable as I was in the past because I can't price the service too high or I'll be out of the market, so I definitely make more margins on the add-ons. And customers don't question the cost as much if they know it's something they need."

In addition to grub control, LCOs are continually pointing to mole control as a profitable add-on service. This is particularly attractive in residential



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developments with wooded lots, which is where moles tend to surface, explains Terry Kurth, director of development, Weed Man USA, Middleton, Wis. "And it's not the grubs they are after – it's earthworms, a mole's biggest food source," he says, adding that mole control does require two to three visits to a client's site. "You have to go in and check out where they are first – you can't just treat them and go. It's not a \$40 application – it's more like a \$150 application."

A similar service – perimeter pest control – is Colorado Springs, Colo.-based Lawn Doctor's third most profitable service, according to co-owner Gavin Vitt.

While many Northern U.S. clients want their lawn to be free of grubs and many residential clients with wooded lots want LCOs to get ride of their moles, Southern U.S. clients want to "take back control of their yards from fire ants," says Mike Daly, director of marketing, turf and ornamental, Bayer

Environmental Science, Research Triangle Park, N.C.

To treat these pests, which have painful stings and are most terrifying to those homeowners who are allergic to them, treating them preventively with proven products is becoming more popular, Kalmowitz says.

DISEASE CONTROL. When looking at unattractive spots of differing sizes and colors on their lawns, homeowners typically can't tell brown patch from dollar spot – they just want their lush green lawn back.

And when a disease invades turf and the conditions are just right, encouraging that disease to spread, there is a risk of losing the entire lawn, Kalmowitz points out. "I've seen this in the transition zone and the South where a disease has taken control and lawns had to be completely reseeded or resodded," she says.

As a result, fungicide services are slowly growing in some areas of the country. As Daly points out, "applications of fungicides on home lawns are up. Those who are offering the service are doing so in two ways – they add it on and offer it separately, knowing how to present it to their customers, or they incorporate it into their current program and sell it with the entire lawn care service package."

However, some LCOs still have a hard time getting their clients to buy into the service. "Disease control is a service with expensive material that has to be repeated and varied to prevent resistance to the disease," shares Phil Fogarty, master franchiser for Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York, Weed Man USA, and owner, Crowley's Vegetation Control, Euclid, Ohio. "It seems to make sense that this would work but so far it hasn't fit into the realm of what we do."

John Buechner, director of technical services, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J., feels disease control is a hard service to guarantee. "Do they work? Yes. Do customers always see the results? No," he says. "You often have to apply the

Which one of your chemical lawn care services grew the fastest in 2005 and which chemical lawn care service do you expect to grow the fastest in 2006?

SERVICE	% of LCOs 2005	% of LCOs 2006
Fertilization plus herbicide treatments	45.6%	46%
Weed Control	18.1%	19.8%
Fertilization plus insecticide treatments	11.9%	11.1%
Fertilization Only	9.8%	6.7%
Insect Control	5.2%	6%
Other*	5.2%	4.4%
Fungicide Treatments	3.1%	4.7%
PGR Treatments	1%	1.3%

*Other includes IPM treatments, mole control, six-application lawn program, organic treatments and fruit eliminator.

Of your total pesticide application sales revenue, what percent is generated from which type of clients?

CLIENT TYPE	% OF LCOs
Residential	59.51%
Commercial	27.90%
Multi-Family	7.91%
Municipal	2.35%
Other*	2.33%

*Other not specified.

Base on total pesticide application revenue, what percent of your pesticide business is from the following service area?

SERVICE AREA	% OF LCOs
Turf	73.53%
Ornamental	14.97%
Tree	8.99%
Other*	2.50%

*Other not specified.

Source: Lawn & Landscape via Insight Express



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product several times, and quite often the cost of the program can be the same as a year-long lawn care program so customers don't understand."

Because of this, pesticide manufacturers are working to help educate LCOs on the service in order to simplify its sale and growth. "It's our responsibility to show LCOs how they need to integrate this into their spring/summer programs," Kalmowitz says. "We want to do this so LCOs can build a general understanding with the customer so they comprehend that fungicides help build healthy turf that can withstand the stress of high heat and drought so it won't need to be replaced every year. We need to show them how to build a more cost-effective program and one that doesn't give customers sticker shock."

REVIVE AND DECELERATE. In dry areas of the country, a new service some are implementing is called a revive treatment, which is using a wetting agent to reinvigorate the turf and help it hold water better. This has worked well for Vitt, who added the service in 2005. "I put some fliers in a service bulletin we send out to advertise the service for the hot summer months," he says. "So far, it's working well. Customers who want it fully believe in it; others are skeptical. It'll be our job this year to continue to educate customers about the service."

Vitt also started offering plant growth regulator (PGR) treatments in 2005. He applied the product once a month from May through September. "They kept the turf low, slowed the growth and resulted in less clippings," Vitt says, adding that he's continuing with the service in 2006.

As the cost of disposing of grass clippings continues to increase, PGRs will become an even more valuable tool for LCOs to have in their product arsenals, agrees Steve Stansell, market manager for lawn, landscape and aquatic, Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, N.C. "They are good products - they work well," he says. "PGRs do have to be trial-and-errored for LCOs to understand how they work with the grass species they treat and



how to position them in their service mix. I think the continued education of what this product accomplishes is also crucial - it reduces stress on grass, enables it to form a thicker root and delivers a whole lot healthier turf."

BEYOND TURF. With invasive tree insects like the Emerald Ash Borer stirring up a scare in areas like Michigan and Indiana, one can't deny the fact that this presents LCOs with a service opportunity - tree and ornamental care, which includes tree spraying, deep root fertilization and micro and macro injection treatments.

"Where there is awareness, there is opportunity," explains Mark Urbanowski, senior marketing specialist, turf, ornamental and technical products, Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind.

In fact, Colorado's drought has contributed to the spread of the Ips and mountain pine beetles on Vitt's customers' trees over the past five years. "It's to the point where the local papers are always doing editorials about them and how much damage the drought has done - this is supplemental advertising for us and is helping us push the service," says Vitt, adding that his tree care service is fairly profitable and efficient. "Our tree and shrub service has

grown leaps and bounds as a result of this over the last five years; it grew from \$100,000 to \$105,000 in 2005."

In addition to recent insect bouts that are stirring up new interest in tree care services, there is also a higher value placed on trees, making them special to customers. "When a lawn dies, it takes four weeks to replace, but when an 80-foot tree dies, it takes 40 years to replace," Daly says. "There is definitely opportunity to showcase your horticultural knowledge in this service since trees are so valuable to homeowners."

Similarly, Doppel added tree care to his business in 1992, and estimates a 20 to 25 percent gross profit margin annually. "It's become a service I wouldn't consider giving up," he says, adding that tree care represents about 15 percent of his company's total revenue and maintains a steady growth of 10 percent each year.

Tree care services are easy to add-on, having a low barrier to entry, Doppel explains, estimating that the maximum investment in equipment ranges from \$2,000 to \$3,000 for items like specific types of spray guns and pumps as well as products, but not including a vehicle.

Though the service has proven successful for many, LCOs warn that labor is the biggest challenge, and taking time to find the right person can provide the best results.

Vitt has a tree care manager, a part-time employee and two trucks devoted to tree care. This use of specialized crews is how many choose to offer the service since it's more complicated and complex than people realize, requiring technicians who are interested in learning about plant material. "You have to have people who have the knowledge of or are willing to learn about a broader range of plants," Fogarty says. "This is a harder employee to find and one who requires an additional 10 to 15 percent investment over your regular lawn care technicians."

To aid success in this service offering, Fogarty suggests LCOs wait until they have a solid lawn care customer base before offering the service. ■

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Product Choices Abound

Changes in the marketplace bring additional products, driving value in them and everything that comes with them.

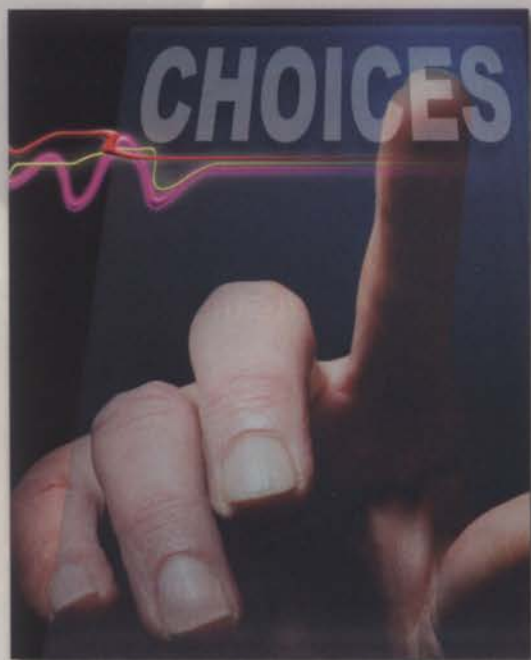
Despite pesticide regulations and fewer brand name products being introduced in the marketplace, lawn care operators (LCOs) have more product choices today than ever before, according to pesticide manufacturers and suppliers, and that's a good thing.

"At the end of the day, we believe more choices are good for the end user as opposed to fewer choices," says Bob West, director of marketing, LESCO, Cleveland, Ohio. "This is because with more products, suppliers will also have to increase the value they bring along with their product to be competitive."

More choices in the chemical lawn care industry refers to branded products, alternative branded products, branded post-patent products and post-patent products. To clarify these terms, let's review their definitions.

Two of these LCOs are familiar with are branded products and post-patent products. Branded products are pesticides formulated with an active ingredient that was created by the manufacturer who is selling the product, the original patent holder. Post-patent products are pesticides formulated with active ingredients that have come off patent.

The next two terms are not new to the industry but are sometimes more difficult for LCOs to understand. Branded post-patent products are pesticides formulated with active ingredients that have



by nicole wisniewski



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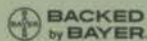


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come off-patent and are sold under the formulator's own brand. Alternative branded products are pesticides formulated with an active ingredient but the manufacturer of that ingredient and a supplier have come to an agreement where the supplier can make a product from that ingredient and brand it under their label. The ingredient is typically still on-patent in this case.

Though making the choice between these options is not a new phenomenon, it is happening more today than ever before due to the number of popular active ingredients labeled for turf and ornamental use that are or soon will be off patent, in addition to LCOs requesting more combination products.

"New chemistries will continue to come into the market," says Sean Casey, vice president of sales, Nufarm Turf and Ornamental, Greenwood, Ind. "But the companies bringing them into the market may be different from what we are used to."

WHO'S SELLING WHAT? All of the manufacturers and suppliers working to bring the different types of products to the industry are trying to create additional value in their product whether it's selling it at a lower price, supporting the industry via education or investing the money they make from the product back into the research and development of future products for the turf and ornamental industry. The reason? To make their product the one the LCO chooses.

Formulators of post-patent products see an opportunity to introduce these options as a result of changes happening in the market. "Alternative branded products and generics will facilitate new product entries and new combination products that are fine-tuned to better meet specific needs," Casey explains. "As chemistries become less expensive, the opportunity to tweak mixtures and combine products becomes greater. More acres will be available for treating as the cost to treat those acres becomes less prohibitive."

Brian Rowan, senior director of merchants, LESCO, Cleveland, Ohio, agrees: "The trend of the post-patent product won't go away because there

are not as many new chemistries being developed that can tilt the end user toward the branded product."

In Bob Yarborough's opinion, the advantage post-patent choices offer is more value for what he views as the same active ingredient. "For years, if someone wanted a product they would buy it from the creator of the active ingredient and they would charge what they wanted," he says. "When alternative choices become available, they can sell the product for less. The post-patent formulator's costs are less so they can charge less."

Though getting registration on a post-patent product may be less expensive than developing a new one, it's still "no free ride," adds Yarborough. "Data compensation has to be negotiated and paid to the patent holder, so post-patent formulators support the industry that way."

On the other side of the equation, many manufacturers of brand name products would say their products are not made similarly to post-patent products that include their active ingredient.

The term "value" is used by all of the manufacturers, formulators and suppliers in the industry, and in some cases bears different meaning.

In certain descriptions, value means a better price for a similar product. But, as Kathie Kalmowitz, market development specialist, BASE, Raleigh, N.C., explains, value should also take into account product efficacy and an LCO's experience with a product. "It's important that LCOs pay attention to this because it's what their customers notice most," she says. "They need to know that a product will provide 30 days or greater efficacy, depending on what the product is, before they need to get out there for another round of applications."

Mike Daly, director of marketing, turf and ornamental, Bayer Environmental Science, Research Triangle Park, N.C., agrees. "You have to look at the total package of what you are buying and focus on the overall best value," he says.

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Manufacturers of branded products invest 10 to 12 years, \$150 million and many tests to meet federal and state regulatory requirements in order to bring new turf and ornamental active ingredients to the market. So, naturally, they feel that when an LCO supports a post-patent choice, they move their resources and funds to a company that is not research-based. "The more we sell of a branded product, the more reinvestment we make in the \$250 million of research and development for the next fungicide or herbicide," explains Mark Urbanowski, senior marketing specialist, turf, ornamental and technical products, Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind. "When LCOs support generic companies they may be paying less cost initially but in the long run this can hurt the industry because it's harder for companies to bring new products into the market. Buying post-patent is not a long-term investment."

Whatever products LCOs choose to purchase, manufacturers believe they should be the ones to explain the values of various products to the end users. As Steve Stansell, market manager for lawn, landscape and aquatics, Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro,

N.C., says: "I don't expect LCOs to understand the difference – I think it's our job to communicate the difference."

THE DECISION FOR LCOs. There is an additional factor affecting product choice today, and that is the continually rising costs of doing business, such as increasing fuel, health care and fertilizer costs. This is forcing some LCOs to explore choices they haven't considered in the past because the price point is now more attractive.

Comparing research from 2004 and 2006, more LCOs – 72.9 compared to 47.42 percent in 2004 – say post-patent products work just as well as branded products. Also, more LCOs – 51.1 vs. 42.54 percent in 2004 – believe that service and support is the same for post-patent and branded products.

Tim Doppel, president, Atwood Lawncare, Sterling Heights, Mich., is a good example of an LCO who's struggling with his product choices. "I have always used branded products, and in the past I never considered generic products," he says. "But this year with the price pressures, I'm finding that I have to at least take a look at the generic products. I have to investigate these

options due to very attractive pricing. And in doing so, I'm going to have to look at effectiveness very carefully. I'm going to have to do some side-by-side comparisons and testing of my own to make sure I make the right choice."

Some LCOs, like Gavin Vitt, co-owner, Lawn Doctor, Colorado Springs, Colo., will continue to stay away from what he calls "substitute products." "There is a lot of information out there, but from our experience some of these products are not cracked up to what they promise to be for the cost savings."

Others use a mix of both products based on what works for them.

Despite the makeup of their product portfolios, even LCOs understand that there is more to the equation than cost. "Some products are cheaper, but some of the branded companies are really supporting our industry, so you want a balance of product quality and industry support," says Terry Kurth, director of development, Weed Man USA, Middleton, Wis. "You have to look at the whole picture. If you're always crying out for new products, then make sure you help out the right company that is going to reinvest that money back into your future."

To make an informed decision, Casey suggests LCOs review these questions before selecting a product:

- Does the manufacturer have production, customer service, regulatory, sales and service staffs available to help out with problems?
- Are the products generic or alternate brands whose actives are being sourced from the original patent holder?
- Does the manufacturer have other trusted, proven brands in the market that the end user is familiar with?
- If there is a problem, will the manufacturer help determine the cause and stand behind their product?
- How long will it take to get a manufacturer's representative physically on site to evaluate the problem?
- Does the manufacturer support the United States and local industry through associations and activities that defend our right to do business in this industry? ■



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Compact equipment can perform tasks in a fraction of the time it takes a worker. Photo: Toro



Mighty Minis

Despite their smaller size, compact utility loaders and mini skid-steers can play a big role in your landscape operations.

Imagine adding site workers who are reliable, efficient and versatile, rarely need a sick day, never take a vacation and don't require a salary or benefits package.

Sounds like every landscape contractor's dream, but it's not too far from reality.

Compact utility loaders and mini skid-steers offer landscape contractors versatile machines that, in conjunction with a diverse array of attachments, can tackle chores in a fraction of the time it takes workers to accomplish. And while relatively simple to operate, their small stature improves users' sight lines, increasing visibility and decreasing the potential for property damage or physical accidents.

Kevin Werbrich, owner of Cincinnati-based Werbrich's Landscaping, is a believer. He owns a compact loader and rents additional units when he's working multiple job sites. The mini machines go everywhere he has crews working on landscape jobs, Werbrich says.

"It's of no use to us sitting in the shop," Werbrich points out. "On the jobsite, when there are tight conditions or it's difficult to access where you need to work and you still need to preserve the client's lawn, that's when they really come in handy."

by mike zawacki

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low landscape contractors to do more – a lot more – with less.

“There is a growing interest as more landscape contractors begin to realize their versatility,” says Aaron Kleingartner, the loader product specialist for Bobcat Co., based in West Fargo, N.D.

While they’ve only been in the

market for about a dozen years, contractors didn’t immediately integrate compact utility loaders and mini skid-steers into their operational arsenal, says Greg Lawrence, product manager for Toro’s Dingo, based in Bloomington, Minn. Initially, the landscape community reacted with hesitation, seeing the small-sized contraptions more as expensive toys than versatile tools. It took time for them to realize the overall potential, Lawrence says.

“Up until six or seven years ago, landscapers looked at a compact utility loader or a mini skid-steer and asked themselves, ‘What’s that?’” Lawrence says. “Then that changed to, ‘I need one of these, but how do I make it work for me?’”

SMART CHOICES. Landscape contractors have many reasons to integrate smaller, compact equipment into their overall operations.

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Compact loaders allow efficient movement through tight work areas. Photo: Bobcat

For example, residential lot sizes have gotten smaller in recent years. Home builders, facing property size constraints, are maximizing land availability by constructing bigger homes on smaller plots of property. This offers very little in the way of open ground for regular-sized skids-steers or loaders to operate efficiently.

“Landscape contractors have less space to maneuver when completing tasks such as grading, sod and irrigation installation and placing hardscape materials,” Kleingartner says. “With



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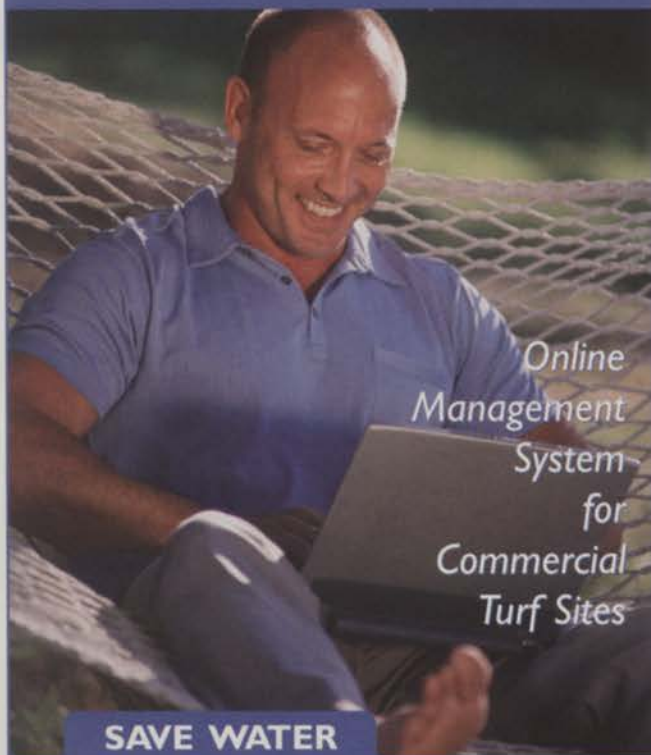
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construction equipment > >

compact utility loaders, landscapers can easily fit between homes, through narrow backyard gates and into many other confined areas. The versatility of mini-track loaders enables contractors to utilize a number of attachments for carrying sod and paving stone, drilling holes for trees and fence posts or installing irrigation and drainage systems."

Compact utility loaders and mini skid-steers replace



Designed to exhibit low ground pressure, compact units do minimal damage to existing turf and landscape. Photo: Ditch Witch.

cold weather warriors

Many landscape contractors in colder Northern climates are beginning to realize their compact utility loaders and mini skid-steers can contribute to winter snow and ice removal duties.

Many manufacturers provide contractors with snowblower, snow plow or even power broom attachments for snow removal duties.

"As they become more and more popular with snow removal duties, we're seeing contractors adopting a variety of blowers and blades," says Mike Lumbers, senior project manager of compact utility loaders for Ditch Witch, based in Perry, Okla.

Likewise, some manufacturers provide attachable enclosures and heated cabs to help protect operators from frigid working conditions.

But there are limitations. Due to the fact that many compact models are designed to exhibit low ground pressure for landscape work, this detracts from the amount of potential traction they receive during snow duties.



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the expense of laborers, says Roger Braswell, president of Compact Power in Fort Mill, S.C. He estimates, on average, a compact utility loader easily replaces the work potential of two or, in some cases, three on-site workers. "This size machine is the closest thing to the dream of a robot in the landscape industry," Braswell says.

Simply consider the cost of an average compact utility loader – anywhere between \$12,000 and \$30,000 depending on the unit's size and number of attachments – with the average cost of the typical landscape laborer – about \$20,000 per year, Lawrence says.

"You can get into a compact utility loader for about the same price and not have to worry about it coming



size matters

While casting a diminutive shadow, compact utility loaders and mini skid-steers do come in different sizes and with corresponding power potentials, weights, horsepower and costs. (The following includes the base unit and a bucket attachment).

	SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE
WEIGHT	1,000 lbs.	1,500-2,000 lbs.	2,000+ lbs.
ENGINE	13-16 hp	20-25 hp	24-30 hp
PRICE	\$8,000-\$11,000	\$12,000-\$17,000	\$17,000-\$22,000
HYDRAULICS	5-8 gpm	10-12.5 gpm	12-14 gpm

* Information provided by Compact Power

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in late or calling in sick," Lawrence says. "And it gives the smaller contractor the advantage because it makes them more efficient so they can compete against the big guys."

"Plus you may only pay on that unit for four years until it's paid off," Braswell says. "It's much less expensive over time to use these machines than employ a person. When you do the math it becomes a no-brainer."

Some landscape contractors prefer to think of compact units increasing jobsite productivity and safety, not reducing workforce numbers.

"You don't have guys breaking their backs left and right because the machine is there to do that for them," Werbrich says.



The mini skid-steer bucket attachment is, by far, the most popular because of its versatility. Photo: Ditch Witch

Their compact, yet power-packed, nature allows the operator to perform routine tasks faster, easier and better than any laborer by hand, Braswell says. For example, in a matter of

seconds to minutes, a compact loader can excavate a larger, deeper and better hole for a tree than a man can accomplish in hours, he says.

And whether it's wheeled or tracked, the unit's smaller size is much more terrain friendly, doing less collateral damage to curbs, walkways and turf than their large-sized brethren. This can reduce or even eliminate repair costs that otherwise would come out of a job's bottom line.

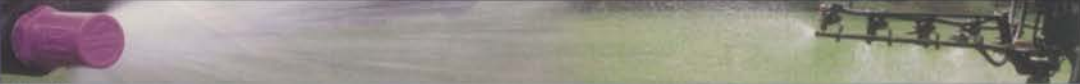
"A landscape contractor can do a job more horticulturally sound than can ever be done by a man," Braswell says. "You're replacing elbow grease with hydraulic fluid."

And there are other reasons why small is better.

Compact units are easier to transport than their big brothers. Most mini skid-steers and compact utility loaders can be transported to the job site with a pick-up truck, which affords greater versatility.

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Turbo TeeJet® Induction 	---	Excellent		Turbo TwinJet® 	Excellent	Excellent	
AIC TeeJet® 	Good	Excellent		XP BoomJet® 	---	Very Good	

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other attractive feature of the compact system. Operators of full-size skid-steers and loaders don't see well from the sides or behind, but a compact unit gives the user a much better view of the immediate landscape. "From the back of a compact utility loader the operator has a 360-degree view and can now see the potential hazards that he couldn't see prior," Braswell points out.

Also, part of being smaller is that it can be safer for the operator, too.

"One of the biggest myths is that you're safer in the enclosed cage of a full-size skid-steer loader than standing on the platform of a compact unit," Braswell says. "One of the biggest safety devices on these machines is having the ability to step off the back and be on the ground. It's one short step as opposed to being strapped into a machine."

POWER PACKED. One of the biggest misconceptions about the performance potential of compact utility loaders and mini skid-steers is that small-sized units don't pack the power of the full-sized versions.

This power quotient is measured by a unit's hydraulic flow – measured in gallons per minute (gpm) – which

dictates the amount of hydraulic power either dedicated or shared with the attachment. A compact unit with hydraulic power of 14 gpm, considered a high amount, will deliver more power from its hydraulic motor to its attachment.

In fact, at half the size and weight, a compact utility loader or mini skid-steer can have as much as 90 percent of the hydraulic flow potential of a full-sized unit.

"In a small package, you're able to harness the hydraulic power to the attachment nearly equal to the hydraulic power to an attachment in a unit twice the size," Braswell says. "So why go with a bigger, heavier machine?"

But despite their versatility, compact utility loaders and mini skid-steers have their drawbacks and can't completely replace their full-sized brothers on a jobsite.

"I've always said, there is a need for a traditional skid-steer," Braswell says. "With a compact model you won't be able to grade as fast, you can't load a large dump truck and you can't move heavy materials, such as a pallet of sod."

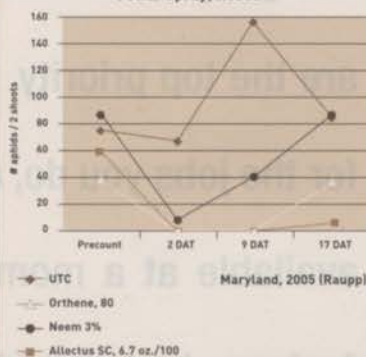
"But when it comes to trenching, auguring, preparing ground for seed

continued on page 96

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choosing the right attachments

Making smart attachments choices is directly related to the amount of success a landscape contractor will have with his or her compact utility loader or mini skid-steer.

While there are a number of variables to consider, there is no single cookie-cutter formula for landscape contractors to consult when choosing the attachments that work for them, says Greg Lawrence, product manager for Toro's Dingo, based in Bloomington, Minn.

"Landscape contractors need to examine how everything will all work together and what attachments they'll be using in their operations," Lawrence says. "They need to be in touch with their needs. Rentals are a good way to experiment. It's important to operate the equipment and see it in action. Also, it's important not only for the owner to operate the equipment, but the workers, too, since most likely they'll be using the equipment most often on the jobsite."

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continued from page 93

and sod, removing turf, backfilling ditches and running hydraulic work tools like a jack hammer, a compact utility loader is the best thing going," he adds.

ATTACHED TO ATTACHMENTS.

With the large, diverse number of attachments available on the market, landscape contractors have nearly limitless options available to them to make their tasks easier.

"By changing attachments you can use this machine continuously on the

jobsite," says Mike Lumbers, senior project manager of compact utility loaders for Ditch Witch, based in Perry, Okla. "Attachments allow you to do the job you need to do and be done, whereas before you needed to bring several different machines along to get that same job done."

And depending on their specialty or business focus, every landscape contractor has his or her personal list of favorites.

But, by far, the bucket is the most popular attachment used by landscape

contractors. Buckets come in a variety of sizes and shapes and are used for digging, grading and material hauling. However, the four-in-one bucket (also known as the all-in-one) is perhaps the most popular because it offers the contractor the most versatility.

An auger is another popular mainstay attachment for landscape contractors and is followed closely by a trenching tool, which is especially helpful if the landscaper installs irrigation systems.

"Any attachment that saves a contractor from having to do any hand digging is popular because you're really saving on money and time," Lawrence says.

A fork attachment ranks among contractors' top five, as well as some sort of soil-cultivating tool, such as a power landscape rake. Other favorites depends on the extent of a landscape contractor's services. For example, a contractor involved in demolition work may add a jack hammer attachment to his or her compact tool kit.


"With landscaping and restoration this can prove to be a handy tool," Lumber says. "And it's a lot easier to use than a hand-held impact tool."

Likewise, a contractor in Northern climates may have a plow attachment or a blower or broom attachment for winter snow and ice removal (see *Cold Weather Warriors* on page 85).

FUTURE TRENDS. Landscape contractors can expect big things as manufacturers continue to develop their lines of mini skid-steers and compact utility loaders.

"Expect more horsepower in the same size package," Lumbers says. "Contractors want to do bigger things with the smaller units, such as lifting a little more and lifting those loads a little bit higher."

In order to provide more oomph in future product lines, most manufacturers plan to develop more efficient hydraulic systems that will allow operators to apply the unit's horsepower where they want it when they need it. "Because the market is still growing, over the next few years you're going to see lots of changes in the units' operating efficiency," Lawrence says.

Braswell adds, "I expect we'll see them get larger and more robust in terms of their carrying capacity and hydraulic flow." 

> purchasing essentials

Like any purchasing decision, manufacturers advise contractors to consider a number of variables before purchasing a compact utility loader or a mini skid-steer.

- **Support and serviceability.** Does the company or dealer you'll be purchasing from have a solid program in place for maintenance and repair? Are replacement parts easy to acquire?
- **Universal quick-attach system.** Attachments provide options. Can attachments from various manufactures be used with the unit or does it have a proprietary attachment system?
- **Adequate hydraulic power.** Will the unit do the job you need it to do? Landscaper contractors should reconsider a compact unit that delivers any less than double digit hydraulic flow. Remember, the higher the gallons per minute (gpm), the better.
- **Tracks vs. wheels.** Operating in sand or mud will make a tracked vehicle a solid beneficial buy.
- **Gas vs. diesel.** A more expensive diesel engine will deliver more horsepower, but will that be necessary for the extent of your landscape duties? A gas engine may be the more economical purchase.
- **Simplicity.** What's the unit's learning curve? Will extensive training be necessary or will site workers be able to step up and go?
- **Recommendations.** What's the word-of-mouth buzz about particular brands among your fellow contractors? What types of machines are your competitors using in the field?

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Contractors should tell potential customers that irrigation systems can decrease their water bills. Photo: Hunter

Selling Convenience

A number of features make residential irrigation an easy sell for contractors.

While digging through old files, irrigation contractor Tom Laur, Jr. saw a 1960s-era photograph of a yard with an irrigation system his grandfather had installed. For some reason, the system was installed on one-half of the lawn but not the other. Laur, owner of Acme Systems, Glendale, Wis., says the plants on the irrigation side were 30 percent larger than those on the other side.

The benefits of irrigation go beyond the simple advantage of growing plants. But while the cost can be as

mammoth as \$100,000 or as small as \$2,000, convincing the homeowner that the investment is worth the expense can be a chore.

Dave Magner, marketing manager at Rain Bird's contractor division in Tucson, Ariz., says homeowners won't find a better way to keep their landscaping looking fresh with relatively little work. "There's no easier or cost-effective way to beautify a home," he says.

Jeff Carowitz, vice president of marketing at San Marcos, Calif.-based

by heather wood

INCREASE PREEMERGENT SUCCESS TO DECREASE CUSTOMER CALL-BACKS

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Every lawncare and landscape professional has seen firsthand how customer call-backs can turn profitable jobs into time-, resource- and reputation-losing propositions. Avoiding call-backs by investing time in proper weed identification and preemergent herbicide selection is crucial.

IDENTIFY YOUR TARGETS

A successful weed control program begins by correctly identifying the weeds (broadleaf and grassy) in the area you are planning to treat. This includes identifying both visible and anticipated weeds.

Broadleaf weeds are easily identified in turf and are especially visible when in bloom. Bright yellow dandelions, white clover and purple henbit flowers are good examples. Grassy weeds such as crabgrass, goosegrass and foxtail are more difficult to identify early and become

increasingly difficult to control once established, due to the large quantity of seed they produce.

Once lawncare professionals correctly identify the type of broadleaf and grassy weeds that are or will be present, they can select the preemergent herbicide(s) needed. Anticipating the weed issue will save time. For example, phenoxy herbicides control broadleaves after they have emerged, but have little to no effect on grasses, while a preemergent herbicide such as pendimethalin can be used to

control grassy and many broadleaves at the same time with one product application.

PREEMERGENT CONSIDERATIONS

While the product label should be your guide in determining which herbicide(s) will work best to control your targeted weeds, some basic considerations when selecting a preemergent product should include the following:

- Annual grasses and broadleaves are best controlled with

preemergent applications in early spring, prior to weed-seed germination.

- Broad-spectrum preemergent herbicides offer the benefit of not having to carry additional herbicide products, which reduces mixing and application time.
- Preemergent herbicide application is generally considered the most effective and least costly means of weed management.
- When the turf is well established, a preemergent herbicide should be used to provide broad-spectrum seasonal weed control.
- The product should be labeled for weed control on ornamentals and offer the assurance of minimal off-target plant damage.

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Two proven, preemergent herbicide products from BASF – **Pendulum® 2G herbicide** and **Pendulum AquaCap™ herbicide** – give lawncare professionals cost-effective, broad-spectrum control for turf as well as labeling for use on ornamentals. **Pendulum 2G** is two percent pendimethalin and gives lawn care professionals application flexibility with its granular formulation. **Pendulum AquaCap** delivers the pendimethalin active ingredient in an aqueous carrier, while encapsulated by a water-based formulation. That formulation

allows it to deliver virtually no odor, reduced staining, increased ease of handling, mixing and cleanup, and improved storage stability.



Pendulum 2G and Pendulum

AquaCap are safe for ornamental beds when applied over the top or at the plant base, and both formulations are approved for use on a broad spectrum of ornamentals, including more than 95 varieties of shrubs, 100 types of trees, several ground covers, perennials, established bedding plants, wildflowers and ornamental grasses.

For ease of application, the granular **Pendulum 2G** formulation requires no product mixing, less equipment loading, decreased cleanup and flexible spreading options, including compatibility with push, handheld

and chest spreaders.

Regardless of the formulation, the active ingredient, pendimethalin, provides proven control of the most troublesome turf weeds, including crabgrass, goosegrass, oxalis, henbit, spurge and 40 other broadleaf and grassy weeds.

In addition, both pendimethalin-based products offer greater control of winter annual and biennial weeds when applied as part of a split application or a fall preemergent herbicide offering.

SPLIT PREEMERGENT APPLICATION FOR EXTENDED CONTROL

With residual preemergent control for two to four months, both **Pendulum 2G** and **Pendulum AquaCap** provide very cost-effective herbicide solutions. They also give lawncare professionals the ability to offer their customers a value-added service in the form of a split preemergent herbicide application for extended control of crabgrass



and other aggressive weeds that can invade a lawn during the hot and dry summer months. This split **Pendulum** application could be bundled with an ornamental application for established bedding plants that will help reduce customer yard work while increasing their satisfaction with your added service.

WEED AND FEED IN LATE SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER

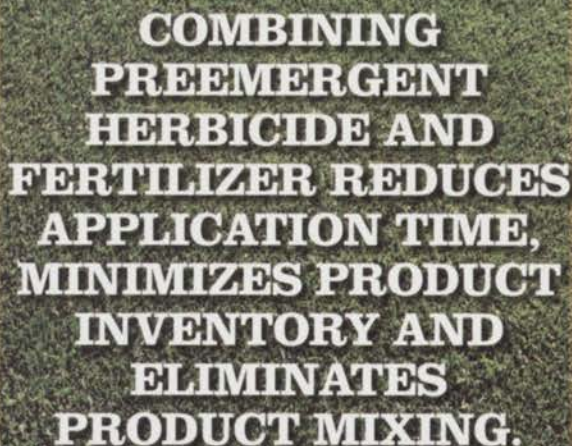
Another option that has proven very effective in controlling weed germination while strengthening turf is the use of **pendimethalin** on a fertilizer carrier during the spring and early summer. Lawncare professionals can prevent the invasion of crabgrass and other annual grass weeds through a combined **pendimethalin/fertilizer** application since most annual grass weed seeds germinate in the top half-inch of the soil and the fertilizer will help develop a thick canopy that will shade the soil and discourage germination and establishment of weed seedlings.

Combining preemergent herbicide and fertilizer reduces application time, minimizes product inventory and eliminates product mixing.

PUT BETTER SCIENCE TO WORK

There is no such thing as an absolute program when it comes to controlling turf and ornamental weeds. Knowing weed life cycles,

understanding conditions that favor weed growth, and applying the science of better products will give lawncare professionals a competitive advantage since weed-free turf means fewer profit-draining call-backs. By taking the time to discuss your strategy with customers and by teaching them the basics, you can help set conditions for success



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Hunter Industries, says homeowners should consider irrigation as a way to protect an investment. "Many times home customers spend \$30,000 to \$40,000 on landscaping on their property but they don't get an irrigation system," Carowitz says. "The benefit of irrigation is really an insurance policy."

Irrigation installation, Krieger says may help save some homeowners money on their water bills. "If a client has not watered his lawn for many years, he will spend a lot more on water than he ever has," he says. "On the other hand, if the client is over watering, he has wasted water and will spend less."

The notion that an irrigation system will end the customer's days of over or under watering is a powerful selling point, Krieger says. "People want a nice, green lawn," he explains. "And they don't have time to do it themselves."

A properly watered, attractive landscape also adds to the property value, making the initial investment justified, Magner says. While the quality of the product installed and the quality of the design are factors, a well-maintained system can last at least 10 years, he says. And, even then, only small repairs may need to be made to keep the system operational, he says.

In fact, some regions of the country require water conservation and there are limited windows during



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USE READER SERVICE # 67

"A big mistake landscape contractors make is not letting the homeowner talk enough. Remember to ask questions to clarify the customer's expectations."

- Jeff Carowitz

the day when watering is permitted. An irrigation system operating during designated watering times, especially if the customer can't be there, is a major incentive, Magner says.

For example, in Wisconsin last year, the region's drought and the dismal condition of plants drove Acme's irrigation system sales. "People couldn't keep up with their hoses," Laur says. Most of the area has a plentiful water supply, so conservation wasn't an issue. Residents wanted to make sure that water supply was



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USE READER SERVICE # 69

getting to their lawns and not burning them out in the process. "They wanted systems so they didn't have to water anymore," he says.

Not only does irrigation provide enough water, but also it can keep the homeowner from over watering,



A contractor installs a controller for a residential irrigation system. Photo: Rain Bird

which kills plants. But only a properly designed system with rain sensors and proper scheduling can lead to an efficient irrigation system, Laur says.

DRIVING THE SALE HOME. A key to selling irrigation systems is to first sell the company, many landscapers say. Showing the customer you have unmatched service boosts their confidence.

"Most contractors are correct in selling themselves and their capabilities way before selling a brand of irrigation equipment," Carowitz says. Ultimately, prospective customers are most concerned with the contractor's reputation, he says.

An irrigation contractor's chances of wooing a customer depends on a solid first impression, says Robert McCarthy, owner of Artistic Irrigation in Woodbury, Conn. "Presentation goes a long way," he says, add-

ing a representative in neat clothing and clean shave gets the prospective client's attention.

During the sales process, contractors should ask the homeowner what he or she is looking for and then just listen, McCarthy says. Carowitz agrees, and adds, "A big mistake contractors make is not letting the homeowner talk enough. Ask questions to clarify the customer's expectations."

From the initial contact through to the sale, Steven Krieger's team takes the time to answer any customer concerns. They review the property, find out what the homeowner is looking for and then design the system, says Krieger, president of Water Tech Irrigation in St. Louis.

After custom designing a system for a client, Water Tech sales personnel prepare a proposal package and present it to the homeowner. "We'll spend whatever amount of time necessary to answer all customer questions and ensure that the homeowner under-

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stands what our system will do for them," Krieger says, adding that they shy away from high-pressure sales tactics.

It's important go above and beyond when formulating proposals, McCarthy says. Because the client may be getting estimates from multiple contractors, he tries to stand out by creating a full blueprint of the irrigation system. He tries to further wow them by including information about the associations he and his contractors are members.

McCarthy gives his clients a few days to review his proposal and places the follow-up call around the fourth day. "That goes 100 miles," he says. "They have three estimates on the table. They might as well put them on a lazy Susan, spin it and stop it and go with that contractor. But if I'm the first to call, I have a better chance."



Landscape contractors install irrigation piping on a jobsite. Photo: Hunter Industries

SELLING CONTINUED SERVICE.

Krieger says his solid reputation helps sell systems at the price he wants. He charges around \$4,500 to \$5,500 for an average subdivision residence, which measures 10,000 to 12,000

square feet. He admits the prices are 20 to 50 percent higher than the competition's prices, but the level of service and product quality warrants it.

With this strategy, Water-Tech has enjoyed a steady 10 to 15 percent growth for the past eight years. They accomplished this by focusing on aspects other than growth. "Service is No. 1 if you want to remain viable and profitable," Krieger says, adding that word-of-mouth referrals have been one of their greatest publicity-getters. "The only thing that gets around faster than good word about a company is bad word about a company."

Acme's 50-year history and reputation also give them some leeway with charging customers. "We're not generally the lowest bidder, but people still want us because we've been there before," Laur says, adding that he still has to be somewhat competitive in pricing his irrigation services.

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irrigation > > >

smart choice

"Smart" controllers are becoming a hot item in the industry, with several manufacturers pushing them. Jeff Carowitz, vice president of marketing at Hunter Industries, says more states are requiring this type of system because they promote water efficiency. The controllers measure the evapotranspiration rate of plants and automatically adjust to prevent over or under watering.

The new technology can be confusing for irrigation contractors who are still getting used to rain sensors but want to sell their benefits to customers. The Irrigation Association, through a new program called Smart Water Application Technologies, offers help with ratings on various brands of equipment and how efficient they are.

The national initiative started in 2002 and the testing began in 2004. The resulting ratings can help to give customers and contractors alike a handle on the equipment and its effectiveness. More information can be found at www.irrigation.org. Click on the "SWAT" link.

To maintain his company's image, Krieger deals with customer service "the good, old-fashioned hard way" by taking on every inquiry on an individual basis. "There's no substitute for personal attention," he says.

Staying in touch with existing customers helps retain them, Laur says. Maintenance is obviously important too, he says. "Systems do need to be maintained," he points out, adding that bi-annual maintenance is a must.

Likewise, be alert of customers building decks and pools after irrigation systems have already been installed on the property, Laur says. This alters the landscape and causes a need for an irrigation system revamp.

TOUTING TECHNOLOGY. Sometimes, the customer is sold on the gadgets designed to make the irrigation system more effective. Recently, these have included rain sensors and wireless controls. "Residential customers don't want something difficult to operate," Laur says.

Sometimes the pressure level, or psi, of a system is too high, which can waste water, Magner says. "For every 5 psi reduction in the system, there's a savings of 7 percent on average," he says, adding that the right type of nozzle can allow the optimum

pressure level. Another water saver is a drip system, which takes water straight to the plant's root zone. Customers can realize a 70 percent savings with this system, Magner says.

Rain sensors are becoming more common on irrigation systems. They have been required in some states and proposals to do so have been made in others. McCarthy, who deals with water conservation issues, says rain sensors can be a selling point.

If these aren't sophisticated enough, new "smart" devices take irrigation and efficiency to the next level. Chris Manchuck is vice president of business development at HydroPoint Systems in Petaluma, Calif. He says some irrigation product manufacturers are designing technology that goes into several brands of "smart" controllers. These controllers have the ability to change daily based on the weather, Manchuck says. They use a daily local weather station from the national service to adjust the system's schedule and compensate for whatever Mother Nature might bring.

No matter what type of technology is used, there's no substitute for expertise and planning. As Laur says, "You could take the same product and install it wrong and have a bad system." □

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Beyond Color and Cut

Photo: Dreamstime



by marisa shoemaker

In addition to increased durability, new turfgrass varieties focus on drought, heat and shade tolerance, increased disease resistance and better erosion control.

Turf seed breeders are working ever diligently, bringing new cultivars to the market seemingly en masse. But is the grass really greener on the other side? For that matter, is it more heat tolerant? What about disease resistant? Breeders acknowledge turf traits as of late extend beyond just color or cut. Today, environmental concerns – and the consuming public – are increasingly providing the impetus for the numerous characteristics new blades must include, such as greater heat and shade tolerance, increased disease resistance, as well as durability and erosion control.

TURF'S INCREASING TOLERANCE. According to Russ Nicholson, agronomist for Pennington Seed, Madison, Ga., water quality is currently a critical issue. "More and more cities, golf courses and municipalities are being asked to use reclaimed water, which isn't ideal due to minerals and salts. The heavy metals have been cleaned out of the water, but new turf varieties need to be resistant to higher salinity levels."

Salt can adversely affect soil structure and lawn aesthetics. Further, grass



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subjected to high salinity levels in irrigation water may suffer root damage, resulting in increased drought-kill susceptibility and crown and root disease problems. Choose varieties of perennial ryegrass, fine fescue, tall fescue, wheatgrass and alkali grass to combat water quality issues. Moreover, contractors should remind consumers to check their irrigation water for sodium, avoiding a sodium absorption ratio (SAR) exceeding 10.

Wayne Horman, director of seed sales and marketing, The Scotts Co., Marysville, Ohio, cites new heat- and shade-tolerant Kentucky bluegrass varieties as significant improvements over older varieties. "Bluegrass in itself has limited shade and heat tolerance," he says. "But newer hybrids can take the heat and the shade," which, he says, was previously a problem with bluegrasses in the transition zone (from approximately Cincinnati south to Atlanta). The heat tolerance of one new line of Kentucky bluegrass is the result of a cross with Texas bluegrass.

Another benefit of new Kentucky bluegrass varieties is its rhizomatous nature. One new example has almost 90 rhizomes (underground stems) per square foot, the underground stems sending up a shoot to the soil surface while extending new roots downward to allow the grass to repair itself, spread and thrive.

"And newer crosses have led to better seed yields, but there are some cons that come with the pros - bluegrass takes longer to germinate than tall fescue," Horman says, with the former taking 10 to 21 days, while the latter takes seven to 10 days. "Then again, you can apply a mix of tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass and address both issues."

THE BLEND TREND. Indeed, the blend trend was mentioned by numerous seed breeders as a best-of-both-worlds solution when one variety falls short. By definition, a blend is the result of two grasses of the same genus joining, which provides a smooth, even turf. A mix, however, blends species. Says Paul Albright, Albright Seed Co., Carpinteria, Calif., "Why not mix species and take advantage of the larger differences? That's the entire concept behind grass mixes. An example that makes the point is the popular mix of ryegrass and bluegrass. The two species are significantly different; perennial ryegrass is a bunch grass. This means that if a spot of ryegrass turf is damaged, it can be repaired only by reseeding. Conversely, bluegrass can self-repair a damaged spot because it is a rhizomatous grass." The combination of both species, Albright says, leads to a tough but beautiful turf.

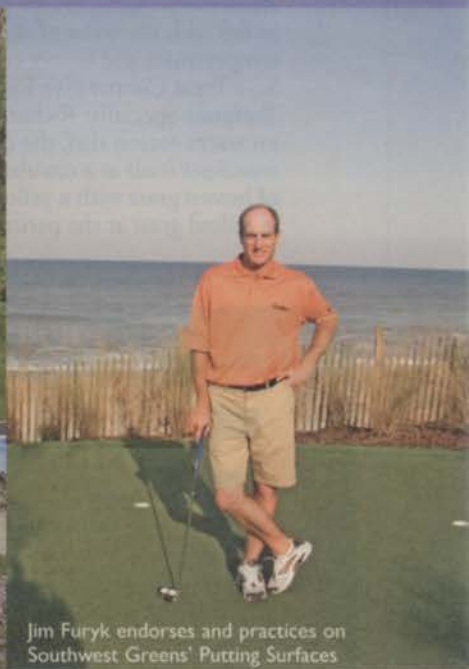
RESISTING DISEASE. Disease concerns are an oft-mentioned influence in the advent and popularity of new varieties. Specifically dominant: gray leaf spot and brown patch. The former, caused by the fungus *Pyricularia grisea*, mainly affects ryegrasses and tall fescue, thereby necessitating greater disease resistance in these turf types. Though it's been common in Southern states for years, recent infections have been found as far north as Long Island, as well as in Pennsylvania.

According to the Cornell Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic, gray leaf spot typically occurs during August and September, when conditions favoring infection include hotter day and night temperatures and high humidity. This prolonged wetness causes gray to brown lesions and creates a "felt" look to leaf blades.

"Disease resistant varieties are needed because of epidemics like this," says Nicholson. "Gray leaf spot can wipe out entire lawns. Consumers are unhappy when the contractor is going in and reseeding every fall, especially because that's when grass is most susceptible to gray leaf spot."

Similarly, brown patch is a fungal disease that presents a challenge to both turf managers and homeowners. Caused by

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Rhizoctonia solani, brown patch occurs in fall with the onset of slightly cooler temperatures and wetter conditions. Says Texas Cooperative Extension Turfgrass Specialist Richard Duble, on warm-season turf, the disease manifests itself as a circular pattern of brown grass with a yellowish ring of wilted grass at the perimeter of the

diseased area. On cool-season grasses, dark green, water-soaked circular patches appear that leave grass wilted and light brown."

Doug Brede, research director and operating officer of Simplot/Jacklin Seed, Post Falls, Idaho, says the biggest breakthrough in bluegrass in recent time is the emergence of excellent

resistance to bluegrass' common cold: brown patch. "Over the years, one by one, bluegrass' disease problems have been addressed and conquered by breeders. First it was leaf spot, then dollar spot, stripe smut and necrotic ring spot. These new bluegrasses are showing marked progress in reducing the incidence of rust disease among elite Kentucky bluegrasses."

Generally speaking, a longer-term advancement, according to the College of Agriculture & Natural Resources at the University of Maryland, comes in the form of fungal endophytes, typically in tall fescues, which provide numerous benefits. Endophyte strains are currently being tested in various tall fescue cultivars. Thus far, their presence is proving to provide better disease resistance, improved drought tolerance through better root development and water conservation in the plant, tolerance to some pests, improved nitrogen utilization and greater seedling vigor.

In terms of emerging trends in advancements, Brede says varieties will begin taking on a more regional flavor. "For example, we'll see truly Midwestern varieties that do only so-so elsewhere. This will require an added level of buying sophistication among the landscape trade to discover these regional gems. It won't be as easy as viewing one column of numbers," he says, referring to national testing programs that yield "nationwide" varieties – a problem because few landscape companies have a nationwide scope.

IMPROVEMENTS ABOUND, BUT AT WHAT COST? At what costs do these advancements come? When looking at the cost-benefit analysis, the consensus is that consumers are willing to pay for "new" and the quality that comes with it. When asked what percentage increase turf seed improvements commanded, seed companies offered a vague-but-realistic, "This is best determined by what it replaces or what is displays in reducing labor or inputs – water, plant protectants, etc." to the straightforward, "Just less than 5 percent." But it was agreed that the end-user pays for it. Says one breeder, "The cost is minute, and it trickles downhill, so the end-user always pays for it."

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the industry, beyond breeders, distributors and landscape contractors, is the fact that consumers are knowledgeable. Each breeder cited that it wasn't necessarily competition, but the consumer, who spurred advancements.

"The popular varieties are that way because consumers stated precise needs, and seed companies satisfied those needs," Nicholson says. "People will always be looking for 'new.' They want something that can take fertilizer in the middle of summer, or they want a Kentucky bluegrass they can enjoy earlier in the spring and longer in the fall."

Keep in mind, however, that consumers still keep aesthetics in mind. The greener the better, as Brede says we'll see in the coming months. "When the last batch of perennial ryegrasses debuted in the late 1990s,

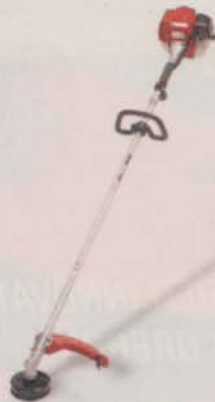


Here, a researcher crosses tall fescue plants in a greenhouse for population improvement. Photo: Simplot/Jacklin Seed

users commented that these were probably as dark as anyone would want a turf variety to be. The new wave of ryegrasses, which should be available this summer, make the older generation look pale by comparison. New varieties are intensely green, and they'll stay that green nearly all season long."

Consumer awareness, indeed, appears to be on the rise. So how can landscape contractors keep abreast of the latest advancements to inform their customers? "Work with good suppliers," Nicholson says. "We work with the distributors who call on the local suppliers, so we make sure our distributors pass on the correct information. That way, when a contractor tells the suppliers they have a problem, the supplier knows specifically how to address it."

"This question is a huge challenge for the future," Brede says of keeping the industry informed. "Attendance at university-sponsored field days and turf conferences nationwide is dropping. A few states have even cancelled their annual field day or gone to alternating years, due to lower attendance." He encourages seed distributors to start their own educational programs, which appears to be a growing trend. **U**



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MODEL	ENGINE	CUTTING WIDTH
FR20KC	20 hp Kohler® Command™ SP	
FR23KC	23 hp Kohler Command SP	
FR27KC	27 hp Kohler Command SP	
FR25KD	25 hp Kubota® Diesel	
FR524		52" (132 cm)
FR604		60" (152 cm)

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NAVIGATOR®

MODEL	ENGINE	CUTTING WIDTH
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NAV27KC	27 hp Kohler Command	
CD42CD		42" (108 cm)
CD48CD		42" (108 cm)

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- Industry-leading Exmark commercial quality

PHAZER™

MODEL	ENGINE	CUTTING WIDTH
PHZ19KA343	19 hp Kawasaki®	34" (86 cm)
PHZ19KA443	19 hp Kawasaki	44" (112 cm)

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A red and black Exmark Metro 26 commercial-grade mower is shown in a field of tall green grass under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The mower is angled towards the right. The brand name 'eXmark' is visible on the black side panel, and 'METRO 26' is written in a stylized font above the engine area.

METRO
26

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METRO[®] 26

MODEL	CONTROLS	ENGINE	CUTTING WIDTH
MSKA26B	Self-Propelled	6 hp Kawasaki*	26" (66 cm)

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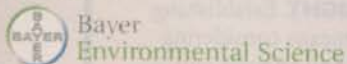
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Seed Money

According to turf seed suppliers and landscape contractors, establishing lawns can be a profitable service.

Stop me if you've heard this one: A suburban woman wants a lawn. She wants her landscape contractor to break up the compacted soil, apply a soil amendment, till and roll – all before spreading the seed, covering it with hay, fertilizing and irrigating. Oh, and she really doesn't want to pay much for it.

Admittedly, it's not much of a joke – especially to contractors. Truth be told, seeding lawns requires, on average, more than an hour of work per 10 square feet, with sometimes little profit gleaned from the efforts. However, landscape contractors include work-intensive turf seeding in their mix because from it they can glean profit from the add-on services they can sell to these customers, such as tree and shrub installation and design work.

DOING THE JOB RIGHT. Establishing a lawn via turf seed means considering a variety of factors. "Soil analysis and preparation are the most important considerations," says Todd Brown, landscape designer for Barnes Nursery, Huron, Ohio. "We have to look at the soil types on each site; a mile down the road, there might be a completely different type of soil. If there's a sandy soil or a clay soil on the site, we may want to add an organic turf blend and repair the soil as best we can. We till the existing subsoil to about 2 inches, then we grade the soil away from the home, removing rocks we find that

by marisa shoemaker

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are larger than 1 or 2 inches."

Brown continues, "Next, we do the drop-seeding. Whether you drop seed with a hand crank, spreader or scattering, you need even distribution. A general rule of thumb is using from 5 to 7 pounds per 1,000 square feet. When we drop seed, we put a starter fertilizer down, though you don't want to use one that's too high in nitrogen; you want a fertilizer that encourages root development and germination. Then, we cover it all with straw, which acts as a barrier, keeping animals away and keeping moisture in the grass seed."

By all accounts, water is often where the process succeeds or wilts. An automatic irrigation system that dispenses a fine mist is optimal, but problems occur with new construction when irrigation systems aren't yet in place. "That biggest failure is improper watering," Brown says. You



Photo: Kuan Chong Ng/Dreamstime

can't tell customers to water 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes in the afternoon – the weather varies, and so does the soil, so the best advice is to keep the top layer of soil moist."

Because customers often know that mowing thickens the lawn, they may be eager to take a mower to their new lawn. But Browns says contractors should tell their customers to wait three to four weeks after seeding, and

then encourage them to mow at a higher setting. After the lawn is established, set the mower for a closer cut.

"A lot of people worry when they see weeds germinating on their new lawns," says Brown, noting that weed seeds are always going to be present in the soil and germinate upon watering. "Tell customers this is normal.

When weeds come up, use a broadleaf weed control product and fertilizer after you mow it three times. We recommend four applications of fertilizer per year – in early spring, late spring, summer and fall. Some people want a golf course-looking lawn, so we'll fertilize six to seven times per year."

According to a sales representative from Lowe's Home Improvement, North Wilkesboro, N.C., "Begin the whole lawn establishment process in early spring or early fall, depending

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on whether you're growing cool- or warm-season grass. When active growth is about to begin – early spring or fall for cool-season varieties and early or mid summer for warm-season varieties – begin the project.”

PRICING FOR PROFIT. In terms of pricing, contractors say the amount

they charge customers for turf establishment via seed is dependent on the type of project they're facing, determining costs on a case-by-case basis.

“It depends on so many variables,” says Brown. “We deal with a lot of new construction. Sometimes the builders leave gravel or other materials in the soil. Sometimes the existing

site conditions are poor. Is the yard wide open? Can we get our tractors in there? Can we get our grading rigs in there? Are there trees and other obstacles to get around? These obstacles would add cost to the project and raise the price.”

Additionally, grass seed quality and prices vary, as do fertilizer costs. Typically, contractors say seed and soil amendments alone cost, on average, about \$20 per 1,000 square feet.

To be sure, many contractors avoid language that resembles a “guarantee,” replacing it with warnings that drought, flooding, erosion and customer maintenance responsibility offer limited control. In these cases, re-establishment fees – typically between \$100 and \$300 – may apply, according to contractors.

Contractors say a well-maintained lawn can add 5 to 7 percent to the property's value. But what does it realistically add to a contractor's bottom line? Some landscape contractors admitted that seeding to establish or renew lawns was a necessary evil – a means, hopefully, to attracting add-on business. Others were more optimistic. “I think the main way that contractors can increase their profits on new lawns is to limit callbacks due to seed establishment issues,” says Jeremy Husen, marketing/communications manager, Barenbrug USA, Tangent, Ore. “If you go with a quality seed that does as it's advertised, the contractor will limit return visits and save money in the long run. With a satisfied customer, there's not too much need to do a lot with marketing, as well. The orders will come in if the product does what it says and there aren't issues down the road.”

Brown says of seeding, “We pride ourselves on putting the whole landscape together. The way we guarantee the lawn is that we want to take care of it for a year, giving the customer the first fertilizer application on the house – then we make them sign up for three more applications. We're keeping an eye on them to make sure they're doing their watering. After a year, if there are bare spots, for example, we'll take care of it without charging the customer. I believe it takes a good year to get the lawn where you want it. We have two crews that do nothing but lawn work all season long. It's a very profitable service for us.”



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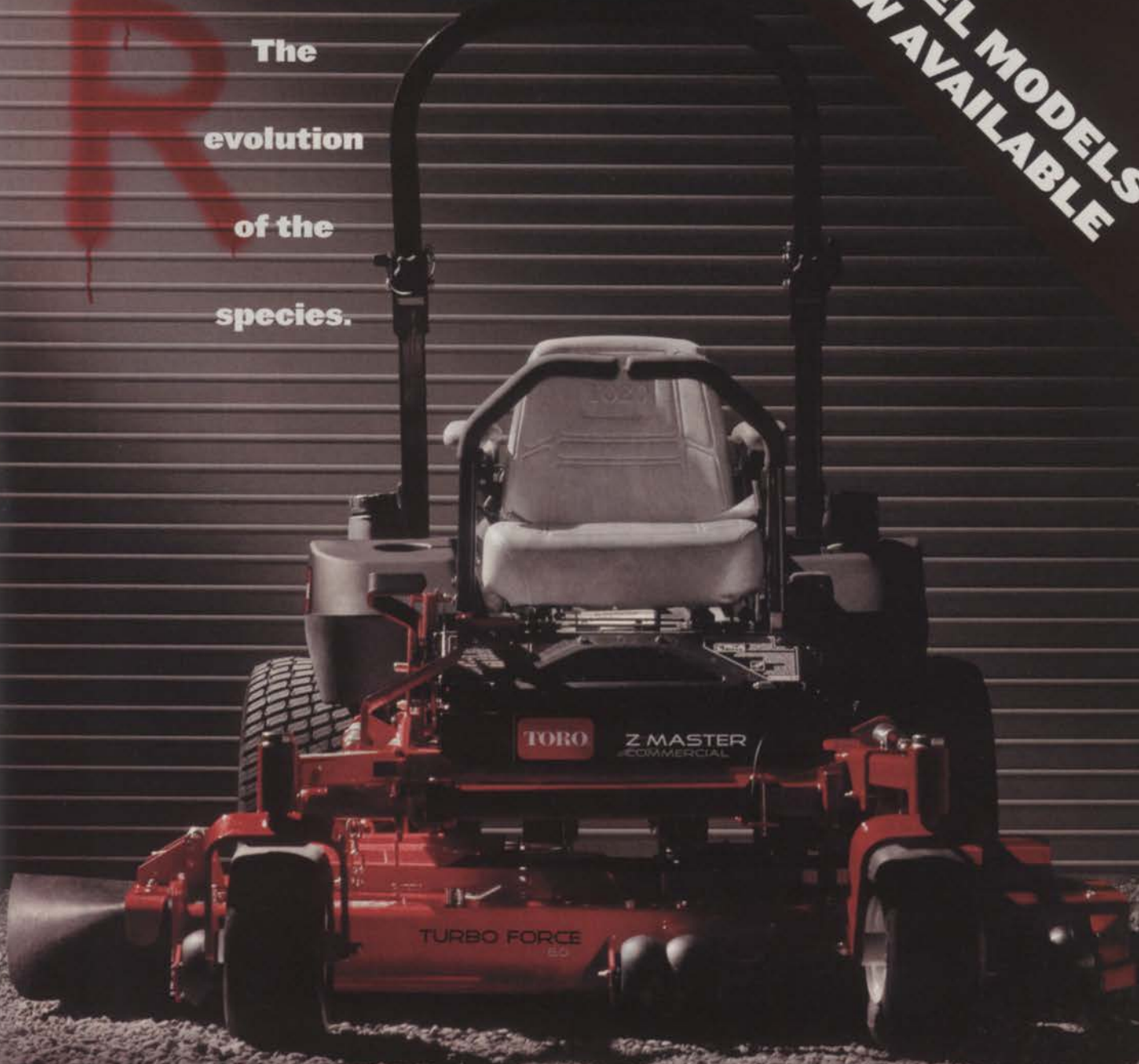
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A spinner top dresser delivers seed to the turf. Photo: Turfco

Making the grass Greener

Executed properly, overseeding can be a quick way to make a profit.

Don't let a lawn's mold or thatch problem cost you more time or money than necessary. Overseeding, the practice of planting seed in an established lawn over or through the canopy of grass already in place, gets the turf to its best form without tearing out the client's entire lawn.

"Overseeding is nothing more than no-till farming on a home lawn to plant grass seed," explains Bob Brophy, director of lawn products for Minneapolis, Minn.-based Turfco, a seeding equipment company.

Dan Setlak, owner of Heartland Lawns in Omaha, Neb., has been offering the service all 16 years he's been in business. And of the lawn care services Heartland offers, overseeding ranks about third or fourth in terms of revenue.

Jody Gibson, general manager at Nair's Lawn Care, Medina, Ohio, is also aware of the overseeding advantage. Nair's has offered overseeding throughout its 20-year history, although the service order isn't always welcome. "Usually, if we have to go back and overseed, it means something went wrong," he says, adding that the plus side is it's profitable because the crews can get the job done fairly quickly.

by heather wood

DETERMINING NEED. While landscape contractors choose to overseed for any number of reasons, damage of some type is often the culprit. For example, insects and mold account for 95 percent of the damage to Northeast Ohio lawns, Gibson says.

When thatch – the dead, dry top layer of soil – plagues a lawn, it creates an ideal candidate for overseeding, Brophy says. He suggests giving the lawn a thatch test to determine if thatch is the problem. “Walk across a lawn with hard-soled shoes,” he says. “If it feels spongy, chances are there’s a thatch problem.”

Brophy recommends taking a core sample from the soil with a pocket knife. If the thatch is 3/8 inch or thicker, the thatch should be removed. The easiest way to remove it, he says, is with a mechanical dethatching machine. A vacuum mower will pick up thatch as well, he says.

Most of the time, overseeding can salvage a lawn. But some lawns

devolve to the point where they need to be completely overhauled. What constitutes the point of no return depends on who you ask. Some lawn care professionals, such as Brophy, say if a lawn is more than 50 percent weeds or damage, it may be time for a fresh start.

Gibson, however, says a lawn can be salvaged even if it contains only 10 percent good grass. However, there are some more dismal situations that warrant a fresh lawn start. “Some fungus, like pythium blight, can wipe out an entire lawn in a couple days,” he says.

Once overseeding is determined as the course of action, additional planning is needed. Different climates create varying turfgrass conditions, and the ideal time to overseed changes with each individual region. It’s best to consult with a turfgrass specialist in the region to determine the best time to overseed, Brophy says.

The best time to plant grass in the Oklahoma area is early fall, taking full

advantage of the spillover of summer’s warm days and the start of cool nights, Brophy says. An added advantage, he says, is weeds grow poorly in that environment.

In Northeast Ohio, Gibson prefers to overseed in the spring before the sun is too overbearing. It can be effectively done in early fall as well, he says, but the customer won’t see the results until early spring. In addition, there may be additional snow mold by springtime, which would all but erase the fall overseeding, he says.

Spring is another optional time for overseeding, Setlak says. However, landscape contractors must be cautious of the fertilizer used because spring is when fertilizers blended with preemergent herbicides are used. These products have been designed to stop the germination of weeds, such as crabgrass, but they’ve been found to hamper the growth of grass seed as well. “If you decide to seed in the spring, use a good quality starter

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fertilizer that's low in nitrogen and high in potassium," Setlak says.

Overseeding in the south is less common than it is in the north, says Eve Keller, sales and marketing manager at Herbi-Systems in Bartlett, Tenn. By trial and error, lawn care professionals at her company overseed with fescue grass in the fall after aerating the area twice. The fescue is able to survive even in the shade, making it more likely to hold up during that time of year, Keller says. In the summer, Bermudagrass is planted during overseeding because "Bermuda repairs easily," Keller explains. "Fescue does not."

Landscape contractors should keep in mind that fescue will likely need to be repaired or reseeded every year or every other year, Keller says. Plus, it remains green while other varieties



An overseeder creates slits in this turf to help achieve seed-to-soil contact. Photo: Turfco

of grass go dormant during colder months, which could cause imbalance in a lawn.

A CHANGING PRACTICE. Advancements over the years have helped ease landscape contractors' workloads and increase productivity. From the 1940s to 1960s, contractors used rototillers to tear up the lawn and stir the soil.

"However, it's just not cost effective and in the lawn care industry when you want to make money," Brophy says. "If you spend 40 hours doing this, you're not going to make money."

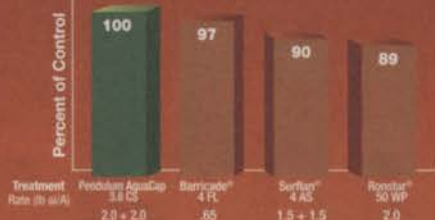
In the 1950s and 1960s, landscape contractors removed sod cores in the lawns or use a rototiller in a practice similar to plowing a field. Now lawn care professionals use machines that cut the work time drastically, allowing them to tackle more than one job in a day.

One of the best methods, Brophy says, is to use an aerator to put holes in the ground. There is also a slit seeder that slices a lawn in several places.

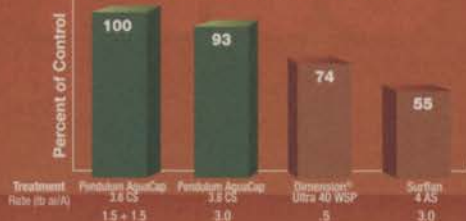
When aerating, Brophy recommends creating at least 12 to 14 holes per square foot. "That gives you a lot of holes and a lot of compaction relief," he says. It also brings soil to the surface, inviting new roots to grow.



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1. Oklahoma State University, 2004. Evaluated 168 days after first application in March. Partial Data Shown.
2. North Carolina State University, 2003. Evaluated 145 days after first application in March. Partial Data Shown.

The seeding operation can then start. Most landscape contractors agree the most important step is getting the seeds where they need to be. "Seed-soil contact is paramount," Brophy says. "The grass seed has to get down to the soil within the first 48 hours." If the seed starts to germinate before the roots are able to get to the soil, the plant will die, he says.

There's more than one way to achieve seed-soil contact. The seeds can be spread using a seeding machine, such as a slicing overseeder, or a seed broadcaster after using a verticut machine.

This is where landscape contractors say it's important to make sure the seeds make contact with the soil. It must get through the canopy and not just rest on top.

Running a sprinkler on the lawn can be effective because the water will wash the seeds to the lowest points, which in this case are the holes or slits created in the turf.

Gibson is a fan of hydroseeding, where water, fertilizer and seeds are combined in a tank to create a green substance sprayed onto the lawn.

Hydroseeding is only done after the soil is loosened in some way. However, Gibson prefers hydroseeding a lawn with bluegrass because the root system can repair itself. Also, he'll use bluegrass to overseed a ryegrass lawn to improve upon the lawn's thickness. Gibson, like others, understands the importance of seed-soil contact.

But the job isn't done when the seeds hit the soil. "One of the critical issues people tend to overlook is after care," Brophy says. "You can do the best job seeding, but if you don't take care of it, there will be no lawn."

It's important that the seeded area does not receive direct sunlight for the first couple of days because the sun's rays can overwhelm the seedlings. Watering the seed into the soil is crucial in the early days, as well.

SEEDING SALES PITCH. It's usually not difficult to convince customers to overseed their lawns, Gibson says. "It's usually pretty easy because their grass looks pretty bad," he says, adding most of their overseeding business comes from customers who call for an estimate, not from a sales pitches.

Heartland charges \$8 per 1,000 square feet for overseeding and \$12 per 1,000 square feet for double overseeding, with no minimum charge for either service. For customers clueless about the procedure, Setlak recommends a routine overseeding. "It's a good idea every three or four years, whether it's needed or not," he says. "Grass is a plant — it does get old."

Those who have ordered the service may not like the look of their yard for a few days following the overseeding procedure. "It makes an ugly looking mess for a week or so," Brophy says, adding clients eventually come around when they see the end result — a lush, green lawn. **LL**

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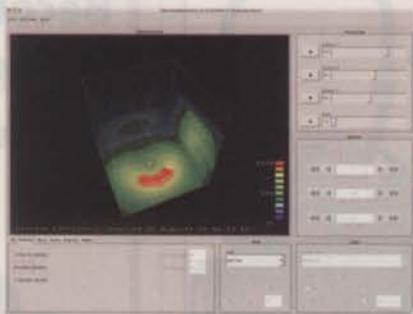
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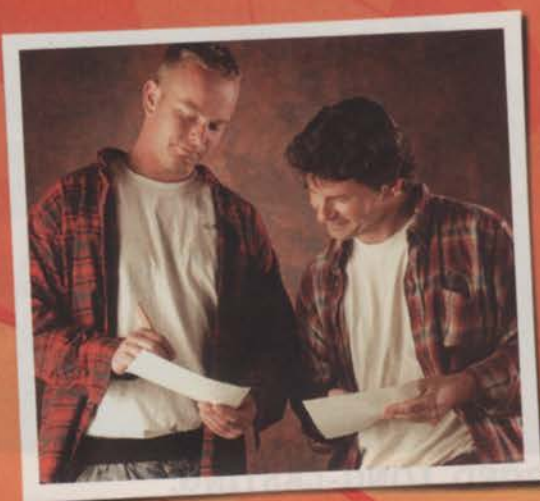
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NAME: Bill Kemp DATES: 10-14

DAY	START	LUNCH	END	JOBSITE	WORK DONE	HOURS
MON	7:00	1/2	3:30	Walby		8
TUE			3:30			8
WED			4:00			8 1/2
THU			4:00			8 1/2
FRI	▽	▽	4:00	▽		8 1/2

Employee Signature: Bill Kemp TOTAL HOURS: 41 1/2



Reality?

Employee Report

Bill Kemp

Jobsite Name: Walby Property Date Range: 4/10/2006 through 4/14/2006

Day	Start	End	Activity	Hours
Mon 4/10	7:08 AM	12:05 PM	Irrigation	4:57 hours
	12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Irrigation	2:41 hours 7:38 hours
Tue 4/11	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:55 hours
	12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Irrigation	2:40 hours 7:35 hours
Wed 4/12	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Irrigation	4:50 hours
	12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Irrigation	3:03 hours 7:53 hours
Thu 4/13	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Planting	5:02 hours
	12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Planting	2:56 hours 7:58 hours
Fri 4/14	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Planting	4:54 hours
	12:44 PM	3:39 PM	Planting	2:55 hours 7:49 hours

Employee total 38:53 hours

Signature: Bill Kemp Bill Kemp



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product spotlight > >



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product spotlight > >



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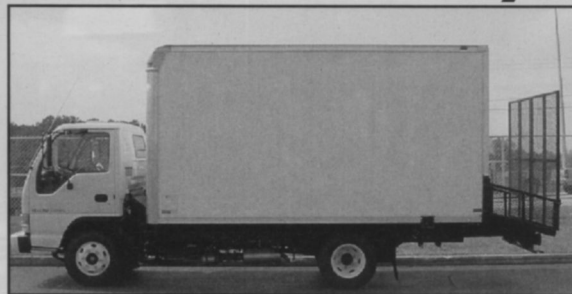
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- Come in 60 and 72-inch cutting widths
- Each diesel model comes standard with a low profile, full suspension seat with weight, back and armrest adjustments
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Circle 231 on reader service card



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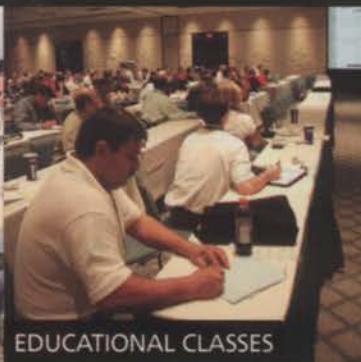
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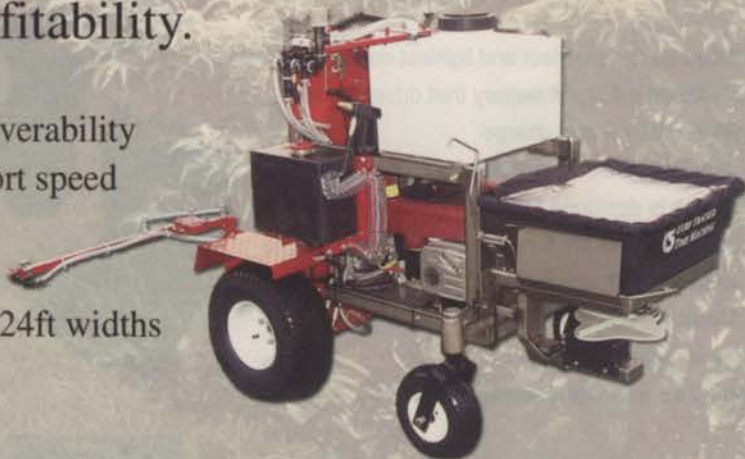
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 5. Irrigation Installation
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Landscape Maintenance

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

Pesticide Application

16. Turf Disease Control
 17. Turf Insect Control
 18. Turf Weed Control
 19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application
Other
 20. Mowing
 21. Hydroseeding
 22. Snow Removal
 23. Interior Landscape Services
 24. Structural Pest Control
 25. Holiday Lighting
 26. Other

3. What is the service mix %?

Mowing/Maint _____ Design/Build _____
 Chemical Application _____

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

5. Is Chemical Application work

1. Outsourced 2. Done by own employees

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

- ____ 1. Less than \$50,000
 ____ 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
 ____ 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
 ____ 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
 ____ 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
 ____ 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
 ____ 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
 ____ 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
 ____ 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
 ____ 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
 ____ 11. \$7,000,000 or more

7. What percentage of growth do you anticipate?

8. What year was your business founded?

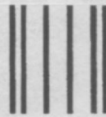
9. What is your business mix? (%)

Residential _____ Commercial _____ Other _____

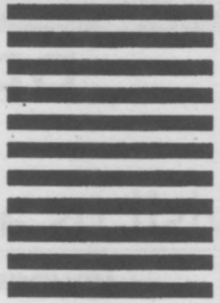
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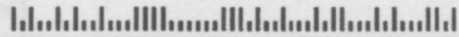


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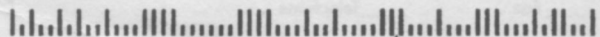
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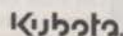
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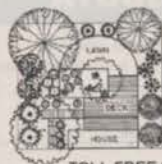
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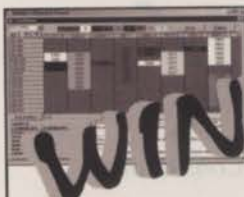
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The author is managing director of Relevance Marketing, Burlingame Calif., and can be reached at info@relevance.biz.

■ Growing Arborwell with Database Marketing



Arborwell has a passion for trees. Our Castro Valley, Calif.-based company was built on the simple premise that customers come first. From the first interaction through the final cleanup of a project, we believe that a customer's satisfaction is paramount – and it appears our passion is paying off. For two consecutive years (2003 and 2004), Arborwell was recognized as one of the 100 fastest growing companies in the Bay Area by the *San Francisco's Business Times*. This is not an easy feat for a tree care company with its roots planted in an area known for the rapid growth of technology companies.

Over the last four years, Arborwell has grown from \$500,000 to \$7 million, sustaining an average revenue growth of 82 percent for the past three years. To achieve much of this growth, we have utilized the latest in Web technology, database marketing and direct mail to regularly interact with customers, keeping them informed of seasonal and plant health care concerns.

Since 2003, we have partnered with Relevance Marketing, a progressive marketing agency based in Burlingame, Calif., to execute our marketing strategies and campaigns. Relevance helps us target our professional tree management

services to corporations, building managers, golf course superintendents and residential estate owners in the Sacramento and San Francisco Bay areas.

Prior to 2003, our marketing was a typical small-business shotgun approach: create brochures of the company's services, maintain a simple Web site and create direct-mail campaigns for customer acquisition. Today, our marketing strategy is to treat each customer as an individual, value their business and communicate in a timely, personal and non-intrusive manner. To do this, our company uses the magic of 21st century databases, which allow us to create unique one-to-one "touch-points," or instances of direct communication, to increase sales and build customer loyalty. These personalized touch points are in the forms of greeting cards used in pre- and post-sales follow-up and targeted direct-mail campaigns that let us contact specific customers and individual market segments about our tree care services.

We feel that all good marketing starts with knowing your customers and treating them uniquely. We know our residential customers have different tree and service requirements than a property management organization or golf course management company. Rather

Arborwell's 3 Database Marketing Program Principles



1. Touch existing customers with a communication piece at least once a quarter.
2. Simplify the process to create the communication or direct marketing materials. The solution must be easy to use, cost effective and be able to create, address, mail and deliver materials within days, not weeks.
3. Talk to customers directly. Use accurate marketing information (extracted from Arborwell's Management Information System) demonstrating that the company understands the customer's business allowing for cross-selling and up-selling opportunities.



Arborwell

Welcome Back, Peter Sutherland

MY COMPANY BUSINESS CUSTOM DESIGN FAVORITES

Step 4 of 6
Preview and approve your card

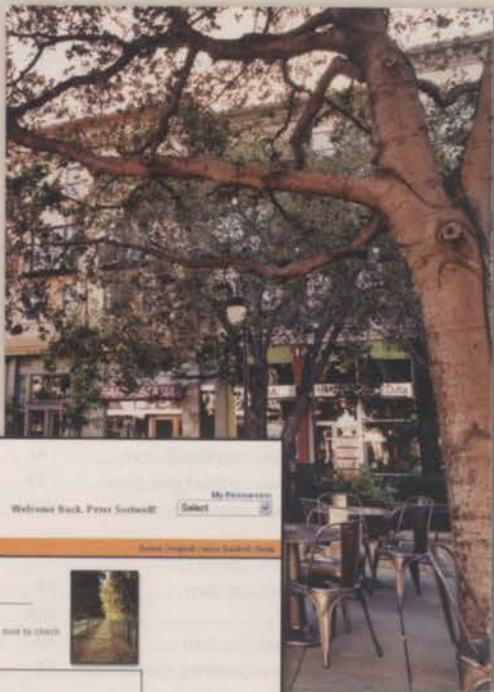
Preview your card
Take a look at your card and make sure it looks the way you want. Be sure to check spelling, grammar, layout, font size, color, etc.

I am pleased you selected Arborwell for your tree preservation and replanting project in San Francisco. We will be pleased with our service. Our contact will be sent to the site to begin on Monday. Feel free to contact me directly, send an email, calling, during the project. I can be reached at 925.929.3333 x 12

Dee Johnson

Thank you for choosing Arborwell. Your business is greatly appreciated by all of us and we look forward to serving you in the future.

Arborwell



Using a special Web portal (left), Arborwell staff can send clients customized thank-you notes, direct-mail cards and more. Images like the ones above, as well as text, can be switched out based on the audience. Photos: Arborwell

than communicate to all of them using the same message, we tailor our marketing to each audience.

To accomplish this, we use a branded Internet marketing portal that lets administrative staff, sales personnel and Arborwell officers mail professionally printed 5-by-7-inch folded cards, addressed and stamped, to individual customers right from our computers. Rather than creating one piece of collateral for all customers, this program lets us customize card images and text based on the recipients' or market's needs. The objective is to create an ongoing program that facilitates fast, professional, one-to-one communication with customers. For example, we would use images and text relating to trees and buildings to target commercial property managers, while cards to golf course customers would have images of course trees.

Good database marketing always starts with good data. For existing customers, we extract, segment, sort and load customer information into the

database. We then use the marketing portal to create and send the personalized cards, for one or hundreds of customers, with just a few mouse clicks. Salespeople can immediately follow up on sales meetings, service-recovery issues or even thank their entire customer base for their business on a quarterly basis. The cards cost \$1.50 to \$3 based on the quantity mailed.

We use the same principles when prospecting and acquiring new customers with direct-mail. Customer acquisition campaigns begin with databases of typical mailing and limited-demographic information. However, response rates increase dramatically when the direct mail piece relates to the individual. This can be achieved through simple personalization techniques, such as tying the text of a tree replacement or plant health care offer to a specific residential area based on home values, income ranges or other demographic information. This is especially important when communicating the trust and expertise Arborwell's

certified arborists bring to residential neighborhoods and estate properties.

Overall, we have an annual budget of \$150,000 that we spend with Relevance on these types of mailings and other direct marketing approaches. Regardless of the cost, being able to touch a customer with the speed and intimacy of a card three days after a meeting is, as the commercial says, priceless. By utilizing intelligent marketing programs to target our existing and potential customers through technology, we've been able to increase our sales while lowering our expenses and the burden on our administrative staff. This has truly helped us spread our roots and grow like trees within an urban environment. - Greg Goldman LL

www.lawnandlandscape.com

Visit the April Online Extras section for additional photos of Arborwell's unique marketing materials.



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