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Lawn & Landscape

01 | 06

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Convinced the same old ways lead to the same old results, Bob Langille adopted new marketing strategies to refresh his client base and boost profits.

Inside >>

Cutting - Edge Mowers

Trenchers: Digging Diversity

Pesticide/Fertilizer Blends

Irrigation Software Solutions



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Convinced the same old ways lead to the same old results, Bob Langille adopted new marketing strategies to refresh his client base and boost profits.

Cover Image by David Carmack

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USE READER SERVICE # 11



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Lawn & Landscape

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USE READER SERVICE # 12

You're Fired!

Granular or Liquid?

Among this month's exclusive *Lawn & Landscape* Online content is a look at the debate over whether liquid or granular pesticide/fertilizer combination products are best. Does one form work better than the other? And what does public perception have to do with a lawn care professional's choice? To find out, look for "Granular or Liquid" in the January Online Extras section.

Next, get in on the debate by sharing your own opinions. **Between Jan. 16 and 22**, log onto *Lawn & Landscape* Online and participate in the weekly Online Poll where we ask, "What types of products do you prefer for pesticide/fertilizer combination applications?" You can elaborate on your preference at the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board and discuss the topic with other industry professionals while you're there.

Let's face it: Some customers just aren't worth the trouble. Whether they don't pay on time, constantly change their minds about a project or are just plain impossible to please, most contractors have had to "fire" customers when the relationship isn't working out.

But how do you know when to take a client to look elsewhere for lawn and landscape services? According to many professionals, when the steps it takes to keep a customer happy exceeds the cost and time that the actual work should require, it's time to move on. *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board users recently discussed the best ways to fire customers and their experiences in such situations, and also shared why it's important for companies to take this step when challenging customers start dragging down a business.

Eavesdrop on their tips and tricks by reading this month's Best of the Web feature on page 64. Then, visit the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board yourself to share your own business questions and experiences. You never know when your business insight will end up in the pages of the industry's leading publication!



Between Jan. 23 and 29, log onto *Lawn & Landscape* Online to take part in the weekly Online Poll where we ask, "Have you ever 'fired' a customer for challenging or unreasonable behavior?"



what's new with you?

Lawn & Landscape wants to know what's going on with your company. Whether you're announcing personnel changes, a new product, an industry event or big company news, *Lawn & Landscape* Online is the place to make it heard! Send your press releases and photos (if you have them) to lspeers@gie.net. Be sure to include your contact information so our staff can follow up.

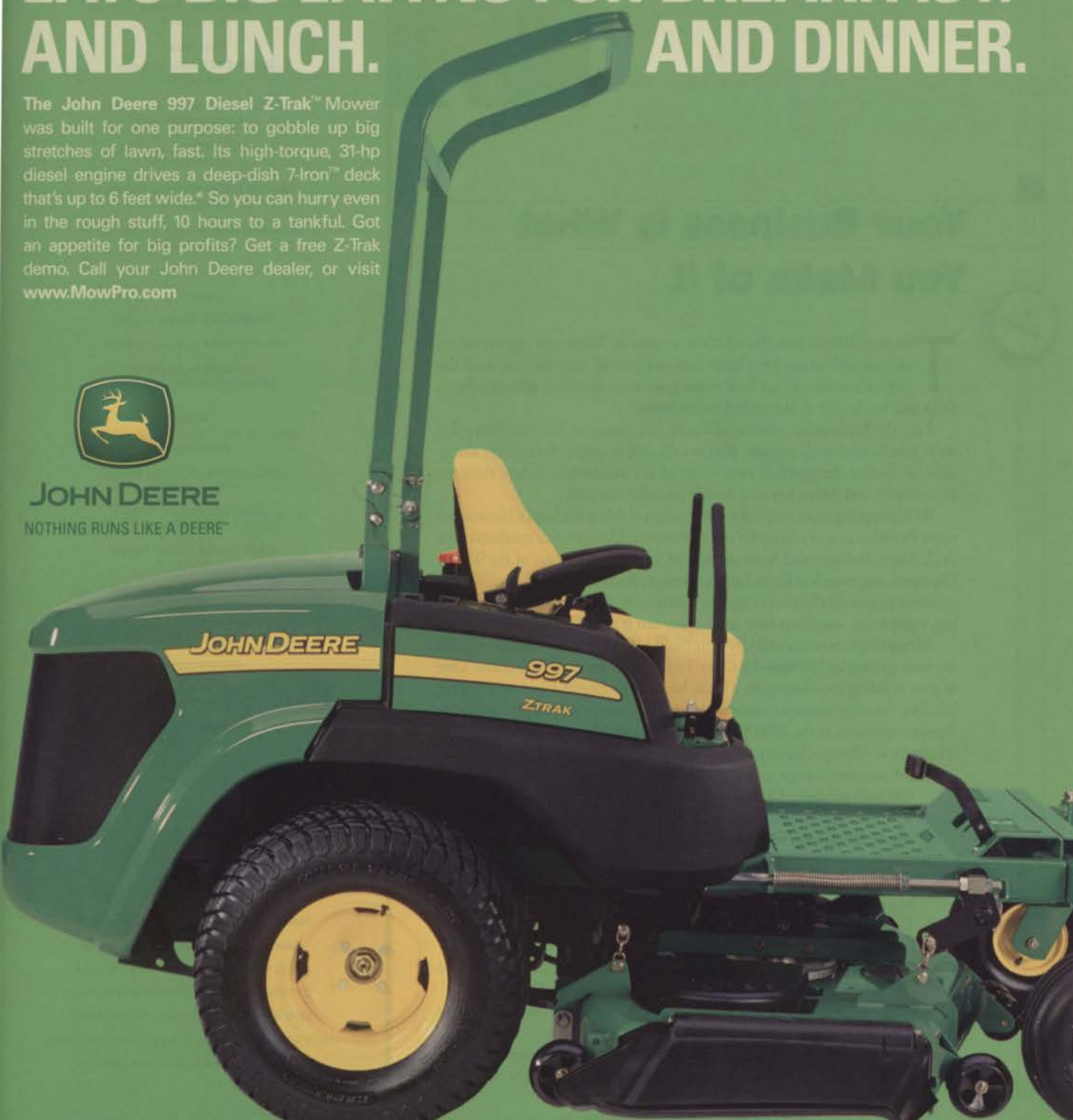
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797



757



727A



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7IRON

PROFESSIONAL MOWING

USE READER SERVICE # 13

cindy code



Your Business is What You Make of it

The year 2005 is history and 2006 is upon us. What new opportunities will we seek in the New Year? Naturally, we all start the year with the best of intentions, but how many goals and objectives will actually go from the "to-do" list to the completed column?

Like the Nationwide commercial says: Life comes at you fast. Every day we're bombarded with e-mails, phone calls and inquiries from every direction. So, before the year gets away from us, it's worthwhile to take the time to strategize and define key and doable goals for the year.

We're not going to accomplish those specifics in this space, but I'd like to share some thoughts to gear you up for the new season. Motivational speakers come in all shapes and sizes and from all walks of life. With the onset of the Winter Olympics next month in Turin, Italy, it's fitting to discuss how good conditioning creates opportunities for your company. If your business isn't fit—financially, staffing, equipment, customer base, etc.—how can it grow and prosper?

Heavyweight wrestler and Olympic Gold Medalist Rulan Gardner was the keynote speaker at last month's Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show. One of nine children growing up on a farm, he said he's fought adversity all of his life. His defining moment came with a victory over a seemingly invincible Russian opponent at the 2000 Sydney Olympics ranking as one of the greatest triumphs in Olympic history.

Gardner's seven steps to winning are:

1. Get back to basics. Don't let adversity get in your way. Rather, persevere and make opportunities for yourself by turning negatives—like low-ball competitors, high fuel prices and labor shortages—into advantages.
2. Self-doubt fuels the fire. Maybe you're not sure about your ability to grow your business to the next level. Use your ability and desire to fulfill your potential. Turn can't into can and won't into will.
3. Enlist others around you to form a support group. Talk to peers and financial experts to review your business plan.
4. Give 100 percent every day. Align yourself with professionals whom you admire. Being around the best prepares you to be the best.
5. Make a commitment to taking care of your business. Don't limit your business' potential. Finish what you start.
6. Aim high when you're feeling low. Realize who your core customers are and what your business is good at. Your potential is what you make of it.
7. Don't rest on your laurels. Business isn't getting any easier and your competition isn't standing still. Strive to keep your company progressive.

As you fine-tune your business plan for 2006, be true to your mission and sincere with your customers.

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Excellent, economical blend component.



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tolerance and dark green winter color.



Dark blue-green color with medium
leaf texture and good year-round color.



Very dark green color with fine leaf texture
that has good wilt and heat tolerance with
less water. Good resistance to stripe rust
and leaf spot with improved resistance to
powdery mildew.



Dear Editor,

I couldn't browse Lawn & Landscape this month – you really make me stop and read. The layout and content just seemed exceptional.

Great work and thanks for your efforts.

Jim Paluch
J.P. Horizons

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The Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board is another way for you to offer your feedback. Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard to share your thoughts on what you like – or don't like – about the magazine.

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 nwisniewski@gie.net. You can also call her at 800/456-0707.

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USE READER SERVICE # 16



Friends Buy From Friends

Relationship marketing is not a new concept. In fact, it's so old you might wonder why I'm dedicating a column to it. The reason is that it's so old it's almost dead – which creates the perfect opportunity for us to resuscitate it while the competition isn't looking.

Now, while we all agree technology has made for great progress, it's also dangerous in a business like ours. These days we're more apt to use a cell phone or send an e-mail to a client than have a face-to-face conversation. Friends do indeed buy from friends, but it's hard to befriend clients you never see. So as we start a new year, let's discuss some ways you can use relationship marketing at your company in the months ahead.

You must first know who your top 25 clients are, and make certain they are getting the level of attention and service they deserve. At my company, a select few clients generate more than half of our revenue. Our success depends upon them – I personally know who they are and I make sure they personally know who I am. Perhaps just as important, my entire staff knows who our top clients are; this ensures they always receive top treatment from all of us, whether it's from our landscapers, our work crews or our receptionist. We want our top clients to remain our top clients, and for them to recommend our services to their family, friends and neighbors. Most people tend to live near and socialize with others whose financial means – and material desires – are much like their own. Your top clients can become both your friends and your best salespeople if you treat them right.

So identify your top 25 clients, and then think of three things you can do for them to distinguish your dedication to them. Here are some tactics that have worked for me:

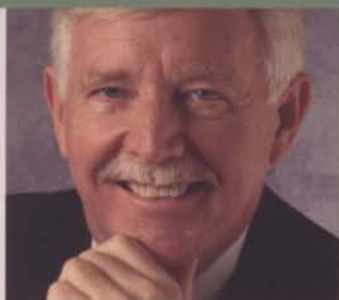
- Invite them to your home for dinner.
 - Invite them to a sporting event and a reception before or after.
 - Take them golfing.
 - Mow their lawn for free while they are on vacation.
 - Stop by out of the blue to say 'Hello.'
 - Drop off a watermelon around the Fourth of July – or a pumpkin at Halloween, or a wreath at Christmas, or flowers any time of the year – and include a handwritten thank-you note for their having chosen your company.
 - Call to check in at least monthly.
 - Treat them to lunch.
 - Set up a time to meet with them at their house and ask them three questions: What should we keep doing? Stop doing? Start doing?
 - Plant some bulbs next fall in their beds and send them a note in the spring telling them to watch for the little surprise you planted for them.
 - Invite them to your office for a party, and then have your whole staff there to greet them and have lunch with them. Make sure your entire team thanks them for their business – something your team should do whenever they see clients.
- Now that you have some ideas, you need to put a plan in place. Take out your calendar and make it a goal to do two things for your top 25 clients in 2006. That's 50 things you have to do – or one per week, with two weeks off. Each week put down a client's name and what you're going to do for him or her. Don't put it off – do it right now while it's still fresh in your mind. If you execute a plan like this, your clients will be impressed. They will think twice before giving their business to the competition, and it's likely they will tell their friends about what you've done for them. Why? Because friends buy from friends, and friends trust friends to go the extra mile for them. **ll**

marty grunder

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



DON'T COUNT ON THIS.



It's Budget Time Again

If you've never created a budget, this is the year to start. Owners of any size business that create and follow budgets ensure fewer headaches, fewer unknowns, less stress during the year and – for sure – higher profit. This method will make it easy.

The initial chore in setting up a budget is to clearly identify each "account" in your Chart of Accounts. I recommend using a Chart of Accounts conducive to the green industry and not a generic contractor's chart. Four categories you should include are: Direct expenses, equipment overhead, indirect overhead and administrative overhead. Ask industry friends or colleagues if you need help setting this up. Doing so will greatly help you analyze your business.

Next, write a short description of each line item. Example:

- Account: Direct Labor: Total amount of labor used to "directly" perform the work. Does not include the Indirect Labor such as time spent for equipment maintenance, yard, etc.


With a complete Chart of Accounts, you have a document that can be referred to by the person keying information into your financial software, such as receipts, invoices, etc., which makes it a valuable reference all year. Having a chart also means you're ready to develop a budget. Have available all of your financial information from the previous year for reference and give your best guess as to what you expect your expenses to be in the coming year. Understand also that your first budget won't be entirely accurate and may not even be close. You'll be able to adjust this budget periodically during the year as you see how everything falls into place.

Creating a worksheet will make creating and organizing your budget easy. On your form, provide a space for the company division, account name, description, and

a line to budget the dollars for each month (see sample below).

Use a separate worksheet for each line item on the Chart of Accounts, then keep the pages together in a notebook. From there, you're ready to write in the dollar amount for each account per month. Scribble on the sheet all you want – make notes as to how you came up with the dollar amount. This will be valuable later in the year when you try to figure out why you budgeted a certain amount.

Involved as many people as possible in the budgeting process. Provide copies of the forms and that are appropriate to your managers' accountability and ask for ideas. Your objective should be to have your managers develop a budget that you approve, then hold them accountable to the budget.

With the information outlined on your worksheets, you can transfer the data to your financial software, or easily develop a spreadsheet in Excel. From there, the budget is all about management. Each month, compare your budget to the actual amounts in each category. If the numbers are off, you'll see very clearly where the discrepancy is. A monthly review will give you control of your business and let you know where every dollar was spent, compared to what you thought you should spend. Don't be afraid to adjust your budget, perhaps on a quarterly basis. This will help you become more accurate in your budgeting by year's end. If you've never created a budget, please give it a try. You'll take control of your business by making good, educated financial decisions. 

SAMPLE ANNUAL BUDGET WORKSHEET

BUDGET 2005

Account No. _____ Account Name _____

Description: _____

Dollars Notes

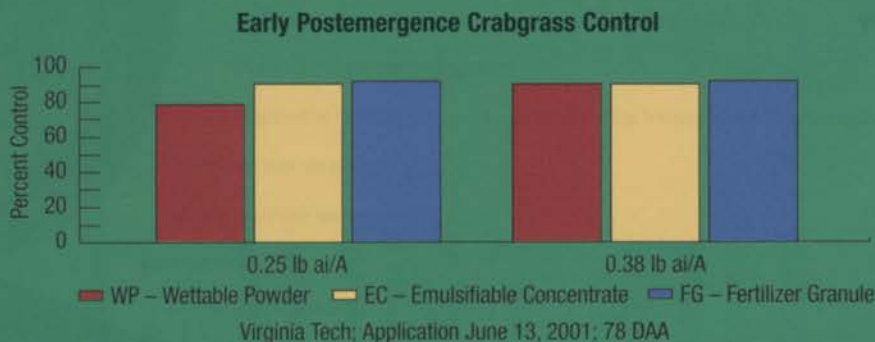
Jan. \$	
Feb. \$	
Mar. \$	
April \$	
May \$	
June \$	
July \$	
Aug. \$	
Sept. \$	
Oct. \$	
Nov. \$	
Dec. \$	

Budgeted by: _____

jack mattingly

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- Stainless-steel throttle and choke cables for smoother operation
- Reduced grease points from 13 to 9
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- Optional rear anti-scalp wheels
- Easier blade servicing
- Serviceless deck idler
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New logo to let you know Hustler is not resting on its laurels



From Just Talk to Engagement

One of the most frequently reported frustrations among landscape contractors concerning their HR issues is the inability to spend more time communicating with their employees.

For most landscape managers, this challenge is a matter of time allocation; for others it is proper prioritization. The traditional weapons of more money and increased benefits are no longer enough to win the war for the best employee talent in our industry. The battle is now being fought over which company – small or large – has the best employee relations and communications programs.

In spite of their best intentions, sometimes landscape company owners become so focused on hiring people that they lose focus on how to treat them once they come aboard. In particular, new employees size up their company in the first few months of employment and, based upon these experiences, begin to make decisions about how long they will stay employed there. These early experiences form lasting impressions – you expect to see the best in them and they expect to see the best in you. In many cases, poor communications can erode even the best recruiting and selection program.

Therefore, it is important for landscape contractors to develop an employee communications strategy as a part of their overall human resource initiatives. Some key points to consider include:


1. Communication needs to be constant. Clear, concise, and regular communication is always best. So many times companies wait until the last minute to communicate changes, especially when the news is not so positive (e.g., medical premium increases, lower revenues than projections, etc.).

Landscape contractors can find the time each day to see and positively urge the workers on who are taking off for a hard day to do their best and greet them

upon their return to the company facility. This activity can be supplemented with postings regarding company news and upcoming events, weekly employee meetings that go into more detail, payroll stuffers and other ad hoc face-to-face meetings which build trust and foster more open dialogue.

2. Communication should come directly from the horse's mouth. There is nothing worse than when employees hear of important company news first from the likes of vendors, competitors or other third parties. Employees may feel a sense of betrayal, awkwardness and loss of power. Therefore, it is important to communicate as much information as possible, honestly and accurately, concerning pending change without violating a trust or confidential agreement. This way, employees will feel more involved, more understanding of pending decisions and will more likely embrace the organizational changes once they do occur.

3. Tighten up your employee communication program. Because of the nature of the workforce, especially those who have smaller numbers, make sure your employee communications have a consistent tone and style. Always appeal to your audience and stay away from any corporate jargon. Employees will then come to look forward to and identify with each communications piece. Don't forget to retain a competent translator who can accurately communicate to your non-English speaking workers.

4. Involve all managers and supervisors in the process. Don't let the boss go it alone. Managers and supervisors are credible and respected members who are valuable resources for conveying key company messages. They need to be active participants in the process and need to assist with the development and delivery of detailed "talking points," Q & As, and face-to-face presentations. 

larry fish

is president of GreenSearch, a human resource consulting organization. He can be reached at 888/375-7787, larry@greensearch.com, or via www.greensearch.com. PeopleSmarts® is a registered trademark of GreenSearch.



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Maximize Early Weed Control

January is a time for lawn care companies to rest and ready themselves. Spring is coming, and with it comes early mornings, late nights and frantic schedules. All along, the goal for many is to keep up with the work without falling too far behind.

With that goal in mind, the temptation to start round one applications as soon as possible is always strong. Why not take advantage of an early thaw to get those preemergent herbicides on the ground, right? Maybe. And maybe not.

Take the temperature. There are no lack of suggestions as to how to time preemergent herbicide applications. While old axioms, like watching for the end of the forsythia blooming period or following certain calendar dates, are popular, the best strategy for timing applications is monitoring the soil temperature. Weed seeds, particularly crabgrass, will not begin germinating until soil temperatures at a 2-inch depth stabilize above 55 degrees Fahrenheit for five consecutive days.

Why wait for the temperatures to reach that germination level? Why not apply products sooner to wipe out weeds before they start growing? First, the term preemergent herbicide is actually somewhat inaccurate. These products don't actually prevent the seed from germinating. They control the weed by inhibiting cell division in the developing plant's young root system, which is usually long before the plant is large enough to be seen. The failure of the root system causes the entire plant to die.

Secondly, you want to maximize the length of control you enjoy from every application you make. Most preemergent herbicides last up to 100 to 120 days, although the best control lasts 60 to 90 days. The control diminishes as the product breaks down from exposure to heat or ultraviolet (sun) light. So, you obviously do not want to waste any of those valuable

days by applying product too early.

Monitoring soil temperatures calls for a soil thermometer. Be sure to place your thermometer in an area with full sun since crabgrass generally only germinates in sunny areas, but avoid taking the temperature in areas near concrete or structural walls since they can artificially warm nearby soil through heat reflection.

Application success. Regardless of the product you choose, certain practices will help ensure your preemergent herbicide application's effectiveness.

The first step is always reading the label, following the directions and applying the product at the recommended rate. Ideally, the product should be watered in with 1/2-inch of irrigation within 48 hours of application. Without irrigation, the product will remain inactive on top of the soil until rain falls, which increases exposure to sunlight and reduces long-term effectiveness.

Preemergent herbicides control weeds by creating a chemical barrier across the top of the soil. Once the weed grows enough to come in contact with the barrier, the product goes to work. Anything that disrupts this barrier will hurt performance, including mowing too low, aerating, dethatching or any other form of mechanical cultivation.

What went wrong? The frustrating reality with preemergent products is that they are never perfect. In fact, independent research studies have shown that any product delivering 80 percent control or better is performing very well. Customers need to be advised that 100 percent weed control is unlikely.

If you get breakthrough, or weed growth within the first 60 to 90 days after making an application properly, then the odds are good that the breakthrough is in an area of thin turf because the thin turf lets more light through to the soil and improves crabgrass germination. **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 with any technical questions you might have.

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2006 Gardening Trends Revealed

Outdoor living continues to be the big trend in gardening with homeowners spending more than \$62.5 billion on outdoor living products and services in 2004, according to Unity Marketing. And the report showed that plants accounted for only one-third of the sales, reflecting hardscapes' growing place in the landscape.

"For homeowners today, it is now 'in' to be 'out,'" says Stacey Pierson, IMPACT Marketing and PR, Garden Media Group, Chadds Ford, Pa. "Outside that is... cooking, entertaining, reading, relaxing and even working in the great outdoors."

For landscape contractors, this could mean increased spending on creating, improving and renovating outdoor living spaces, Pierson says, adding higher fuel prices will further drive this trend as homeowners continue to stay closer to home for entertainment and relaxation.

"Now the homeowner's focus is on decorating the outside of the home on the deck, the patio and all around their property," she says.

According to Susan McCoy,

president of the Garden Media Group, who has predicted outdoor living trends for the past five years, lived-in gardens are taking center stage over showplace gardens in 2006. "Homeowners want easy and simple gardens that are low maintenance and full of color," she explains.

Gardening in small spaces, including on patios, decks and rooftops and in containers, is also growing in popularity among consumers. Plant Breeder Raymond Evison calls it vertical gardening, growing either up or down from balconies or patios, and says contractors will see more dwarf-sized annuals, perennials and shrubs being specifically bred for these minute spaces.

While container gardening is still popular among nearly half of the consumers surveyed by the Garden Writers Association, the trend has now stepped off the back porch and patio and moved out into the landscape, showing up in beds and borders. Busy homeowners find decorating their yard with "spots of pots" an easy way to splash color throughout the yard, McCoy says.

When choosing plants to incorporate into their landscape designs, contractors may also notice customers asking for plants with large leaves that create striking foliage in addition to eye-catching blooms. Some examples of plants with this architecture include Summer Chocolate mimosa, Blazin' Rose iredine and Kong coleus. The colors clients will be requesting in 2006 include red, purple and gold, says Steve Hutton, president, The Conard-Pyle Co.

Well-mixed containers are not completely out, but as Elvin McDonald, garden editor of *Better Homes & Gardens*, says, "Plants in too many colors and textures look as tasteless as wearing plaids, stripes and prints together. Plant several of one variety per container or several different varieties, all in one color family, per pot. Then group colorful containers together to create an avalanche of copious color."

Finally, McCoy says incorporating sound, motion and water in the garden via water features and fountains continues to remain trendy.

For more gardening trends, visit www.gardenmediagroup.com. — Nicole Wisniewski



Outdoor living continues to increase in popularity. Photos: Garden Media Group



Mergers & Acquisitions

Girard Environmental Sells Residential Lawn Care Division, Prepares for Garden Center Opening

Sanford, Fla.-based Girard Environmental Services recently announced the sale of its residential lawn and shrub care accounts to TruGreen ChemLawn. Company President Rick Girard says much of the company's business has been moving toward growth on the commercial side, leaving them with fewer resources to focus on this particular service.

"When we started residential work, we were very gung-ho about it – and we still are in many respects," Girard tells *Lawn & Landscape*. "But we found that there's only so much of us to go around. We reached a point where we were applying a lot of financial resources and infrastructure to that aspect of the business, but our growth is focused in another direction."

In terms of its unique service blend, Girard says that the company offered lawn and shrub care in conjunction with its irrigation services. For the purposes of the TruGreen transaction, Girard Envi-

ronmental Services sold only the lawn and shrub services, which Girard says had been costing the company \$12,000 to \$15,000 monthly in time and resources. The company retained its irrigation accounts, which will be rolled back into the commercial side of the business. Residential landscape construction also will remain on the company's service menu for high-end customers.

Girard says managers and employees of the portion of the business that was sold off have been reallocated throughout Girard Environmental Services, as has the profit made from the sale. Financial aspects of the transaction were not disclosed.

For business owners considering selling a portion of their companies, Girard recommends doing some homework internally before approaching a potential buyer. "There are a lot of different aspects to consider," he says. "Look at your financial resources, your management team and what you can handle as a company in terms of growth and business diversity."

Offering a service well and offering it profitably are very different, Girard says. While Girard Environmen-

tal Services offered lawn and shrub care successfully on a customer-relations level, the service spread the company's resources too thin. "You have to self-analyze," he says. "I don't look at this sale as a failure by any means – it just happens that the service isn't right for us right now. Instead, we sold about 650 accounts for top dollar and we've been able to take the management and assets of that division and the money we sold it for and redistribute them into more successful areas of the company."

"Some people become too attached to their business and the services they offer, which is great if you're small, but once you reach a certain point, that attachment needs to be to building your brand the best way possible," he says.

One area in which Girard Environmental Service is building its brand is through the launch of a new garden center, planned for the spring. Girard says he

and the company are excited about this new venture. "We have a great location and a plan to offer garden center services

differently than other businesses in the area," he says. "Our goal is to build relationships with our garden center customers, who may also be design/build customers."

"One way we plan on doing that is to have consistency throughout the customer's garden center experience, meaning that they'll be able to work with the same staff member from the time they walk in, to the time they choose their plants, to having that person help them load the materials in their vehicles and taking care of paying at the end of the transaction," Girard says. "We're going after a higher-end customer and know they'll appreciate that kind of service."

Girard says the new garden center and other growth within the company should bring Girard Environmental Services' revenue up to the \$18 million mark – a 20-percent increase – next year. The Girard Cos. also include Girard Wholesale Nurseries and Girard Pool & Patio. Girard Environmental Services came in at No. 77 on this year's *Lawn & Landscape* Top 100 List. – Lauren Spiers Hunter



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USE READER SERVICE # 19

ASSOCIATION NEWS

PLANET's 2006 President John Gibson talks about his goals for the association



After a busy year as the first president of the newly formed Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), Dan Foley's term is ending and President-Elect John Gibson is next in line to continue to drive the association forward in 2006.

At a press conference conducted at the Green Industry Expo in Orlando, Fla., Gibson, of Swingle Tree, Lawn & Christmas Décor, Denver, Colo., highlighted some of his immediate goals and the results of some 2006 strategic planning discussions that have been happening since September.

First and foremost, Gibson says he wants the association to have a continued focus on obtaining member feedback. With approximately 4,300 members since the merger of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America in January 2005, this is crucial, Gibson says. "We want to make sure that everyone feels that they are a part of the association without losing the bigger picture," he shares.

Next, Gibson says that as a direct result of member feedback the association is going to split up the Summer Leadership meeting and the Legislative Days. "We combined the events this year to see how that would work," he says. "Afterward, our members told us they thought it would be better if we kept the events separate so that we can have greater focus on each event and the issues being addressed. We are listening to the members and the Legislative Days will be in July and the

Summer Leadership event will be in August."

Thirdly, Gibson wants to ensure that PLANET delivers the value of networking to its members, something the association has been known for with some of its events, such as the Breakfast of Champions each morning at the Green Industry Expo.

There is also a desire in the industry to redefine the career ladder of employees who contractors are trying to recruit, Gibson says, highlighting his fourth point. He hopes to address this at events like the PLANET Student Career Days in March, which will be held at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. "We have secured Stephen Covey as our main speaker, which should attract a lot of students and draw attention to our industry as a successful career option," he says.

And, the final goal Gibson discussed is enhancing PLANET's relationships with regional and allied regional associations.

This year, PLANET has enjoyed a more than 11-percent increase in its membership, according to Foley. More landscape and lawn care professionals are also volunteering to help lead the association's various committees. For this, Gibson says the association truly excels. He says, "We aren't a great association without the time our volunteers are giving us." — Nicole Wisniewski



PLANET Continues Renaissance Park Support

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) announced during a press conference at the Green Industry Expo in Orlando, Fla., that it will continue to support the City of New York's efforts to build Renaissance Park, a memorial park honoring the heroes of 9/11.

The association originally planned to build the park during 2004; however, after still not receiving plan approval in 2005, PLANET representatives made the decision to scale back their role in supporting the city's efforts to build the park. "PLANET will still contribute to and support the building of Renaissance Park, but we will not lead the project," explains PLANET President Dan Foley. "The reasons for this are the continued delays due to poor city response, and the fact that we realized that the only people that can get a park approved and built in New York are those folks from New York."

PLANET's original offer to design and build the park for the city was a new concept to the board of directors of PLANET and to everyone in the city government, points out Jim Martin, PLANET chairman of the Renaissance Park project. "PLANET began this process more than three years ago in 2002 when we held our Renaissance Park design charrette in Chicago," explains Martin, who has been working as the PLANET liaison to the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.

The design charrette consisted of approximately 30 PLANET (then Associated Landscape



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ASSOCIATION NEWS

Contractors of America – ALCA) members who are also landscape architects and designers. After creating a design for the site, members of the project team worked for 18 months to revise the plans to meet the demanding requirements of many New York City agencies. By the end of 2003, when it appeared the final design obstacles had been overcome, ALCA signed an agreement to design and build Renaissance Park by Dec. 31, 2004.

By July of 2004, the plans were presented to the final approval authority – the New York City Arts Commission. The plans were not approved and PLANET was requested to work with a recommended New York City sculptor on revising the water feature and pavement design. In January of this year, when PLANET

received the preliminary designs from the sculptor, they found the proposed design no longer reflected the original plan prepared by PLANET members; it was estimated to be significantly more costly to build; and would have required a completely new plan review and approval process that had already taken two years.

By March 2005, after the agreement between PLANET and New York City Department of Parks & Recreation had expired, in order to facilitate the building of the park and alleviate concerns on all sides, the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation decided to move forward and build the project. Prior to ALCA's interest in designing and building Renaissance Park, the Department of Parks & Recreation had received community support and preliminary approval for a simplified park design that

will now be built under the approval and supervision of their representatives.

"Due to a family concern on Sept. 11, I feel a strong connection to this park," Martin says. "This was the location where police officers and firefighters staged the initial rescue and then recovery from the World Trade Center. This was also the site that was the furthest south that the general public could venture. They hung letters, ribbons and signs along the fence that bordered this half-acre. I truly feel that this is a great location for a park that we can all be proud of and that this is a wonderful way for PLANET members to honor the many heroes of 9/11."

For more information about Renaissance Park, call 800/395-2522 or visit www.landcarenetwork.org.

– Nicole Wisniewski

Mergers & Acquisitions

ValleyCrest Acquires RMV Landscape & Maintenance

CALABASAS, Calif. – ValleyCrest Cos. announced it has completed the acquisition of RMV Landscape and Maintenance, a Loveland, Colo. landscape construction and maintenance company.

Under the terms of the agreement, ValleyCrest has purchased substantially all of the assets of RMV and the company has become part of ValleyCrest's landscape development division. RMV was previously owned by Rod Bryner, who has joined ValleyCrest as operations manager, and McWhinney Enterprises, a leading Colorado real estate development firm and a customer of ValleyCrest.

The acquisition expands ValleyCrest's operations in the northern Colorado market. "We are going to focus on making the transition smooth for RMV's customers and employees," says Jeff Hinners, vice president and regional manager, ValleyCrest Landscape Development. "This is a talented and enthusiastic group of people and we know they'll have great careers with ValleyCrest."

Bryner expressed excitement about joining ValleyCrest. "ValleyCrest has been an industry leader for decades, primarily because they focus first on satisfying their customers and second on developing their people," he says. "We're looking forward to becoming a part of the ValleyCrest team." ValleyCrest, founded in 1949 ranked No. 2 on *Lawn & Landscape's* 2005 Top 100 list with annual revenue reported at \$675 million.



ValleyCrest Landscape Development Vice President and Regional Manager Jeff Hinners (right) welcomes Rod Bryner to the ValleyCrest team. ValleyCrest has completed the acquisition of Bryner's company RMV Landscape Development. Bryner joins ValleyCrest as operations manager.

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> 90th Anniversary Celebration

Ariens Celebrates 90th Anniversary



This year marks the Ariens Co.'s 90th anniversary, and the company has signed on country music artist Charlie Daniels as a spokesperson to help commemorate the event's theme – All American.

Recognizing Daniels' all-American spirit, company President Dan Ariens says, "We were drawn to Charlie Daniels because he has an incomparable ability to tell the stories that capture the soul of America."

In conjunction with the sponsorship, Ariens' Gravely dealers will have access to a special edition Charlie Daniels Band CD featuring a playlist of America-inspired music.

Additionally, Ariens/Gravely Partner Plus dealers will have additional marketing opportunities made available to them, including ticket packages for 100 concert dates, "meet and greet" events and personal appearances at dealerships. Daniels will be featured in Gravely anniversary advertising and point-of-sale materials throughout the year.



Beyond its marketing materials, Gravely is spending a portion of its big anniversary year looking for its biggest fan. The company rolls out its All-American Gravely Fan Contest this month. Beginning Jan. 1 and ending March 31, Gravely owners can register at www.gravelycontest.com to vie for the title of "biggest fan." Entrants will be asked to upload a photo of their equipment and answer one of the following three questions: "What is your biggest accomplishment with your Gravely?", "Why is Gravely a 'Great American Brand?'" and "What would you be willing to give up before you'd give up your Gravely?" Gravely fans who don't have equipment to display online will have the opportunity to visit the Web site and vote for their favorite entrant beginning on April 1. The five entries to receive the most votes each will receive a Gravely anniversary t-shirt and hat, a set of Collectors' Series Trading Cards, and will be invited to display their Gravelys at the 2006 Gravely Mow-In and the 2006 Ariens Dealer Summit, where Gravely's Biggest Fan will be announced.

Current Ariens fans – that is, the company's own employees – are already getting in on 90th anniversary spirit with the opportunity to build commemorative mowers for the celebration, like the one pictured at left. Ariens has commissioned some of its employees to build the commemorative mowers in time to display them at EXPO 2006 to be held in Louisville, Ky., Oct. 6 to 8.

> Lawn & Landscape Launches Digital Edition

Lawn & Landscape magazine already offers you a fantastic Web site, dynamic interactive message boards, an online Dealer Search feature and numerous other Web tools – but the digital advancements don't stop there. *Lawn & Landscape* is proud to announce that it has jumped further into the digital age with the launch of the *Lawn & Landscape* magazine Digital Edition.

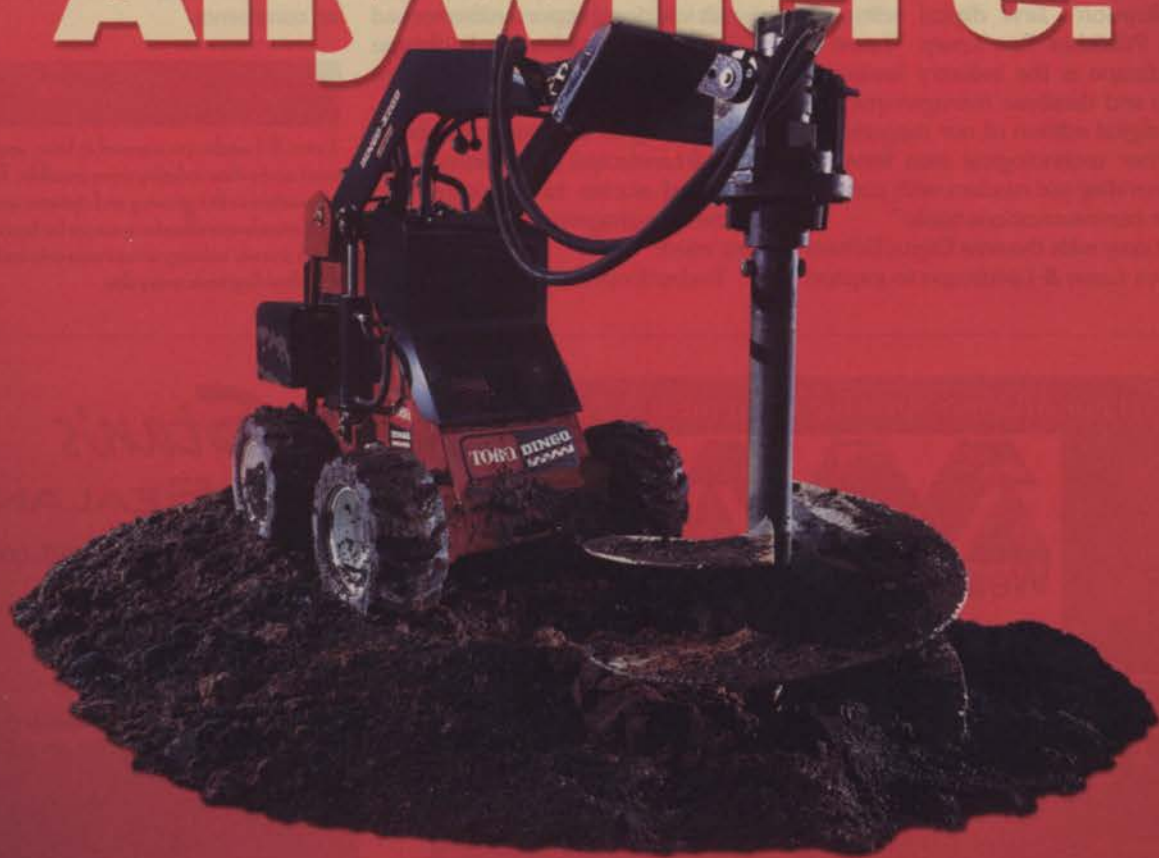
The *Lawn & Landscape* Digital Edition offers subscribers the same award-winning content they're used to receiving in

the print edition of the magazine, but with the easy access and navigation of a Web-based format. For instance, hyperlinks placed in the Digital Edition's table of contents can take you directly to the article you're interested in, or you can use the "next" and "previous" buttons along the navigation bar to page through the issue, just as if you were holding it in your hands. Moreover, locate

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continued from page 32

Lawn & Landscape Launches Digital Edition

Lawn & Landscape advertisers' Web sites and reader service pages easily with hyperlinks located right in their advertisements. You can also zoom in or out on any page, and choose to view the issue in two-page mode – as if you were opening up to a magazine spread – or read *Lawn & Landscape* one page at a time.

"Lawn & Landscape magazine is proud to bring our readers the publication's first digital edition," says Publisher Ron Lowy. "Lawn & Landscape is the industry leader in Web and database management and the digital edition of our magazine is another technological step forward in providing our readers with cutting-edge communications tools."

Lowy adds the new Digital Edition allows *Lawn & Landscape* to expand

its reach and readership beyond the United States and Canada and into new international markets.

"Lawn & Landscape is thrilled to be the first industry publication available online, in an easy-to-read electronic format," says Doug Adams, director of marketing and research for GIE Media, parent company of *Lawn & Landscape*. "Bringing our award-winning publication to a digital format provides professionals additional opportunities to read and enjoy the publication landscape professionals prefer four times more than any other industry publication. By providing an electronic version of *Lawn & Landscape*, professionals have increased access to the important business management information they need."

To check out the inaugural *Lawn &*

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USE READER SERVICE # 24

CONSUMERS SPEAK



— PROJECT —
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Project EverGreen Releases Survey Results

Project EverGreen took time at the Green Industry Expo to announce the results of the organization's recent homeowner survey. The survey, which compiled opinions from 1,235 homeowners nationwide, is the first in a series designed to gauge consumer attitudes about green spaces and their management and will serve as a baseline for future surveys.

"The survey is based on techniques that have an error rate of no more than plus-or-minus 3 percentage points, with 95-percent confidence, so this will provide a reliable baseline for future research," explains Gene Brown, CEO of Market Intellect, the market research firm commissioned to handle the survey. "While they're not definitive, the results of the survey tell us that the nation as a whole thinks strongly of this industry, despite what media reports may imply. They also point out some contradictory attitudes among consumers, which shows us where the industry can do a better job providing education.

In particular, Brown points out that 84 percent of survey respondents agreed that pesticides are useful in fighting weeds, disease and insects in lawns, but 55 percent of homeowners disagreed that those chemicals help the environment.

Currently, Project EverGreen offers numerous sales tools that green industry professionals can use to educate their customers on the benefits of lawns and landscapes. Moreover, Executive Director Den Gardner says results of future surveys will further gauge consumer attitudes, and results of those surveys will be made available as they arise. At this point, surveys are scheduled annually. "This initial study will help us focus on areas where consumers have differences of opinions about the value of green spaces and the materials needed to keep them green," Gardner says. "Concentrating educational efforts in these areas will be a high priority for us."

Following are the results of the first survey:

Survey recipients were asked if they agreed/disagreed with these statements:

STATEMENT	% AGREED/DISAGREED
GREEN INDUSTRY ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS	
Most lawn care companies care about the environment	80% agreed
Most professional landscape companies care about the environment	82% agreed
Most professional irrigation companies care about the environment	76% agreed
Professional irrigation companies are good for the environment	78% agreed
Professional landscape companies utilize pesticides safely	77% agreed
Professional irrigation companies help conserve our water supply	80% agreed
Professional lawn care companies utilize pesticides safely	77% agreed
Professional maintenance of public parks and sports fields is good for the environment	89% agreed
The environment is important in making a decision to hire a green professional	92% agreed
GREEN INDUSTRY ECONOMIC BENEFITS	
A well-maintained landscaped yard increases curb appeal and property value	99% agreed
Landscaping adds value to a home's worth	99% agreed
Use of professional lawn and landscape companies improves your lawn and landscape	89% agreed
GREEN INDUSTRY LIFESTYLE BENEFITS	
A well-maintained lawn provides a safe, cushioned play area surface for children	97% agreed
Maintaining the look of your home is important in the decision to hire a green professional	95% agreed
Having a green lawn is important in the decision to hire a green professional	89% agreed

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CONSUMERS SPEAK continued...

GREEN INDUSTRY CONTRADICTIONARY CONSUMER VIEWPOINTS*

Lawn care companies provide a useful service, such as lawn disease control.....	97% agreed
Chemicals that lawn care companies use negatively affect the environment.....	72% agreed
Pesticides are a useful tool to fight weeds, disease and insects.....	84% agreed
Chemicals that lawn service companies use help the environment	55% disagreed
Fertilizers are a useful tool for maintaining the health of a lawn	92% agreed
Fertilizer has a negative impact on the environment	52% agreed

GREEN INDUSTRY ATTITUDES ABOUT REGULATION*

Government should be more involved in controlling the use of fertilizers	61% agreed
Government should be more involved in controlling the use of pesticides	69% agreed

*Perhaps one of the most interesting and valuable insights provided by the baseline survey is the indication that, in some cases, consumers may have contradictory attitudes. These responses reflect a sampling of positive and negative viewpoints on basically the same subject.



BUSINESS SMARTS

How to Keep Your Key Employees > >

It's a worker's market in today's business world, and green industry contractors know this fact best. Attracting and retaining talented and reliable workers is always a challenge in the service sector, and it may come as no consolation to lawn and landscape contractors to learn that, according to a recent study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, 76 percent of employees are looking for new employment opportunities.

In response, nearly 50 percent of employers, according to the study, say they're taking proactive steps to prevent a mass exodus. These employers indicate they're implementing special retention programs to keep their talented workers from walking out the door.

While salary increases are seen as the quickest stop-gap measure to encourage employees to stick around, employers often find it difficult to amass the capital necessary to boost pay.

"Offering competitive salaries for the market is important to employees," says Susan Meisinger, SHRM president and CEO. "However, compensation alone is not sufficient for a complete retention strategy."

While compensation was the No. 1

reason an employee leaves, the study found, issues dealing with career advancement and growth opportunities ranked next on their list of reasons to leave for greener employment pastures.

There are a number of strategies green industry business owners can utilize to strengthen their employee retention efforts.

1. Create growth programs. Provide your talented and skilled workers with a mentoring program. Allow them to realize that upward mobility within your company is possible. Consult them on their desired career paths. Reward attempts to take on more responsibility and acquire additional job skills.

2. Enhance work-life balance. Allow workers greater leniency to control when they work. Likewise, do not resist a worker's attempts to collect on flextime or take vacation time, just as long as it doesn't impede work flow.

3. Improve work conditions. Simple amenities like free coffee and soft drinks, a supply of snacks and a clean and comfortable break room can go a long way towards satisfying restless employees. — Mike Zawacki



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Contact: Joann Gruttadaurio, jg17@cornell.edu, www.hort.cornell.edu, 607/255-1792

JAN. 17, 18, 19, 25, 31 Florida Turf Grass Association Horn Memorial Research Conferences, Lake Worth, Miami-Dade, Fort Myers, Jacksonville and Milton, Fla. Contact: aflenghi@ftga.org, www.ftga.org, 407/291-9415 for specifics on dates and locations

JAN. 17 – 19 Midwest Regional Turf Foundation Turf Expo, Indianapolis, Ind.
Contact: www.agry.purdue.edu/turf/, 765/494-8087

JAN. 18 – 20 Idaho Nursery & Landscape Association Horticulture Expo 2006, Boise, Idaho. Contact: www.inlagrow.org/, 800/462-4769

JAN. 19 – 21 Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association's Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. Contact: www.tpie.org, 770/888-2883

JAN. 22 – 25 U.S. Composting Council Annual Conference & Trade Show, Albuquerque, N.M. Contact: www.compostingcouncil.org, 631/737-4931

JAN. 23 – 24 Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association Winter Conference and Trade Show, Council Bluffs, Iowa. Contact: www.nnla.org, 402/450-7192

JAN. 23 – 25 Central Environmental Nursery Trade Show 2006, Columbus, Ohio, Contact: Erin Thomas, erinthomas@onla.org, www.onla.org, 800/825-5062

JAN. 23 – 27 ProGreen Expo 2006, Denver, Colo.
Contact: www.progreenexpo.com, 800/397-6665

JAN. 24 – 25 Landscaping & Groundskeeping EXPO, Vancouver, British Columbia, Contact: www.landscapingexpo.net, 888/570-0499

JAN. 24 – 26 Green Industry Professional Seminar, sponsored by Professional Grounds Maintenance Society's Washington, D.C. branch, Annandale, Va. Contact: Mary Bean, greenisdcaol.com, 703/250-1368

JAN. 25 – 27 Georgia Green Industry Association WINTERgreen Expo & WINTERSchool Conference, Athens, Ga. Contact: mail@ggia.org, www.ggia.org, 706/632-0100

JAN. 25 – 27 Iowa Nursery and Landscape Association Annual Conference, Des Moines, Iowa. Contact: info@iowanla.org, www.iowanla.org, 816/233-1481

JAN. 26 Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council Northeastern Pennsylvania Turf Conference & Trade Show, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Contact: www.paturf.org, 814/238-2402



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JAN. 30 – FEB. 1 Alberta Landscaping & Groundskeeping EXPO, Calgary, Alberta. Contact: www.landscapingexpo.net, 888/570-0499

JAN. 30 – FEB. 24 Guelph Turfgrass Institute Turf Managers Short Course, Guelph, Ontario. Contact: www.open.uoguelph.ca/turfmanager/, 519/767-5000

JAN. 31 – FEB. 2 New England Grows 2006, Boston, Mass. Contact: info@NEGrows.org, www.negrows.org, 508/653-3009

FEB. 1 New York State Turfgrass Association Lobby Day at the State Capital, Albany, N.Y. Contact: www.nysta.org, 800/873-8873

FEB. 1 – 4 2006 American Nursery & Landscape Association Management Clinic, Louisville, Ky. Contact: www.anla.org, 202/789-2900



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FEB. 9 – 11 Golf Industry Show 2006, New Orleans, La.

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Photo: Landa Pressure Washers

Cleanup Crew

by kathleen franzinger

Pressure washers clean equipment and trucks, but they can also create profit by being used to clean jobsites. Here are some tips on how to buy the right one.

No doubt about it – landscaping is a dirty job. Cleaning equipment, trucks and jobsites can be a major chore, and not one the average garden hose can handle. That's where pressure washers come in. "A pressure washer has more cleaning power in terms of penetration, lifting ability and agitation, yet uses far less water than the typical garden hose," says Ron Lye, vice president and general manager, Landa Pressure Washers, Camas, Wash.

It may be hard to believe that pressure washers use less water, but it's true, says Paul Peacock, product manager, Landa Pressure Washers. "Surprisingly, a pressure washer uses much less water than other cleaning methods," he says. "For instance,

the typical garden hose puts out between 6 to 10 gallons per minute (gpm), whereas the typical pressure washer uses between 2 and 5 gpm – a 50 to 70 percent savings in water usage."

In addition to water savings, Peacock notes several other advantages of pressure washers over the average garden hose, such as timesavings. He estimates pressure washers clean four to five times faster than traditional methods. Less cleaning time translates into less labor. "Less labor means more productivity and less overtime by employees," he says.

There are two basic types of pressure washers: hot water and cold water. So how do contractors know which to use? The answer depends on what is being cleaned.

continued on page 49

continued from page 42

If the pressure washer will be used to remove sand, soil or mud, cold water will suffice. But for those who want to clean equipment and vehicles, Peacock recommends a hot-water, high-pressure washer. When cleaning anything with oil or grease, he says hot water is better suited to the task. "Hot water melts grease and grime; cold water only pushes it around," he explains.

In addition to hot and cold, there are gas- and electric-powered pressure washers. Knowing which one to buy is a matter of knowing where most cleaning will take place. In other words, contractors have to decide if the pressure washer will be used on jobsites or if it will be kept in the shop to clean equipment and vehicles.

Electric-powered washers are often the better choice for indoor applications because there are no fumes and they run quieter. Gasoline-powered washers are self-contained and portable, so they can be



Pressure washers help contractors keep their equipment clean of grease and grime. Hot-water pressure washers are particularly well-suited for the task. Photo: Landa Pressure Washers

easily transported and used on jobsites. "Gasoline-powered pressure washers give you greater flexibility for operating in the field where electricity may not be available," Lye says.

Pressure washer selection also depends on how often it will be used. This is really a question of how high of quality a contractor is looking for, says Peacock. With higher quality comes a higher price tag, so contractors should decide how much money they're willing to spend.

If the pressure washer will be used less than five hours per week, contractors could buy a less expensive model available at a local do-it-yourself store, Peacock says. "But don't count on much service or warranty support," he adds.

For those wanting to use the pressure washer five to 20 hours per week, mid-range models are available, which are "typically identified by a direct-drive pump and a bare-bones design," Peacock says.

"For those who are serious users washing more than 20 hours per week, you will be dollars ahead to invest in quality."

In addition, the type of washer affects price. "Typically hot-water pressure washers will cost more than cold-water pressure washers because they deliver more cleaning power enhanced by heating the water," Lye says.

In fact, hot-water pressure washers can cost as much as two times more because of the complexity of heating hot water while under pressure, Peacock says. "Still, hot-water pressure washers easily pay for themselves in labor cost savings via faster, more effective cleaning," he says.

A 9-hp cold-water commercial pressure washer, which costs around \$1,725, would be suitable for a small landscape company, Lye says. "A larger landscape company encountering bigger projects with bigger equipment would spend \$2,795 on a 13-hp cold-water pressure washer. A hot-water washer of the same size would be slightly more than \$6,000."

When shopping for quality in pressure washers, it's important not to be deceived by the

> a cleaner chalet

At The Chalet, North Chicago, Ill., crews use three portable, cold-water pressure washers to perform a variety of tasks on jobsites. "We use them to clean bluestone, flagstone and brick patios; wash boulders and clean retaining walls," says Bill Koch, fleet manager.

They'll even use these 5-hp, gas-operated pressure washers to perform special add-on services that customers request, such as cleaning houses, garage floors, patio furniture and storm windows. Koch says about two washers go out per day on average. "They're used heavily during the spring as customers do spring cleaning and then again in the fall as they get ready for winter," he says.

Koch estimates the cold-water pressure washers cost between \$700 to \$950. "In general, gas-operated pressure washers cost between \$600 and \$1,800," he says. In terms of maintenance, Koch keeps an eye on the oil level and watches the pumps for leakage. "We change the oil after 25 to 30 hours of usage," he says, adding that the washers typically last five to seven years.

In addition to the cold-water pressure washers, the company owns one hot-water pressure washer that remains in house for cleaning mowers and other equipment. "It's electric-powered and has a heater attached for hot water," Koch says, adding that they use the pressure washer about 25 to 30 hours a week and purchased it for \$2,400 to \$2,700.

term pressure. "Most people look at pressure and think the more they have the better they clean," Lye says. "Actually the ideal is having a balance between volume or flow rate (gpm) and pressure (psi)."

For cleaning equipment and vehicles, Lye recommends a pressure washer with 3 gpm at 1,000 psi as a good starting point.

"A little known secret is that there is more cleaning power in a pressure washer's volume than in its pressure," Peacock says. "A pressure washer with 2 gpm and 3,000 psi won't clean as fast as a pressure washer with 4 gpm and 2,000 psi. Volume is the deciding factor, and a quality pressure washer will provide the proper balance of volume and pressure."

Contractors should also keep in mind that there are a number of accessories available for pressure washers. Lye cites a few, such as wands with a curved tubing for cleaning hard-to-reach places and special nozzles that clean faster and deeper than conventional nozzles by using a water-propelled spinning action.

In addition, reels can keep the pressure washer hose from tangling and extra hose lengths can help the hose reach farther. "There are also detergents formulated specifically for power washing, which enhance the

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A variety of attachments are available for pressure washers, including special nozzles that help clean faster and deeper. Photo: Landa Pressure Washers

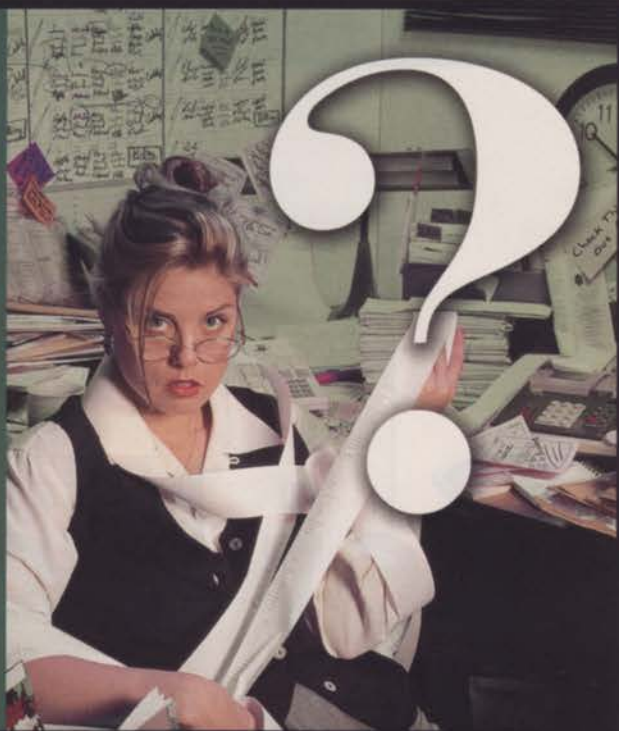
cleaning process," he says. "Surface cleaners attach to a hot- or cold-water pressure washer and 'mow' grime from concrete, asphalt and even wood surfaces faster than using a conventional wand."

Like all equipment, pressure washers do require some maintenance, especially hot-water pressure washers. "Maintenance is encouraged both on a seasonal and usage basis," Lye says. "Typical maintenance procedures are changing the oil in the engine and pump, tune-ups of the engine and burner and, in some areas where hard water is found, the descaling of the heating coil."

Cleanliness, especially when it comes to vehicles and equipment, may not be something contractors spend a lot of time thinking about, but it's an important part of the business. "Clean equipment lasts longer," Peacock says. "A pressure washer helps protect and extend your investment in machinery, trucks and other equipment." ■

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Get Noticed Now!

Convinced the same old ways lead to the same old results, Bob Langille adopted new marketing strategies to refresh his client base and boost profits.

by nicole wisniewski

At the Landscaping Concepts office last summer, it was just too quiet. "No one was calling," explains the Seekonk, Mass.-based company's Owner Bob Langille. "The few calls we did get weren't jobs worth taking, but we took them anyway just to get by."

This came after Langille made a painful decision to fire one of his long-time maintenance clients whose continued overbearing attitude with his employees became too much to endure, walking away from \$50,000. Then, unexpectedly, the company suffered an additional \$70,000 loss as the result of a few commercial buildings being sold to new owners, and the property managers who took over brought their own landscape contractors along with the change.

"We were scrambling to make up the work because we lost so much maintenance so fast," Langille says. "We didn't think about getting new business from our existing customers – we were hoping for new customers."

But pricey *Yellow Pages* advertisements and untargeted direct mail brought spotty and inconsistent results. When he approached a marketing firm about helping him create a new plan, they wanted \$15,000 just to get started. For Langille, this sounded like an overwhelming initial investment with few immediate answers.

Desperate to change this scenario fast before it affected his bottom line, Langille combined the advice that came from a heart-to-heart talk with a business friend, a tip he garnered from a business seminar and a lesson he learned



landscaping concepts

OWNER/PRESIDENT: Bob Langille

HEADQUARTERS: Seekonk, Mass.

FOUNDED: 1987

EMPLOYEES: 8 in the spring; 6 in the summer and fall; and 15 in the winter (including subcontractors)

SERVICE BREAKOUT: 30 percent maintenance, 32 percent design/build and 38 percent snow removal

CLIENT BREAKOUT: 50 percent commercial (office parks, hospitals, etc.), 10 percent commercial residential (condominiums, apartment buildings, etc.) and 40 percent residential (design/build only — no maintenance)

REVENUE BREAKOUT:

2006 Expected:\$800,000

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2003 Revenue:\$645,000

2002 Revenue:\$612,972

2001 Revenue:\$558,000

2000 Revenue:\$517,357

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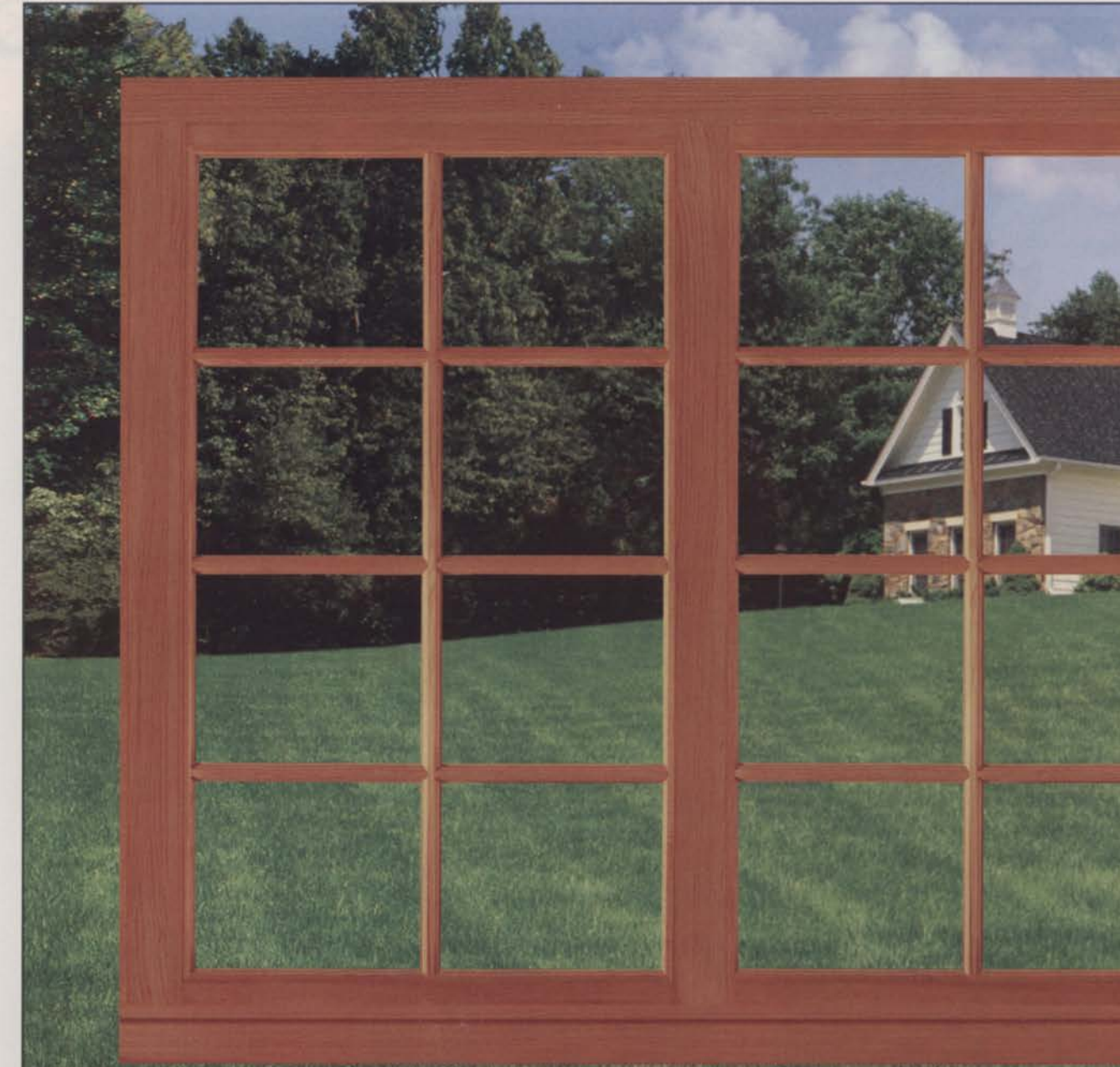
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snow days

In 1991, Bob Langille, president, Landscaping Concepts, Seekonk, Mass., added snow plowing to his commercial maintenance service mix because clients requested it.

The company's commercial jobs average between 2 to 5 acres, and they include many parking lot areas and sidewalks that need cleared in the winter months. "Each of our commercial customers spends an average of \$15,000 with us in snow services each year," Langille says, explaining why this service makes up 38 percent of his revenue and, as a result, deserves a great deal of planning and focus each year.

Instead of treating snow and ice removal as one revenue source or giving clients one price that includes everything, Langille breaks it out into a la carte specifics, including sanding, salting, shoveling and plowing. "Snow shoveling is more labor intensive than snow plowing so this needs to be priced differently to account for the added labor expense," he explains.

Langille prices snow services in two ways as a means of checking that he's pricing jobs correctly. He looks at it per push and separates pricing based on 1- to 3-inch snowfalls, 3- to 6-inch snowfalls and 6- to 9-inch snowfalls. Then he will base it on the square feet of the parking lot and compare that to ones he's done in the past that are similar in square feet to ensure he's in the right price range.

Invoices are sent after snow events, but for the 2006-2007 snow season Langille is switching to a faxed invoice so clients receive invoices immediately after each snowfall. Langille pushes his team to fill out time sheets and then he keeps these records so when clients phone he can tell them when a crew was there, how long they were there and what was done on their property. This alleviates any concerns for commercial clients who don't always notice when Landscaping Concepts was there or are questioning invoices. This also acts as a means for paying employees and subcontractors for hours worked.

Langille prepares a snow removal management plan each year. To get employees geared up

for the season a couple of weeks before it begins, which is usually in November, he holds an educational meeting where he gathers all of his employees together during a Saturday morning for coffee and donuts and a outline of the plan.

To kick off the meeting, Langille presents any new members to the snow team and they introduce themselves and exchange important personal information that could be useful to the team later in the season, such as contact information, emergency phone numbers, etc. This takes between five and 10 minutes.

Then Langille communicates his objectives for the coming season, what he expects from employees – their functions and duties – and other miscellaneous issues. For this season, Langille added a video presentation to show all of the proper procedures and activities that employees should remember in order to have a safe snow removal season. This section of the meeting takes between 35 and 45 minutes.

The next 10 to 15 minutes, Langille asks employees to share feedback, new ideas, innovative ways to improve processes or any concerns.

At the end of the meeting, Langille tells employees how teams will be formed, the different lots they will have to take care of and the different jobs they have to be done on each lot. Then he gives each foreman a packet, outlining their team's information, including special forms that need to be used.

In addition to his existing employees, Langille uses subcontractors who have their own trucks and plows to get the work done. They fill out the same time sheets as Landscaping Concepts employees and have regular routes. He pays subcontractors \$50 to \$55 per hour – he had to increase it by a few dollars this season because some of his subcontractors were complaining about the rising fuel prices.

This was also the first season that Langille offered clients an incentive to sign two-year vs. one-year contracts, and to sign them early. "If they signed up before the last Friday in October, they got \$100 off of their first snow bill," he says. "We were very excited – half of our customers took advantage of this."

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from watching Donald Trump's *The Apprentice* and completely revamped his marketing program.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK. When Langille first started marketing his new business in 1987, he used his past experience as the superintendent of grounds at Brown University, Providence, R.I., as well as his horticulture

degree from the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, to sell residential maintenance. This previous landscaping knowledge also earned him his first commercial job – a high-end apartment complex – less than one year later. From there, commercial work grew naturally and became the company's focus.

Though maintenance was boom-

ing, and necessary for cashflow, Langille didn't feel comfortable relying on just one key service. He was also growing frustrated with the bid situation in commercial work, where price was the determining factor on whether Landscaping Concepts won the job. But high-end residential design/build was based more on quality work, which was what Langille wanted to promote, so he added this service in the early 1990s. To market it, a *Yellow Pages* salesman convinced him that a dollar bill-sized ad in the publication would do the trick.

Though the \$850-per-month expense drew many calls, the close ratio on them was what Langille describes as "hideous." "I spent so much time with potential clients, but it never resulted in work," he says. "It got to the point where I couldn't tell who wanted to pay for nice landscaping and who just wanted free ideas. I felt that the ad was good for visibility, but that's it. Did it bring in calls? Yes. Did it bring me good, qualified leads? No."

By the late 1990s, Langille decided to replace his *Yellow Pages* presence with direct mail. He created post card-sized pieces with finished landscape photos to promote the company's services. Though he was winning work with these pieces, it was inconsistent. "One year, we sent out 5,400 pieces and won \$152,000 worth of work," he says. "The next year, hoping for more work we sent out 8,700 pieces, which cost us \$5,463 for purchasing the lists, printing and postage, and that brought us \$70,000 in business. What I couldn't understand is why almost double the pieces only brought us half the work we got the year before."

Obtaining the potential client lists, which included data about local new home buyers, as well as subscribing to database services to obtain the contact information of people who pulled permits for new homes, structures and pools in the area (which cost \$305 every three months) was easy. But Langille quickly realized that organizing and utilizing them properly wasn't his strong suit. "We sent postcards once to each new list of potential clients, but permits are typically pulled in advance of a new structure being completed, so the homeowners may not have been ready for a new landscape when they got the postcard. And since I wasn't hitting them a sec-



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USE READER SERVICE # 33

ond time with the information, I was losing potential clients," he explains.

FINDING HELP. In the spring of 2005, when Langille was faced with a loss of \$140,000 as a result of firing a long-time client and losing a few additional commercial maintenance accounts, he marched into a marketing firm and asked for a quote on re-vamping his program. "They wanted \$15,000 just to get started – that was 2 percent of my revenue and the majority of my marketing budget for that year," he says. "I couldn't do that."

Langille felt deflated. He was sharing his situation with a business acquaintance, who suggested he hire a marketing intern to do the same work that the marketing company would do, but for less. "He told me that interns are always looking to make money and boost their resume with solid marketing experience," he says. "He was right – why couldn't a landscape contractor hire a marketing intern?"

So Langille put an ad for a paid marketing internship on the local college Web sites, seeking an enthusiastic, self-motivated individual to enhance his current marketing program.

Four college students applied for the position. During interviews, Langille focused on candidates who were technologically savvy because one of the main tasks to accomplish was working on his client database creation and organization. "I asked them six to eight key questions during interviews, including 'What can you bring to this company with your marketing experience?'" Langille explains. "I hired the one whose enthusiasm and outside-of-the-box thinking just stood out."

During his September to December internship, the intern formed this central database of employees, vendors, existing customers and the more than 4,000 potential customers Langille garnered from lists he purchased. He worked 15 hours a week initially, but that increased to 20 hours a week during November and December. Langille paid him \$10 an hour.

The intern was so successful at getting so much done in such a short amount of time that Langille offered him a part-time position to stay with the company after graduation, working 25 hours a week.

ASKING CUSTOMERS WHAT THEY WANT. Langille will never for-

get one of the episodes from Donald Trump's *The Apprentice* series, where two competing corporations had to create a new clothing line for American Eagle that incorporated technology, i.e. pockets to hold cell phones, iPods, laptops, etc. The team who won the task had done market research by visiting a nearby American Eagle store and questioning the customers about

what high-tech products they used most and what their needs were in terms of storing these gadgets. After viewing the episode, Langille says the idea was so simple and obvious: "They went and asked their customers what they wanted and then created a product that won because of this key feedback. I thought, 'I should do that with my current customers and ask

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USE READER SERVICE #34

them why they hire me and what their future service needs are.”

Once his marketing intern set up his previous client database, Langille started working with his intern on a plan to reconnect with these previous customers so he could build a referral base and survey them on his company.

But along the way, Langille started to feel awkward about reappearing out of the blue to ask clients to partake in his survey. Despite the post-job thank-you letter, he was what he describes as a “one-hit wonder” with his clients in the past, so he would need to build back up these relationships and start putting the Landscaping Concepts name in front of them more often to get them thinking about the company again. “We sent our past clients Thanksgiving and Christmas cards last year as a way to start the process,” he says. “Our survey is completed and we’re going to send it to our clients this spring via regular mail and offer a drawing for \$50 off of a

future landscape job or service with us if they return the survey.”

Some of the questions Langille will ask in this survey include: Why did you hire me? Why did you hire me over someone else? How do you measure value when hiring a landscape contractor (two-year vs. one-year warranty, whether they offer financing, if you have a good rapport with the contractor, etc.)?

Then, as Langille reestablishes these relationships with previous clients, he wants to encourage them to refer his company to others via an incentive. “I was missing out on the best free marketing opportunity – referrals – because I wasn’t keeping in touch with my clients,” he says. With the help of his intern, Langille drafted a referral invitation letter, offering a drawing for \$50 off of landscaping for those past clients who pass along successful referrals.

Now that he has a way of tracking who is sent a letter and who calls with

a referral, the process has become simpler and more efficient. “In addition to marketing to potential customers, I should be marketing to my current customers – they’ve already hired me once, which means they would be more likely to hire me again. It’s the best low-cost way to continue to drive my business forward.”

Langille also learned from a seminar he attended last year that to stand out, he has to do something different to get noticed by more residential design/build clients. His potential customers, who own average homes in the \$400,000 to \$500,000 price range, are looking for unique ideas to bring relaxation to their back yards, and they are willing to pay for these additions. Based on some discussions with clients about this, Langille added water feature creation and putting green installation to his services.

To draw attention to these services, Langille set up a cascading waterfall, as well as a small putting green, in the



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USE READER SERVICE # 38

cover story

area in front of his building, which is located on a busy main intersection. "None of my competitors were doing this so I felt that it could become my niche," Langille says, adding that he worked with his intern to create new direct mail postcards that have photos of water features and putting greens on one side with service and contact information on the other as another way to boost client interest.

BUILDING REFERRALS IN EVERY WAY.

While attending a seminar in the summer of 2004, Langille remembered an organization that was mentioned by a speaker, and it struck him in 2005 that this was a group that could help him in his current predicament. The association was Business Networking International (BNI), which brings one representative from many different business types in one area together so they can feed off of each other for ideas and, most importantly, client referrals.

But this organization wasn't for someone who was only going to commit to it half-heartedly. The group meets for one and one-half hours every week, and members can only miss three meetings in a six-month period (members can send substitutes to meetings in their place), or they are asked to leave the group. It also costs \$340 to join for the year and then members have to contribute to meeting room rental fees, which cost approximately \$120 per member each quarter. The organization claims that each seat is worth \$35,000 in referrals. Needing the work, Langille requested to join the group of 26 people in July 2005 to network and see if this would help boost business. He was allowed to attend two free meetings to see what the group was all about. What intrigued him most was the fact that some of the members included a builder and a real estate agent that he could try and connect with for referrals. Then he had to go through two interviews with group members to ensure he was going to be an active, contributing member before he was admitted.

The meetings are very structured. The local BNI president talks for a minute and then everyone around the room does a 60-second commercial on their business. Then, each week, one person gets the chance to do a 10-minute presentation so that others in the room get to know a certain

business and then feel more comfortable passing along referrals. During Langille's 60-second presentations, he learned quickly to focus on one seasonal service and be as specific as possible so the time is used well, and save his company overview for his 10-minute speech. "In 60 seconds, there's no way you can go over everything that you do - I focus on what I'm working on during a specific time of year or a service that I really want to push sales on, such as pond clean-outs," he says. "The more specific you are about who your dream clients are, the better referrals you will get."

In addition to these meetings, each member can set up one-on-one sessions with another member who they want to get to know better and who might help the business obtain additional clients. Langille made a wish list of new clients - places like private schools and country clubs - who may want maintenance or design/build services, and one member of the BNI group who works with telephone systems knew half the people on his list. So, Langille set up a one-on-one with her to help get his foot in the door, which he quickly learned would be easier than making cold calls to these clients.

In 2005, Langille got \$20,000 worth of work as a result of the group and he says they were easy jobs to close because the client already knew about his business from the referral, and Langille knew what the client wanted.

With a revamped marketing plan in place, including an organized list of past, present and potential clients, a new marketing intern program, a valuable association relationship, a structured way to manage referrals and a customer survey in place, Langille is planning to make 2006 a 13.96 percent growth year, surpassing his average annual 3- to 5-percent increases. "If you do the same old things, you get the same old results," he says. "I knew I had to do something new to get better results, but it took losing \$140,000 to force me to make it happen. Now I feel like I am moving in the right direction and am ready to surpass the next phase of growth."

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Check our January Online Extras section to see some of the snow and ice management forms that Landscaping Concepts uses to organize the service.

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You're Fired!

Lawn & Landscape Message Board participants discuss the appropriate way to give overbearing customers the boot.

Sometimes keeping certain customers doesn't make good business sense, draining a company of patience and profits. Whether they don't pay on time, renegotiate contracts every month, nitpick excessively or remain consistently displeased, some clients aren't worth the extra time, money and lost sanity.

But when severing a business relationship becomes the clear solution, a contractor needs to do so professionally.

This was the basis of a conversation that took place on the Lawn & Landscape Online Message Boards after Chad Stern, owner of Chevy Chase, Md.-based Mowing & More, explained his scenario with a particular client.

"We did a yard cleanup for this guy who was referred to us by a good customer of ours," he explained. "We started the work, then he changed the agreement, and we stopped work until we got the new contract back, which was in about a month. We redid some of the work that had once again become overgrown and mowed the lawn for free, even though it

was 1 foot tall. After he sent me a slightly late payment for completion of the work, I sent him a mowing contract. During initial talks, I said that if he gave us the work for the cleanup we would be able to do the mowing for \$35 biweekly.

"We finished the work on July 24," Stern continues. "I received the payment the first week of September, and sent the proposal for mowing about the third week of September, so that means the lawn had not been mowed for almost two months. In the new proposal I said that the mowing would be \$55 for the first two visits because the lawn was overgrown ... and I needed to recover the cost of getting things back under control. I also reminded him that I mowed the lawn one time free of charge after that grass had been growing for six weeks uncontrollably."

Despite Stern's attempts to reason with this client, the customer argued that the agreed upon \$35 per mowing visit should stand and insisted that Stern absorb the cost of the extra cleanup that

continued on page 76; sidebar on page 74



how to fire troublesome customers

In regard to customers, the 80-20 rule means that 80 percent of your business will come from 20 percent of your customers. But according to Jeffrey Moses with the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), it also may mean that 20 percent of your customers will give you 80 percent of your problems. In a workshop published by the NFIB, Moses shares why some of these customers need to be shown the door in a professional manner.

"Certain customers always seem to be a pain – they're never satisfied," says Moses. "They have excessive demands, even to the point of the company losing money on transactions and causing undue employee aggravation. Some customers have an attitude that is so hostile and irritable that it demeans employees. Some insist on monopolizing employees to the extent that other customers cannot be served. And some customers may even verbally abuse employees, either with profanity or personal remarks."

While the adage, "The customer is always right," should be the rule of business activity, there are times when specific customers may be causing more trouble than they are worth, Moses explains, adding that when this happens, a manager or owner of the company needs to "fire" them.

Usually the front-line employees take the most abuse from customers. "These employees almost always have their hands tied; they have to grin and bear it," Moses points out. "They don't and probably shouldn't have the power to refuse to do business with someone. It's the responsibility of management to determine when a customer is disrupting the overall business. Employees should be encouraged to report such customers, and to give managers detailed information about the customer's activities."

But there is a fine line between a customer being demanding and being impossible, and there are no manuals written on the subject. When encountering the situation, managers should speak with all employees involved to determine not only what the customer does to be so irritating, but how long the customer has been disrupting business.

When management determines that a specific customer is a severe disruption, Moses says the customer should be spoken with in person – not by letter, e-mail or phone.

When speaking with such customers, managers should describe to them the nature of the complaint, and – without naming employees – should give detailed accounts of the problem. When talking with the customer face-to-face, the manager should take the attitude that the customer may not be aware of the strain that he or she is putting on the company. The conversation should remain entirely business-like. If the customer takes offence (which is quite likely), the manager should simply say that if future events along the same line occur, the company will have no choice but to end its relationship with the customer. "Always give the customer a chance to rectify what has been done," Moses says. "The manager should make the customer aware that the company values his or her business but will not tolerate future disruptions."

The proof of a customer's change in ways can be determined only by future contacts with the company. If the same patterns of disruption continue, the manager who spoke with the customer should inform the customer by mail that the company is ending their business relationship. "The letter should include a few details from the first conversation, but it is not necessary to go into great length," Moses says. "It's not required that a manager inform the customer of the company's decision during a face-to-face talk. Such a talk could produce fireworks, and could be temporarily as disruptive to the staff as the customer's original activities."

If the customer in question gives the company a large amount of business, the decision will be harder. But letting even important customers go when they're causing major disruptions can help a business in the long run. Employees will gain new motivation and will respect the fact that the company is on their side. "When the staff finds out that a problem customer has been fired, don't be surprised if a loud cheer goes up," Moses says. "Such customers can be a real thorn in an employee's side, and can make their entire work-life miserable."

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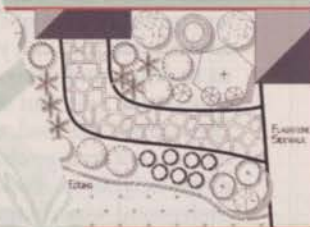
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would take place during the initial visits. "He said if I didn't do this he would not hire us to do the maintenance work," Stern says, asking Message Board participants: "What is your opinion – cut him loose or absorb the cost?"

"That's easy," answers Bob Keating, president, Liberty Land Management, Palm Harbor, Fla. "Fire him."

But is it really that simple? Message Board users debate the best ways to fire a client.

FIRE FAST. Many Message Board participants encouraged Stern to let this customer go. "Any lawn that is allowed to grow to 1 foot tall is not a lawn you want to deal with," advises Ken Reis, owner, Turf & Shrub Management, Dartmouth, Mass. "Sounds to me that this guy wants some neighborhood kid to come along every now and again to hack the lawn down."

Though firing this client was the resounding response from other contractors, Stern had a legitimate worry. "My

"It is important to scrutinize your firing decisions lest you acquire a mentality about how all customers create problems and get in your way. I think that only dealing with customers who share your values would go a long way toward reducing the need to fire customers." – Chad Stern

only concern with firing him was that he would tell my other customer that I did not follow through on my agreement with him," he explains.

Andrew Aksar, owner, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md., says this is a negligible fear, but told Stern that people will consider the source. "I have a feeling your other client was probably tired of the guy's nuisance lawn and politely advised that they call you," he says. "I have had clients refer us to others and things didn't pan out. And I had the same concerns as you. But then when I talked to the referring client down the road, they'd say something like, 'Yeah, that old guy is a strange character, he never waves or talks to any of the neighbors.' Basically they would agree that they can understand why things didn't work out with him."

And being polite shouldn't include giving away services, adds Jamie Bush. "Every time I tried to be nice by doing stuff for free, it burned me," shares the president, Jamie's Lawn Services, Plano, Texas. "The customer loses the appreciation for your action and comes to 'expect' what you consider being 'nice.' My advice would be to let your personality be nice, but don't let it include ever doing stuff for free. Stand by the price you quoted him in the most professional manner that you can. You have already given him something free once."

Though Bill Smallwood also agrees that Stern should let the client go, he offers some future advice in dealing with

similar customers. "Put a timeframe on all estimates so that someone doesn't call you for that \$35 cut two months later," advises, the owner, W.J. Smallwood Landscaping, Salem, N.H.

HOW HE DID IT. After the incident with this client, Stern wrote him the following letter.

"Mr. Jones, I just wanted to follow up on our conversation yesterday regarding lawn mowing. It has been about 14 weeks since we began the cleanup of your property. That means that if we had done the bi-weekly mowing visits you would have paid for seven visits - \$245 in total. I did in fact inform you that we would offer bi-weekly mowing visits for \$35 if you had us do the yard cleanup, but seven of those bi-weekly visits have passed and the yard needs a great deal of additional work in order to get things back in order. During the yard cleanup, my crew mowed the lawn for a second time (after it had been growing for six weeks) free of charge. You made it clear that you thought a total of \$40 in charges was unreasonable for getting the lawn back in shape, and would not be willing to pay for such charges. I am sorry that you feel the charges are unreasonable, but I cannot waive the fees for getting the yard back in shape and think that it would be best if you seek the services of another contractor. If you have any other questions, please let me know."

After posting this response on the Message Board, Aksar says Stern offered too much explanation and suggested this simpler approach: *"Dear Client, After our conversation on X date, I have recognized that your goals for your property do not coincide with the type of services that we offer. Therefore, I am respectfully advising you to seek services from another lawn/landscape contractor, as effective immediately we are withdrawing our offer to service your property. Thank you for your interest in Mow-N-More. Respectfully, Chad Stern."*

"I know you try very hard to do everything right, and you are doing things right," Aksar says, explaining his revised client letter. "But this guy knows what he is doing. He knows you are right. He is trying to see what he can get out of you. With that said, you do not owe him any explanation. Your letter is too dramatic. Therefore, cancel him with a letter such as or similar to what I wrote and move on. Next spring, you won't even remember his name."

George Iannoccone of Lehman Plant Care in Hicksville, N.Y., thought both letters were sound. "If this guy owed you money, then your (Stern's) letter spells out exactly where you're at in the business relationship and why you're terminating it," he says. "But since it sounds like you just want out of this relationship (and you should), Aksar's letter really shines. If this subject were ever to come up, you can simply state that the client's goals for his property did not coincide with the type of services that you offer and leave it at that."

But in the end, Stern disagreed. "Although your concise 'customer release' letter is nice, it did not address the issue in this case. In this specific instance, the issue was not values, it was the extra money for getting his out-of-control yard back under control."

"I do think that I learned an important lesson here and that is that I should not waste my time dealing with people who do not really care about their yards," Stern continues. "I can definitely see how it is important to really scrutinize your firing decisions lest you acquire a mentality about how all customers create problems and get in your way. However, I think that only dealing with customers who generally share your values would go a long way towards reducing the need to fire customers." ■

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ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Mower manufacturers are meeting demands for a quality cut at a quick pace.



In 2006, mower manufacturers are focused on one thing: productivity. Along with several new deck designs, contractors should expect to see manufacturers filling out existing product lines with more cutting widths and engine options. The advancements are in response to contractors' requests for riding and walk-behind machines that offer a quality cut as quickly as possible.

THE RAGE IN RIDING. Higher production rates and less operator fatigue make riding units the mower of choice in today's market. "One of the highest expense items facing a commercial cutter, next to the capital investment, is the manpower," says Erik Memmo, general sales manager for Ferris Industries in Munnsville, N.Y. "Because you're combining manpower and capital equipment cost, the return on investment with riders is faster and can provide more profitability long-term."

Manufacturers are continually looking at ways to increase that profitability. The introduction of several high-horsepower

engines in the past couple of years has led to more powerful mowers. More contractors seem to prefer mowers with more than 30 hp, says Luke Prussa, senior marketing manager, Exmark Mfg., Beatrice, Neb. Most of the time, he says, contractors will have enough power in a typical mid-mount zero-turn mower with the traditional 23 to 27 hp. "But certain times of the year, like in the spring, there is more moisture and grass grows more quickly," he says.

In these conditions, contractors have to slow down to get a quality cut – not an ideal situation during the busy spring season. "Higher horsepower helps contractors mow properties in these tough conditions without slowing down," Prussa says.

When purchasing mowers in the 23- to 30-hp range, the general rule of thumb is that retail price increases about \$100 per 1 hp, Prussa says. For example, a 27-hp mower would cost about \$400 more than a 23-hp unit. But mowers with a horsepower of 31 and up typically come at a higher premium because the mowers don't only increase in

continued on page 82

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continued from page 79

horsepower — they also include such features as larger tires and transmissions. Because they are higher quality machines, Prussa estimates that mowers in the 31- to 35-hp range cost about \$500 to \$800 more than lower horsepower units.

In addition to higher horsepower, increasing fuel prices are making efficiency a top concern for contractors. "We understand that contractors can't typically raise their prices or tack on surcharges to deal with higher fuel prices," says Randy Harris, senior marketing manager, The Toro Co., Bloomington, Minn., which is why he says more manufacturers are offering diesel engine options.

"A big benefit of diesel engines is that they are very fuel efficient," Harris says, explaining that diesel fuel burns slower and more efficiently than gasoline. "Diesel engines are in the range of 30 to 40 percent more fuel efficient than gasoline engines," he says. "In addition, you can buy off-road diesel for mowers, which has no tax applied to it. So contractors

can buy diesel fuel at a lower cost per gallon than gas."

There is no state or federal tax on off-road diesel because fuel taxes are used for road repair and construction, Harris says. This tax advantage, which varies by state, results in cost savings for contractors. He adds that diesel engines also deliver higher torque to power up hills and through tough conditions.

This fuel-efficiency does mean a higher purchase price, mainly because the engine costs more. Memmo estimates that liquid-cooled or diesel riding mowers cost \$10,000 to \$18,000, compared with the \$5,000 to \$10,000 price tag on air-cooled units.

But the investment is worth it, Harris says. "Diesel engines are liquid-cooled and are designed to last up to 5,000 hours," he says, whereas an air-cooled gas engine is designed to last 1,500 to 2,000 hours. "You may



Photo: The Toro Co.

pay a couple of thousand dollars more up front, but you get that return typically in one year's time."

Tim Cromley, marketing manager,

Walker Mfg., Fort Collins, Colo., says strides in liquid-cooling and electronic fuel injection have resulted in mower engines that combine both. Mowers powered by these engines cost around \$12,600, but the money is returned in extended life and fuel savings, he adds.

Manufacturers are also designing decks to improve cut quality, especially in the spring when the grass grows quickly. "The common feedback we hear is that all cutting decks perform pretty well when conditions are easy, such as during the middle of the summer," Prussa says. "You see the difference in tougher conditions, when there is more moisture and the grass is taller."

make yourself comfortable

As manufacturers develop new mowers, one area of special attention is ergonomics. With crews mowing eight to 10 hours a day, the goal is to make the mowers as comfortable as possible to operate.

Obviously, most crewmembers would probably prefer to operate a rider rather than a walk-behind because riding units offer less fatigue. And manufacturers are constantly looking at how to improve comfort even more. They're increasing legroom, offering seat adjustments and raising dashboard panels for easier viewing, as well as simplifying height of cut adjustment.

Seat suspension is another way manufacturers are trying to deliver comfort. Most offer an optional seat that includes more suspension than the standard seat, says Gilbert Pena, commercial segment strategy manager, John Deere, Cary, N.C.

But one advancement goes a step further than that by offering a spring-suspension kit. Instead of having to change the seat, contractors can simply add the kit to existing units. "If you're buying a suspension seat, it might cost \$400 to \$500, whereas a kit to add to the existing seat is only going to cost

about \$200," Pena says.

Operator comfort is a major concern for walk-behinds, too. About four years ago, a control system was designed to be easier on operator's hands, and the demand for the feature was overwhelming, says Luke Prussa, senior marketing manager, Exmark Mfg., Beatrice, Neb. "Operators can run the machine without continually exerting pressure on the controls," he explains. "It helps their hands hold up for eight hours of cutting rather than be worn out by constantly applying pressure."

Another design focuses on an intuitive-style handlebar for steering walk-behinds. "Forward motion powers the wheel, rather than braking as with a pistol grip," says Mark Naperal, marketing director, Ariens Co., Brillion, Wis., adding that the benefit is that the walk-behind mower operates more like a zero-turn rider, making it easier to transition between the two types.

For many contractors, operator comfort is a growing concern. "A happy employee is a better employee," Pena says. "Operator comfort means less fatigue and a more effective employee."

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One new deck features a 6-inch-deep cutting platform and flow-control baffles that help move more air and materials in difficult conditions. The result is a smooth cut and even discharge of clippings, Prussa says. The cutting platform also features an adjustable discharge baffle that lets operators quickly open the platform

discharge to handle thick, wet grass.

Another new deck includes enhancements to the drivetrain, electrical system, deck drive and cooling system. The improvements are aimed at increasing productivity by 30 percent, says Mark Naperala, marketing director, Ariens Co., Brillion, Wis. "On mowers that typically last 2,000 hours,

30 percent more productivity is another 1,600 hours of runtime," he says.

Manufacturers are also making advancements in mulching technologies. "There is a movement to experiment with different types of mulching concepts," says Gilbert Pena, commercial segment strategy manager, John Deere, Cary, N.C. "That includes mulching kits or moveable parts within a deck to accommodate easier mulching."

Steve Atkinson, maintenance manager, DeSantis Landscapes, Salem, Ore., is happy to hear it. "Some manufacturers say their mowers offer mulching, but the attachments are difficult to put on and take off, or the attachment doesn't come off at all," he says.

Manufacturers understand that contractors want to mulch occasionally because it makes them more productive, but they don't want to waste a lot of valuable time putting on and taking off the attachments, Pena says. One new deck design handles this dilemma by allowing operators to go from mulching mode to side-discharge by flicking a lever from their seat.

Mulching features can add anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 to the cost of a mower, Pena says. "If you want to buy a kit you can take on and off, it will run closer to \$500," he says. "But a dedicated deck that goes from mulching to side-discharge will run closer to \$1,000 more."

Contractors will also see more cutting widths, such as a new 66-inch deck size. The majority of large riding mowers have come in the 60-inch cutting width, Prussa says. Larger cutting widths, such as a 72-inch width, cover more ground, but they're harder to transport on trailers. "A 66-inch width offers 10 percent more productivity than a 60 inch, but it's easier to transport and fit on properties than a 72 inch," Prussa says, adding that a 66-inch deck costs about \$200 more than a 60-inch deck.

KEEP ON WALKING. Although they may not be as popular as the riding machines, walk-behinds are still holding their own in the market. Atkinson likes walk-behinds because they fit through gates and maneuver around obstacles found on small commercial and residential sites, and they're easy to get on and off. "I think our most versatile mower is our 36-inch walk-behind," he says. "Our climate has a lot of seasonal weather, so it's rainy in the fall. You

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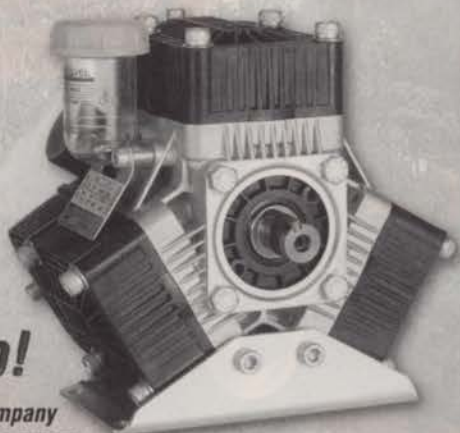
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can't have big machines on wet turf."

Customers, especially in the residential market, may also request a walk-behind. Dan Ritchie, president, The Lawn Co., Boise, Idaho, says he often has to deal with customers' perceptions about riders. "They think the 60-inch rider is going to damage their turf, so we use a 21- or 36-inch

walk-behind on their sites," he says.

In addition, start-up companies often opt for walk-behinds. "Walk-behinds are usually a little lower priced, so it's easier to begin with them," Prussa says, adding that walk-behinds are also smaller so they don't require as large a trailer for transportation.

With hydrostatic-drive mowers

costing up to \$5,500, high-end walk-behinds face stiff price competition from low-end riders. Therefore, the challenge for manufacturers is figuring out how to improve a commodity product without increasing price. Manufacturers are trying to accomplish this with new deck designs and sizes.

For example, a new rear-bagger offers a 26-inch deck — one step up from the standard 21-inch deck. "It gives the contractor about 20 percent more productivity than a 21 inch for about \$300 more," Prussa says.

Contractors will often select a walk-behind with a 36-inch cut width so they can get through narrow gate openings, Harris says, but research shows the majority of gate sizes installed on new construction are 42 or 48 inches wide. A new deck measuring 40-inches from side to side enables contractors to be more productive than with a 36 inch and still clear a 42-inch gate. According to Harris, the 40-inch deck is approximately \$100 more than a 36-inch model, but offers 11 percent more productivity.

Floating decks are another focus in walk-behind development. "As the deck gets wider, the probability for scalping increases, so floating decks tend to alleviate that potential problem," Pena says.

Contractors can also expect to see walk-behinds gaining features typically associated with riding units. A deck design previously only available on riders will soon hit the walk-behind market. The new deck features a baffle that lets operators fine-tune their cut in various conditions. In long, dense or wet grass, the baffle is opened to conserve power and reach faster mowing speeds. In less demanding conditions, operators can close the baffle. "Contractors said their decks would cut well about 80 percent of the time, but 20 percent of the time they had to double cut lawns because of tough conditions," Harris says. "The goal was to modify deck performance to allow contractors to be productive 100 percent of the time." He notes that another benefit is that the deck comes at no added cost.

BUYERS' GUIDE. With riders ranging from \$5,000 to \$14,000 and walk-behinds costing between \$2,000 and \$5,500, mowers are a significant investment. But how do contractors decide which mower to buy? "Every

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day there are more and more choices in this equipment category," says Prussa. "That's good for the customer, but it also makes it tougher to sort through all the options."

Contractors should first decide what features are most important to them, and then make a list of the mowers that offer those features, Naperala says. "If contractors are going to roll out units every two years, maybe they're looking at price rather than longevity. But if contractors want to only put out capital once every four or five years, they'll want a mower that offers longevity."

Once a contractor makes his list of desired features, the next step is to test out the equipment. "When you're



In addition to new deck designs, contractors should expect to see manufacturers adding more cutting widths and engine options to their existing product lines this year. Photo: John Deere

talking about investing thousands of dollars in a lawn mower, the best thing you can do is demo each brand under consideration to qualify the quality of cut, feel and general

performance of the machine," Harris says.

Another crucial component contractors should consider is the type of support they'll get after purchase, Pena says. This includes the availability of replacement parts and whether or not loaner equipment is offered when mowers are being serviced. Contractors should also look at the dealer's business hours and how knowledgeable a dealer is about new products.

"As contractors look at safety, productivity and comfort, they're going to see a lot of look-a-likes on the market," Pena says. "The important question then is 'What does the support look like?'"

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Photo: Vermeer Mfg.

Digging Diversity

by kathleen franzinger

Manufacturers offer a variety of trenchers to help landscape contractors increase productivity and profits.

For landscape contractors, time is money. Therefore, the more a piece of equipment can decrease the amount of time or labor on a job, the higher the profits. For many contractors – especially those in irrigation installation – trenchers are a critical component in their equipment line-ups for just that reason.

Digging by hand is rarely an attractive option on landscaping jobs. There may be a certain satisfaction in seeing the sweat of a hard day's work, but the hours and labor involved in shoveling trenches means less productivity and profitability. Luckily for contractors, manufacturers offer a variety of equipment options to eliminate hand digging and make trenching an easy task. Contractors can choose from ride-on and

walk-behind trenchers to trencher attachments for compact and full-size skid steers. The only challenge for contractors is sorting through the choices and selecting the right trencher for their needs.

MULTIPURPOSE MACHINES. Though irrigation and drainage top the list of trencher applications, landscape contractors are putting the machines to work in a variety of other ways. "As the markets have grown, so have the capabilities of trenchers," says Todd Roorda, solutions specialist, Vermeer Manufacturing Co., Pella, Iowa. "Digging trenches for electrical lines for landscape lighting and digging pits to plant trees are some examples. Also, if contractors are installing a brick retaining wall, they'll cut the outline out with a trencher so there is less

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The compact size of walk-behind trenchers makes them easy to maneuver and transport. The machines are well-suited to residential jobs in which they have to fit through gates or into backyards. Photo: Ditch Witch

hand digging involved."

Greg Barreto says water lines are still the most popular use for trenchers, followed by electrical lines and drainage or sewer lines. But the founder of Barreto Manufacturing, La Grande, Ore., a manufacturer of hydraulic walk-behind trenchers, also sees the machines being used to cut foundation bases for homes, foundations for curbing machines, planting trees and root barriers. One unique application he hears more of lately is using trenchers to install invisible dog fences.

In addition to using a dedicated machine, contractors can attach a trenching implement to a power unit, such as a skid-steer. "Trenchers are one of the top-selling attachments in the landscaping market," says RaeDell Braaten, attachment product manager, Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D. "Trencher attachments are gaining popularity, especially as the compact loader market grows and the number of available attachments increases."

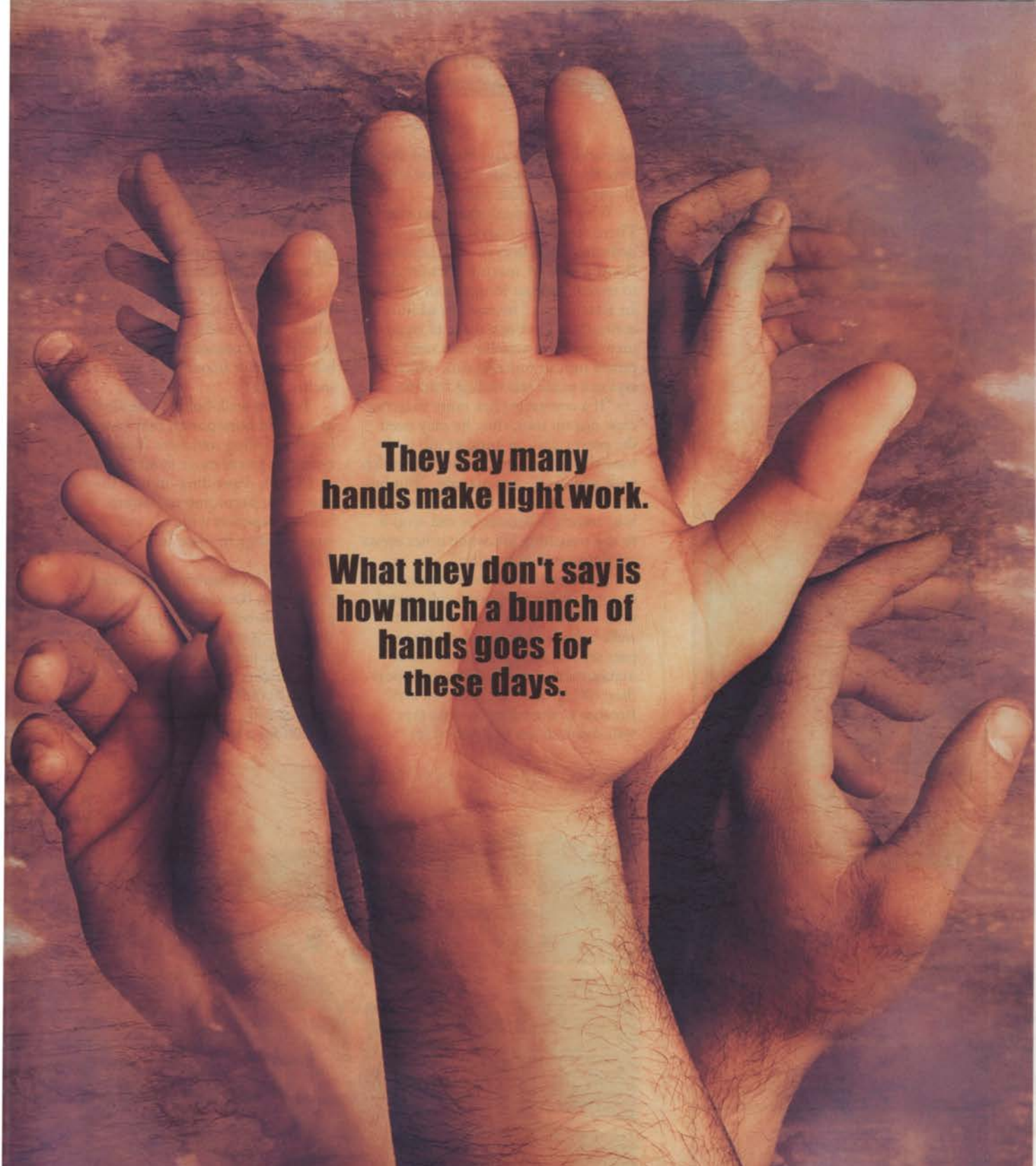
Bill Schumacher, a contractor who uses trenchers mainly for irrigation and drainage applications, owns one ride-on trencher, three walk-behinds

and two trencher attachments. The president of Springtime Landscaping & Irrigation in Bend, Ore., says the walk-behind trenchers work well on small residential landscape jobs while the riding trencher is best on large commercial construction jobs. He uses the attachments on special landscaping projects that require the use of several attachments.

For Schumacher, the benefit of trenchers comes in the form of labor savings. "The main thing is we don't have to deal with additional labor," he says. "Trenchers have helped us save money in labor and eliminate headaches."

No question, there is a time and labor savings for using trenchers vs. hand digging. How much time and money is saved depends on the size of the job, but Roorda suggests that when using a trencher to eliminate hand digging, a contractor might be able to trench a yard in one day with one person vs. wasting one week's time of four or five crewmembers to hand dig it.

SHOWING DEDICATION. Even though attachments are gaining rec-



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ognition, Barreto says his stand-alone trencher business has increased about 20 percent this past year.

Why buy a stand-alone trencher? There are distinct advantages to dedicated trenchers vs. attachments, Roorda says. "A machine designed to trench will last longer than just an attachment," he says. In addition, contractors have one piece of equipment, whereas attachments need a power unit in order to run, which he says can cause scheduling trouble.

"If a contractor has more than one crew out on jobs, then he may need the power unit on another job to do something else, such as moving mulch with a bucket," Roorda says. "But because a stand-alone trencher's only job is to trench, a contractor can send it to the trenching job while other crews are doing something else."

Stand-alone trenchers are divided into two basic categories: riding and walk-behind. One major benefit to walk-behind trenchers is their compact size, which makes them more maneuverable and easier to transport than riding trenchers, Barreto says. Because of their size, Roorda says walk-behinds are best suited for

residential jobs in which they have to fit through 36-inch gates or into backyards.

Along with being smaller in size, walk-behinds are lower in horsepower, typically ranging to about 25 hp. "The walk-behind trenchers around 13 to 15 hp are the most popular," Barreto says. "Those can trench anywhere from 0 to 36 inches deep. I'd say the most common is the 24 inch, but most have booms that go up to 36 inches deep."

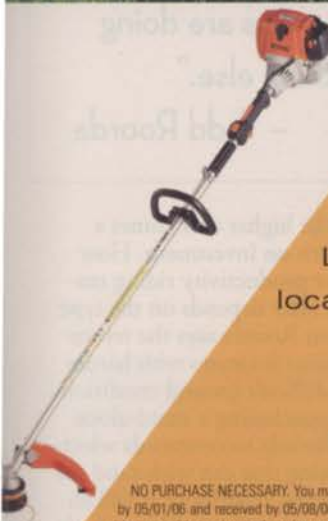
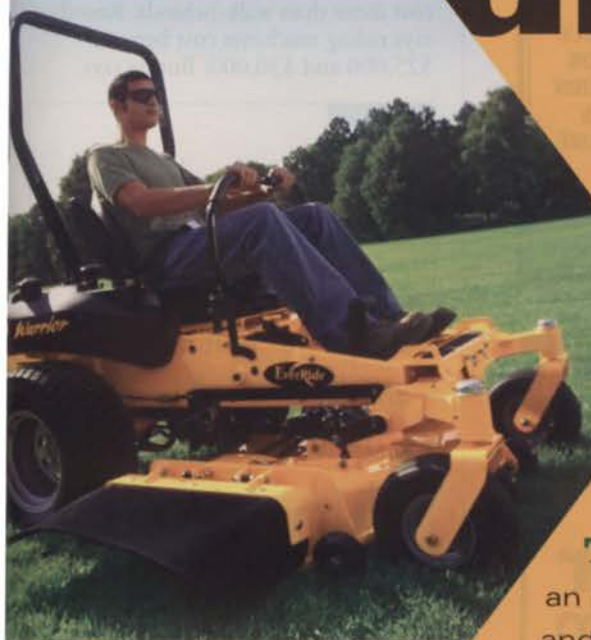
Because walk-behinds are smaller in size and horsepower, they cost less than riding trenchers. Roorda estimates prices range from \$9,000 to \$9,500, depending on how they're equipped. According to Barreto, walk-behind trenchers with 12- and 18-hp engines range in price from \$7,000 to \$12,000.

While attachments are gaining popularity, Barreto says they won't replace walk-behinds, mainly because of the cost — not the cost of the attachment, but for the power unit itself. "Contractors who buy power units have \$20,000 to \$24,000 tied up fairly quickly, whereas they can spend \$7,000 for a small trencher that will



In addition to stand-alone trenchers, contractors can attach a trenching implement to a power unit. According to manufacturers, trencher attachments are gaining popularity, especially as the compact loader market grows. Photo: Bobcat

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construction

do a lot of the same work," he says.

On the downside, because of their smaller size and power, walk-behinds don't offer as high of productivity as ride-on trenchers. Riding machines are larger and offer more power, so they are designed to trench wider, deeper and faster. Roorda says horsepower on riding machines start at about 37 hp. The higher productivity makes riding machines a better choice for large commercial irrigation and landscaping jobs, Roorda says. "The harder the ground, the more weight and horsepower it takes to dig through that ground," he explains.

Of course, the higher power and durability means riding trenchers cost more than walk-behinds. Roorda says riding machines cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000. But he says

"If a contractor has more than one crew out on jobs, then he may need the power unit on another job ... because a stand-alone trencher's only job is to trench, a contractor can send it to the trenching job while other crews are doing something else."

- Todd Roorda

that with the higher cost comes a higher return on investment. How much more productivity riding machines can offer depends on the type of work, but Roorda says the return on investment increases with harder and more difficult ground conditions.

When purchasing a stand-alone trencher, Roorda recommends selecting a machine that can withstand the type of digging conditions it will encounter on a daily basis. "If you're doing irrigation work and going 6 inches deep vs. drainage work that needs to be 3 feet deep, you'll need comparable

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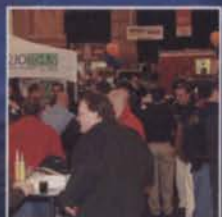
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equipment," Roorda says. "The depth and width of the trench you need to install at your jobs definitely needs to be looked at."

Barreto agrees, saying digging

depth is the primary reason for selecting a certain trencher. "If 90 percent of the time a contractor will just be installing sprinkler systems and won't need to go more than 16 inches deep,

he may want to buy a small trencher and rent a larger one the other 10 percent of the time," he says. Once the right type has been selected, Barreto recommends that contractors look at the durability of the machine, ergonomics, maneuverability and, finally, cost.

Another issue when selecting a trencher is maintenance. Barreto says hydraulic trenchers require less maintenance than mechanical style trenchers, and typically last longer as a result. "There are some grease points on hydraulic machines, and there is a hydraulic filter to change once a year," he says. "But the maintenance is minimal compared with mechanical machines." He adds that hydraulic machines can easily last 2,000 to 3,000 hours.

Roorda estimates that stand-alone trenchers can last about five to six years, but it depends on the maintenance. He says hydrostatic machines require less maintenance



Ride-on trenchers offer more horsepower than walk-behind units. This translates into higher productivity, making them a good choice for large commercial jobs. Photo: Vermeer Mfg.

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construction

than mechanical ones, which means increased life. "If you have a hydro-static machine, your maintenance is a lot less because you don't have chains to adjust and so forth," he notes.

GETTING ATTACHED. In the late 1980s, Toms Creek Nursery & Landscaping in Denton, N.C., used a dedicated trencher for its irrigation and drainage work. But today the company uses trencher attachments on a compact walk-behind loader and a full-size skid-steer. They've had the full-size skid-steer for about six years, and the compact loader for about three to four years. Brandon Vaughan, chief project supervisor says the company made the switch because crews found the skid-steers easier to maneu-

"With the large number of attachments available in the market today for landscape contractors, it makes sense to rent or purchase a trencher attachment for a loader vs. buying a dedicated trencher."

- RaeDell Braaten

ver. "They turn quicker and are easier to get into tight spaces," he says.

Vaughan says the attachments also offer a smoother ride than a ride-on trencher. "When you have ride-on trenchers, you bounce around a lot, especially on those with tires," he says. "In my opinion, the platform is not stable on trenchers with wheels. Both our machines have tracks so they tend to stay put more." In addition, because the company owns two power units, the attachments are a more economical choice than riding machines.

A compact loader with a trencher attachment can do about the same

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amount of work as four or five workers with shovels hand digging a trench, Braaten says. He adds that attachments offer extra convenience because the soil is displaced to the side of the trench, and afterward the loader operator can simply attach a bucket and backfill the trench.

Although Vaughan says their crews still perform some hand digging, the trencher attachments speed up the process. "We still have a lot of laborers because we do a lot of hand digging," he says. "It's more of a timesavings. We get in and out of jobs quicker." Vaughan says he can go about 10 times faster using a trencher attachment compared to hand digging, depending on the soil. "In nice soil, you can go about 8 to 10 feet with the compact loader in about 10 minutes," he says. "Our bigger machine can go faster when it's a straight line. But when you start turning around, the smaller one is faster because it's more maneuverable."

The versatility of attachments makes them an attractive option, Braaten says. "In a matter of a few minutes, the compact loader opera-



Digging by hand is rarely an attractive option on any job. That's why contractors are putting trenchers to work in a variety of tasks, including the installation of irrigation and landscape lighting systems. Photo: Vermeer Mfg.

trencher."

The life of a trencher attachment depends on the ground conditions it operates in and how well it's maintained, Braaten says. "The majority of everyday trencher maintenance includes checking the tensioning of the chain and checking the teeth on the chain for proper tightness and any premature wear," he says.

Although attachments can be expensive when you include the price of the power unit, Schumacher says his crews prefer them. "We're leaning toward attachments because my crews

This is significantly less compared with larger riding trenchers, but, of course, the savings assumes a landscape contractor already owns a compact loader. But Braaten says they are fairly common in the industry. "For the most part, contractors already own a compact loader," he says. "So it may only take a few jobs for the landscaper to pay for the trencher attachment whereas a larger, dedicated machine could take months or even a year."

While Vaughan likes using trencher attachments, there is one thing on his wish list. "It's just high-tech, wishful thinking, but I'd like a trencher that would make the depth stay," he says. "As you go the way of the land, the operator has to keep the trench going one way if you're doing drainage. If there was some way to automate that on trenchers, it would be nice."

Manufacturers are constantly striving to improve stand-alone trenchers, as well as attachments. Roorda says it's an ongoing process. "Manufacturers are trying to make better machines all the time," he says. "We're always trying to improve the quality and durability."

And that can only mean good things for contractors. **ll**

"If 90 percent of the time a contractor will just be installing sprinkler systems and won't need to go more than 16 inches deep, he may want to buy a small trencher and rent a larger one the other 10 percent of the time." - Greg Barreto

tor can install or remove the trencher attachment and attach another tool, such as an auger, combination bucket or sweeper," he explains. "With the large number of attachments available in the market today for landscape contractors, it makes sense to rent or purchase a trencher attachment for a loader vs. buying a dedicated

feel they're more stable," he says, but there is a cost involved. "A dedicated piece may only cost \$5,000 to \$6,000. For an attachment, you're paying \$14,000 for the machine plus paying for the attachment."

According to Braaten, trencher attachments cost between \$2,800 and \$8,500, depending on the features.

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by mike zawacki



The Perfect Blend

Pesticide/fertilizer combination products can increase efficiency and profitability while not decreasing the amount of services offered.

Photo of fertilizer pellets:
Pursell Technologies

Since entering the market 25 years ago, lawn care operators have come to rely on pesticide-fertilizer blends to troubleshoot routine pest-related turf problems and to keep clients' green spaces lush, healthy and the envy of the neighborhood or business park.

Combination pesticide-fertilizer products provide LCOs an enticing two-for-one deal – apply a pair of products during one pass over the lawn, thus decreasing technician and travel expenses, yet not reducing the number of services offered to clients. Likewise, combination products increase efficiency by reducing the need to carry separate amounts of fertilizer and pesticide from job site to job site.

From a productivity standpoint,

blended pesticide-fertilizer products make the most sense, says Jon Cundiff, president of Turf's Up in Lee's Summit, Mo.

"If we're in the process of doing our spring feeding and we need a pre-emergent pesticide then we can do it all in one pass," Cundiff says. "In the old days, you fertilize first and then would have to go back over with the pre-emergent. It was costly and time consuming."

Cundiff has been using blended products, primarily fertilizers imbedded with pre-emergent herbicides and grub-control insecticides, for nearly two decades and says it's a staple product among LCOs in his regional market. In fact, the products are so deeply rooted with his competitors that Cundiff is not aware of a peer who routinely offers the option of separate

continued on page 115

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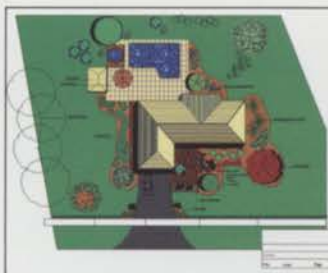


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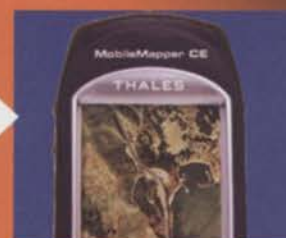
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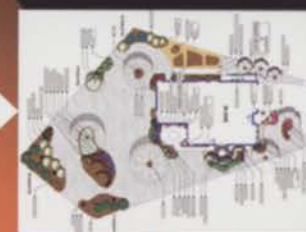
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continued from page 112

products. As for his weed-and-feed operations, Cundiff switches to separate products on very rare occasions.

"The only time we'd use separate products anymore is if we're treating an area that has just been seeded," he says. "We'll use a separate fertilizer first, then come back later on with an application of a pre-emergent."

Cundiff is like many LCOs in the industry who utilize pesticide-fertilizer products at some point during the green season to significantly cut the time they spend applying product to lawns. Consistently, between 35 percent and 40 percent of LCOs purchase pesticide-fertilizer blended products annually, according to recent research conducted by *Lawn & Landscape*.

In general, LCOs utilize three basic types of pesticide-fertilizer products.

Fertilizers impregnated or mixed with herbicidal agents are the most common combination products employed by LCOs. Preemergent herbicides are the most numerous of this class of blended products because they tackle two important tasks in a single pass. Technicians apply the preemergent-fertilizer blend, most commonly in a granulated form and with a spreader, in the spring to give a lawn its initial wake-up feeding and to stave off weed growth. Some LCOs also utilize this particular combination product in the fall to pre-treat for the next season's weeds.

LCOs will apply postemergent herbicides during the summer months to deal with undesirable broadleaf plants and grasses. This "weed-and-feed" technique is more commonly utilized in a liquid format for direct feeding and to burn off the nuisance vegetation. Granulated postemergent products are also available.

Besides adding nutrients, insecticide and fertilizer combination products, in granulated and liquid forms, control for grubs under the ground and target surface-roaming insects, such as ants, army worms, sod web worms and chinch bugs.

Fungicide-fertilizer blends are also available to landscapers, though they represent only a small segment of the combination market, say manufacturers. This product is more commonly used in Southern states, in the middle of the summer and outside the time line of the routine lawn maintenance cycle. However, experts warn that a

lawn with a fungal problem is indicative of other problems that require troubleshooting. More often than not, it's the wrong time to begin fertilizing with a combination product.

There are a number of factors to consider to use the combo blends effectively, efficiently and, most importantly, profitably.

clients a better quality lawn program than competitors who weren't using blends or were using cheaper, inferior substitutes.

"I switched because a preemergent herbicide-fertilizer blend kept the lawn quality up and the weeds down," LaScalea says. "I knew if I didn't use a combo product that the lawn color

next generation combos

Lawn care operators often ask why manufacturers haven't developed a product that, with a single application, weeds and feeds in the spring, eradicates grubs and kills broadleaf grasses in the summer and, in the fall, releases a final feeding and next season's pre-treatment.

While the technology is available to create a type of super-combo product, pesticide-fertilizer manufacturers say environmental regulations strictly dictate that some of the chemicals used in combination products, insecticides for one, cannot be present in the environment for such a long time period.

But with continued technological development, manufacturers hope a more complex all-in-one combination pesticide-fertilizer product may one day grant LCOs their wish for a one-application product.

In the meantime, LCOs can expect new combination products coming to market that feature more accurate time-release mechanisms, less dust and improved product performance, especially at higher temperatures.

Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist for BASF Professional Turf and Ornamentals, describes a granular postemergent combination product in development that, when it comes into contact with moisture, explodes into a thousand microscopic grains.

"It assures the herbicide gets onto the foliage of the targeted weed," Miller says. "It's kind of like a pesticide-fertilizer grenade."

A LOOK AT COST. Pesticide-fertilizer blends are 10 to 12 percent more expensive than stand-alone products, and cost more depending on the type and amount of pesticide formulated with the fertilizer. However, it's a cost worth serious consideration.

Rising fuel, materials and labor costs will always be issues for an LCO, says Gary LaScalea, president of GroGreen in Plano, Texas. But efficiency wasn't the only reason LaScalea switched to combination products last year. Preemergent herbicide-fertilizer products allowed him to offer his

would not be there and I would not get the proper amount of weed control."

And while blended products may carry a higher price tag than utilizing separate applications, LCOs say the benefits outweigh the added expenses. "It may cost you more money," says Todd Graus, president of Green Turf Landscapes, Worland, Wis.. "But it pays in keeping you sane."

But customers never want to hear from LCOs that chemical lawn service prices are going up. And when passing on the cost increase of a pesticide-fer-

tilizer blend, it's important to educate customers on why you're using these particular chemical products, Graus says, who integrated blended products into his operations nearly 20 years ago.

"We put it all on the line up front with customers," Graus says. "This

is our program and this is what it costs."

LCOs should take time to outline for clients the reasons why they're switching to blended products and the benefits the green spaces will receive from the added cost, LaScalea says.

Overlooking this process may force a cost-conscious client to reconsider an LCO's services.

"Your residential customers may not want to spend the money for the preemergent-fertilizer blend in the early spring and decide to hold off until late May when they have lawns full of weeds," LaScalea says. "At that late of a start date, we can treat that, but they'll pay a premium price to turn their lawns around. They need to know up front that, in the long run, it will cost them more money if they don't receive those early (pesticide-fertilizer) applications."

BUYING THE RIGHT PRODUCT.

Chemical manufacturers develop the pesticides, and a formulator then mixes it into a wet or dry combination product that is sold to a distributor or directly to an LCO. Sometimes, a formulator can mix a combination product to meet an LCO's specific needs.

LCOs are encouraged to choose blended products based on the type of pests they're attempting to control during a season, says Steve Cosky, a technical manager in Syngenta's Professional Products Group. For example, if grubs are the primary nuisance, choose a product that treats the biggest issue first. Small, second-

overcoming challenges

Depending on the region of the country, LCOs have a few challenging variables to consider when using pesticide-fertilizer blends, including time and product overlap.

"If you're applying a product with grub control in June, are you fertilizing in June, too?" asks Jon Cundiff, president of Turf's Up, Lee's Summit, Mo. "If your timing is off, that offers a whole new set of challenges."

Timing isn't the only variable to observe. LCOs need to provide a buffer zone around fish ponds and ornamental plants. Misused insecticides can kill fish and other aquatic wildlife and improperly applied herbicides can poison garden fruits and vegetables, says Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist for BASF Professional Turf and Ornamentals. Likewise, LCOs should exercise caution when using pesticide products around ornamentals since many herbicide-fertilizer blends are not premixed for their specific requirements and tolerances.

"Some herbicides are not labeled for use on ornamentals," Miller says. "It's important for the LCO to read the product labels and make sure it's OK for both lawn and ornamental use."



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any problems can always receive spot treatment later on. "Target the correct pesticide and fertilizer to be applied for that particular time of year," he explains.

Likewise, LCOs should consider how much more efficient a particular pesticide-fertilizer blend will make them compared to using separate products, says Ben Cicora, business manager of herbicides and insecticides at Bayer Environmental Science. "Cost should be a consideration when choosing a pesticide on fertilizer product, but it should not be the limiting factor," he says. "Calculate out the efficiency and what these products will save you in labor and gas down the line."

When examining a blended product's potential cost effectiveness, Cundiff weighs the breadth of jobs done by a blended product during a single application. "Can it save me service calls down the road by hitting all the application windows in the

right way?" he says.

In addition, Cundiff considers blended products that offer his customers value in the long run. "I don't care how cheap or expensive it is if there is no value added to the customer," he says.

But when it comes down to it, LCOs choose blended products that are applicator friendly and compatible with their existing spreaders and spray equipment. And when integrating a new pesticide-fertilizer product into use, Dan Cheslock, president of Mountaineer Lawn Care in Morgantown W. Va., suggests using it in advance on select properties to gain practical experience on how the agents work.

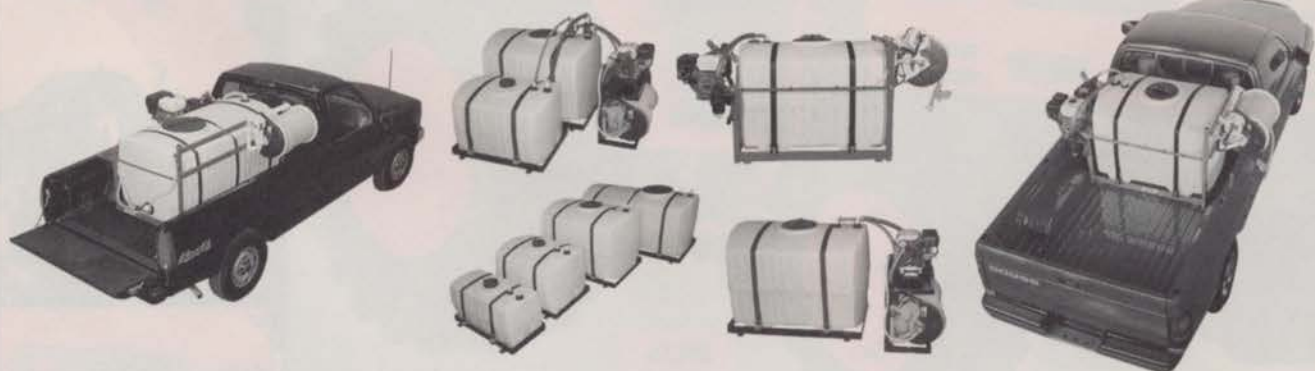
"You never want to use a new product wholesale on all of your accounts," Cheslock says. "There are labels to follow on the packaging, but they don't always tell the whole story. Try the products out and see how they work in a controlled situation, such as on a site where you're called back for

a service call. Often, I'll try them out on my own lawn first."

To make smart purchasing decisions, LCOs should be well versed in the intricacies of the combination products, including which ones save them the greatest amount time and money while benefiting clients' green spaces, says Cicora.

"Ask questions, both of the manufacturers and the distributors," he says. "Become as educated as possible so you can go to the homeowner or property manager and explain why you're using these particular products, why they'll make you more efficient and that you're working with them and not against them when you apply a combination product to their property."

BEST PRACTICES. Blended pesticide-fertilizer products are only as effective as the individual applying them to a client's lawn. LCOs should establish and adhere to a number of common best



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practices for the proper and successful use of pesticide-fertilizer products.

Education, by far, is the most crucial best practice. LCOs should become well versed in the specific type of chemical compound blended with the fertilizer. Review all product labels to ensure you're following proper dry and wet application techniques.

"If you have an active ingredient on the fertilizer it's going to follow the same (application) rules as if it were being used in a stand alone liquid form," says Cosky.

This best practice also involves educating the client, Cosky adds. "If I'm the LCO, I want to be able to explain to the client all about what I'm applying and why," he says. "That gives the customer a better knowledge base about what's going on."

Proper equipment calibration is another important best practice. LCOs should establish a strict routine to check and re-calibrate application equipment. Pesticides, such as

insecticides, have certain application rates that must be monitored for the product to work effectively.

"Correct calibration is very important both for safety and for responsible environmental stewardship," Cicora says.

Likewise, over application needlessly increases an LCO's costs.

"When an LCO goes out and treats 20 lawns in a day, it's very important to check the equipment on a routine basis," Miller says. "If your spreader is dumping 10 percent more product, after a day that's a fair amount of product and money needlessly lost."

Routine training is another important best practice. LCOs should provide regular training on the use of blended products and ensure their technicians follow proper application procedures. Contractors should make sure their employees are properly certified, according to their state department of agriculture, to handle and

apply pesticide-fertilizer products.

"Train and review proper procedures with your people, especially any time you make a change in the combination products you're using," LaScalea says. "Communication is the key to anything a landscape professional does, especially when making a change like this in their business."

In addition to training, outfit all workers handling pesticide-fertilizer products with the proper personal-protection equipment. Depending on the pesticide blended with the fertilizer, workers may need rubber boots and gloves, goggles and possibly other protective apparel, such as dust masks or even respirators. Employees should heed all safety and warning labels. **LL**

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These days, irrigation systems can be both designed and controlled from the comfort of your office computer. Design programs make head layout, hydraulic calculation and materials list generation easier, while Web-based irrigation control programs allow systems to be monitored and adjusted remotely. Photos top to bottom: Software Republic, Signature Control Systems

TechnoSoaking

by lauren spiers hunter

As irrigation software turns watering landscapes into a high-tech business, contractors can turn megabytes into megabucks.

As the green industry has matured and as more young contractors have entered the industry, the use of technology in irrigation companies and the lawn and landscape market in general has increased. In addition to company Web sites, contractors are benefiting from technology in the forms of cell phones and two-way communication devices; computer programs for everything from routing to billing; global positioning technology; and more. This is good news for software manufacturers who see the industry becoming more tech savvy.

"There are younger contractors entering the business every day," notes John DeCell, president of Software Republic, Houston, Texas. "Many of these contractors grew up using computers and expect

to have some sort of technology to assist them in business. We're also seeing an increase in computer literacy among contractors' existing and prospective customers that use computers in their own line of work and have come to expect the use of technology in other industries as well."

Steven Moore agrees. "There's a rising generation of business owners and consumers who are more computer savvy, so the demand for a high-tech approach is growing," says the president and general manager of Irrisoft, North Logan, Utah. "In terms of irrigation in particular, there's a demand from the marketplace for improved water management, and business owners in the industry today aren't afraid to use computers to achieve that goal."

For a round-up of irrigation software solutions, *Lawn & Landscape* spoke with several manufacturers of software pro-



Certain types of irrigation software work with hand-held computers to boost scheduling and work order efficiency in the office and in the field. Photo: Rain Bird

grams and Web-based tools designed to provide speed and accuracy at every phase of a job, and also offer a level of professionalism that gives an upper hand in sales and a boost to contractors' bottom lines.

DIGITAL DESIGNING. First up in most projects is design software that allows irrigation contractors to accurately create irrigation plans in a matter of minutes for almost any property.

"Design software gives the irrigation contractor the ability to generate an irrigation plan by computer very quickly and then have documentation ready right away to hand to the work-

ers," explains Art Tedeschi, owner and chief designer of Denver, Colo.-based Science Hill, manufacturer of WaterMark PRO irrigation design software. "You're also able to provide the homeowner with a drawing of their property with the sprinkler heads all laid out and the spacing and water requirements calculated for you. It takes all the guesswork out of it."

Contrary to popular belief, there are a number of standalone programs geared toward light commercial and residential irrigation design that don't require expensive construction software to run. RainCAD, WaterMark PRO and Fastquote (manufactured by Walla Walla, Wash.-based MP Rota-

tor) are among these standalone programs and all three operate similarly.

After measuring a potential client's property, an irrigation contractor can use a design program to sketch out the client's yard and a footprint of the residence or building on the property. (Some programs also provide the option of importing a basic layout from another file.) From there, the contractor uses tools in the software to identify the water source for the site, specify hydrozones if necessary, and can then have the software itself populate the area with rotors, sprayheads, pipe, etc. Each design program includes a database of parts and pieces from a number of irrigation product manu-

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irrigation > >

facturers, which users can customize based on their preferred products and suppliers.

With a preliminary design laid out, most software programs will then run a virtual test on the system to ensure the hydraulics were calculated properly for uniformity in the system. If the test goes well, the contractor can quickly generate a printout of the design, along with a list of materials – including all fittings – that will be needed to install the system, providing both the customer and the crew with an on-the-ball estimate of the scope and cost of the project.

"These programs' greatest strengths are the ability to do good designs and generate materials lists," says Steve McCoon, software support specialist for MP Rotator. "Those things matter to both the consumer and the contractor because you want to be designing irrigation systems that have high uniformity and you want to be able to install them with great efficiency. When you print these reports that can be customized with your company logo and have the customer's name in big letters, it puts a spotlight on the specifics of their design and it makes the contractor look very professional."

This extra boost of professionalism comes with a relatively low price tag. Most irrigation design programs cost between \$499 and \$1,300 and include the software, program upgrades as necessary and technical support during the life of the product. Some programs offer trial periods before a purchase is necessary and manufacturers say the cost of a program can quickly be recouped.

"From our past research, we know that a computer design is worth several hundred to a few thousand dollars per residential installation," DeCell says. "Our past research indicates that by including a computer design as part of their marketing materials, contractors were able to increase their business by 55 percent and increase their average price per residential installation by 16.7 percent."

McCoon adds that because it only takes 30 minutes to an hour to design an irrigation system using a software program, contractors can generate more proposals in less time. "We know of companies that have been able to create as many as 12 irrigation designs a day, which is more than most companies will need to

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do, but the point is that the more proficient you become, the more proposals you can send out and the more sales you can close," he says.

IRRIGATION CALCULATIONS.

With a design in hand, irrigation contractors also have tech tools at their disposal to ensure that water flows through those systems properly, thereby establishing contractors as professional water managers.

"Water management software is a valuable tool for irrigation contractors that lets them simplify the process of calculating irrigation schedules," says Moore, whose company developed InSite Irrigation Scheduling software. While the program and others like it cannot currently program irrigation controllers automatically, their technology simplifies the necessary calculations. "Contractors that need to make these calculations have to gather information about the landscape water needs, the performance of



Photo: Software Republic

the system and then combine that to create the actual schedule to program into the controller," Moore says, creating an efficient and functional watering schedule.

Guesswork often leads to water-wasting irrigation systems and needs to be eliminated, DeCell says. "Some contractors set a customer's controller for a worst-case scenario watering situation and then it either stays there all year long or is only adjusted once a year for a big change of season," he says. "In reality, adjusting irrigation

controllers on a monthly or quarterly basis can actually be an add-on service that contractors can sell and available software makes that an even more viable option."

InSite and Irricalc (manufactured by Software Republic) give contractors the simplicity of entering a few pieces of information about the irrigation system and the site, and then calculate an appropriate watering schedule instantly. By selecting details like plant type, soil conditions, slope and the irrigation system's and controller's capabilities, the software can generate accurate start and run times. Precipitation rate, soil infiltration rate, soil moisture holding capacity and other characteristics also are considered by some programs, and the ability to add evapotranspiration (ET) data can make each schedule even more precise.

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water savings, and even more so if contractors take DeCell's advice and offer clients system adjustments on a regular basis. Programs like Irricalc cost as little as \$250, while InSite is offered free to irrigation contractors as a tool to educate the industry on the

ers' benefit – and ultimately be more professional.”

WORLD-WIDE WATERING. The benefits of technology on irrigation management don't stop after irrigation controllers are programmed. The

systems. I-Central from Rain Master, Simi Valley, Calif., and eConstellation from Signature Control Systems, Irvine, Calif., are two such programs.

“Traditional central control irrigation systems generally require an expensive dedicated desktop computer with complicated software that resides in an office somewhere on the site,” says Drew Ferraro, director of sales and marketing for Signature Control Systems. “If you want

“There's a demand from the marketplace for improved water management and business owners in the industry today aren't afraid to use computers to achieve that goal.” – Steven Moore

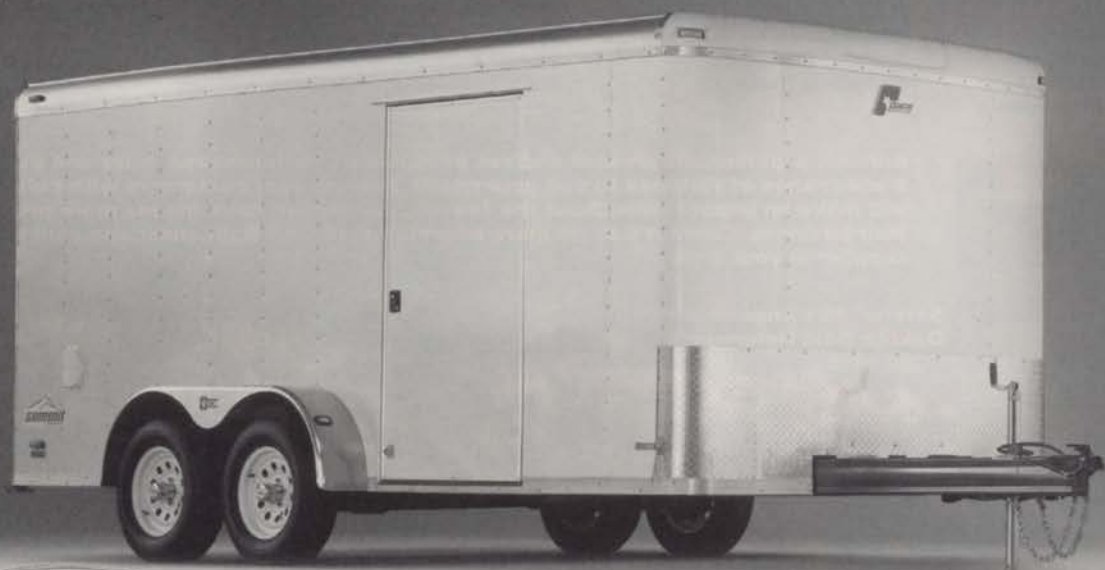
importance of accurate water management. “In order to run an efficient business, it's all about quick access to good information,” Moore says. “Whether it's calculating an irrigation schedule or automating a system with ET data, you want to have an accurate estimate and no mistakes in the math. These programs can help contractors do the math right – to their custom-

irrigation software industry steps in again with a high-tech way to reprogram controllers and manage systems – all from the comfort of your own office. Operating on the principles used by traditional central-controlled irrigation systems, some irrigation manufacturers have brought to the marketplace Web-based platforms from which to manage irrigation

to make a change to the irrigation schedule, you have to physically touch the dedicated computer in some way.”

Web-based control, however, gives irrigation contractors the ability to wirelessly and remotely access the same controllers from any Internet-accessible computer no matter where the contractor is located. In a basic setup, the controllers on a given site are

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hard-wired or radio-linked together and a single modem is set up to communicate to the entire system. With a subscription to this type of service, a contractor could log onto the software provider's Web site, access the modem through his or her online account and control the system remotely. Each central-controlled site requires its own modem, but all the modems for a

alarms from sensors on the system.

"A Web-based central control system as a whole saves contractors money because they don't have to have people physically onsite, running around and adjusting individual controllers," says Steve Springer, vice president of business development for Rain Master. "This is a huge labor savings and it also positions the con-

problems quickly and start the maintenance process off-site, rather than having to make time for crews to continually monitor irrigation systems. Moreover, Ferraro notes that the tools afforded by these programs let contractors access irrigation controllers at any time and under any circumstance. If an unexpected storm rolls in, a rain shutdown can be performed immediately at any time of the day or night, keeping irrigation systems from coming on during the rain event. In other situations when homeowners or property managers

"In the green industry, these kinds of technological advances can make contractors look like heroes and gives them the benefit of being a high-tech company." – Drew Ferraro

single contractor's sites are accessible with one online account. The Web-based platform allows contractors to write new irrigation schedules, perform rain shutdowns, turn individual valves or programs on and off, adjust water budgets and receive reports and

tractor as a professional to the client – they want to have someone who's water-management savvy managing their system."

In terms of convenience and labor savings, Web-based programs allow contractors to be advised of potential

are unavailable, the remote access lets contractors tap into controllers that may otherwise be locked in garages or behind gates.

Unlike systems that would require dedicated computers, the online aspect of these programs makes them

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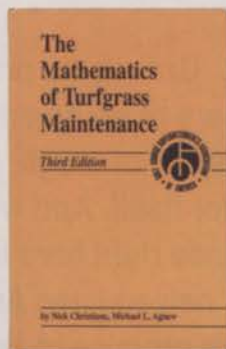
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significantly less expensive. They can also be set up to work with ET data for even more efficient automated watering.

Ferraro says eConstellation's modems cost around \$1,000 depending on the service provider, and the service has one-time setup and programming fees that total around \$50 (\$30 to set up the Web account and \$20 to set up and program each modem). From there, monthly subscriptions start at \$25, plus \$8 each for each controller that's hard-wired or radio-linked to the modem, and automated ET subscriptions can be added for just \$2 a month. For I-Central, Springer says communications cards are \$795 for each site being centrally controlled and the online subscription to access the controllers is as little as \$9.95 monthly.

While the total cost of a Web-based central control system will depend on how many sites and con-

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With the ability to generate materials lists, irrigation design software can make sure crews arrive onsite with the proper materials and also helps down the road when maintenance and repairs come up, notes John DeCell, president of Software Republic, Houston, Texas. "Suppose Mrs. Smith calls you five years after her installation because control valve No. 7 is stuck on in the backyard," he suggests. "The contractor may not have the same crew that originally installed the system, but if the design file was saved, he can quickly open Mrs. Smith's design and print a copy for the repair crew, giving them an accurate record for quick and easy location of all the system components and keeping repairs costs to a minimum."

trollers a contractor wants to access, Springer says the payoff is fast. "A homebuilder we've worked with told us that the water bill for one of their communities was \$10,000 a month," he says. "The easy management and water savings that a Web-based cen-

tral control system offers could knock 25 percent off that price and if the total cost of their system is \$10,000 to \$15,000, it could pay for itself in less than a year."

Ferraro adds that irrigation contractors can actually use Web-based

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all synced up

From pagers, to cell phones, to laptops, green industry contractors keep finding ways to bring technology into the field. In the irrigation market, some manufacturers offer business-management tools that allow contractors to extend their tech savvy beyond design and control to the operational aspects of business as well.

One such solution is Rain Bird's CMS Pro software program for use with personal digital assistants (PDAs). Allowing technicians in the field to "sync up" with computers in the main office, Gurmeet Singh, product manager for Rain Bird, Tucson, Ariz., says CMS Pro lets irrigation companies streamline their work-order processes and minimize the time and materials involved in work requests, billing, payroll, etc. "Think about how an irrigation contractor does his or her job today," Singh says. "A customer calls the office to request attention on their system, the office staff fills out a work order form if there is one, and then the work order is assigned to a technician who goes out to complete the job."

Rain Bird CMS Pro, Singh says, creates a more efficient workflow. "The program can be loaded onto a computer at the main office and then onto PDAs for the technicians," she explains. "The software lets the contractor manage a customer information database and details of each technician's routes. If a work request comes in, the contractor can quickly identify which technician will handle the job, and a calendar of where and when the technician is scheduled, so the new job can be dropped into the schedule right away."

When technicians bring their PDAs to the main office, they sync up to the master computer through a phone line and download the updated schedule. Technicians could download the next day's schedules before they leave the shop at night, or the next morning when they get in, and be ready to go for the day.

Sync-ups work both ways, so as technicians use their PDAs to record when jobs are finished and any

comments, that information is uploaded into the main system when the PDAs and main computer are synced. "Because all that information goes into the customer database, the program on the main computer will reflect what the technician did and when," Singh says. "It can send that information straight into Quickbooks for easy accounting and payroll, so work can be invoiced almost immediately." The system also can update a master inventory based on the parts technicians used on their jobs.

Another business-management software tool available to irrigation contractors is Quik-Irr estimating software manufactured by Irrisoft. The software lets contractors easily prepare materials lists for sprinkler installations or repairs, with pricing built into the program for accurate estimates.

"Quik-Irr can let a contractor generate an estimate in about five minutes," says Steven Moore, president of Irrisoft, North Logan, Utah. "That's a big time saver and takes the guesswork out of estimating."

Quik-Irr includes many manufacturers' product lists so contractors can itemize the materials needed for a job, generate purchase orders based on the materials list and export the list into excel or Quickbooks for easy invoicing. "If you make mistakes in estimating, you're more likely to lose money on the job," Moore says. "With estimating software, a contractor can customize his or her pricing to include necessary markups so they don't have to worry about losing money on a project."

Business software solutions like Quik-Irr cost about \$650, while CMS Pro is available through a \$160 monthly subscription for the first user license, and \$42.50 for each subsequent license (PDAs sold separately). Manufacturers note that the payoff comes in the accuracy of estimates, greater productivity and the speed of invoicing, which can improve cash flow.

irrigation as a way to leverage their expertise and ultimately charge more for their services.

"On a basic system, you could be paying \$25 a month for the service, but reselling the value that the service offers for \$100 or \$150," he says. "In the green industry, these kinds of technological advances can make contractors look like heroes and give them the benefit of being a high-tech company."

The service saves time and money, so the contractors are still able to provide their customers with healthy turf but without the extra labor and maintenance expenses, which helps their bottom lines."

Editor's note: The inclusion or omission of a product or manufacturer in this feature should not be considered an

endorsement or criticism of those products by Lawn & Landscape.

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Want to know more? Learn about these products and the ways irrigation software programs can help you run a more professional and profitable business in our January Online Extras section.



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- Smart Start technology uses a spring-assisted recoil to reduce pulling force and decrease wear on starter components
- Features a front handle that can be adjusted without tools and a rubber isolated rear handle
- Husqvarna – 800/487-5962, www.husqvarna.com

Circle 200 on reader service card

Maruyama BST23 Trimmer

- Weighs 9.8 pounds
- Equipped with a 22.5-cc engine
- Includes a die-cast aluminum clutch housing, anti-vibration mounts, structural aluminum outer tube and a threaded driveshaft mount
- Recoil Assist Starter System is said to require less effort than a traditional starter system
- Maruyama U.S. – 253/735-7368, www.maruyama-us.com

Circle 201 on reader service card



Echo SRM-261T Trimmer

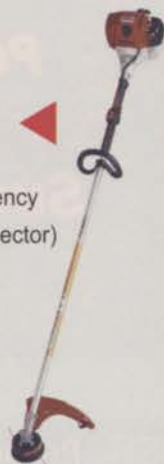
- Suitable for trimming and cutting in thick regional grasses and brush applications
- Powered by a two-stroke, 25.4-cc Power Boost Tornado engine
- Includes a heavy-duty engine vibration reduction system with padded handles
- A ring on the shaft eases harness connection
- 59-inch, four-layer flex cable drive provides additional strength in tough applications
- Features a 19.6-fluid-ounce fuel tank and a debris shield with a built-in cutoff knife
- Echo – 800/432-3246, www.echo-usa.com

Circle 202 on reader service card

Stihl FS 100 RX Trimmer

- 31.4-cc 4-MIX engine offers 1.3 hp and good fuel efficiency
- Weighs 10.4 pounds (without cutting attachment or deflector)
- Equipped with a reduced weight driveshaft and compact gearbox
- Provides quick, smooth acceleration
- Low vibration for comfortable operation
- Stihl – 800/467-8445, www.stihlusa.com

Circle 203 on reader service card






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Cool Power® is a premium ester formulation that provides superior post-emergent control of hard-to-kill weeds and a wide range of other broadleaf weeds in cool weather conditions.

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- Chickweed
- Plantains

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USE READER SERVICE # 88

product spotlight > >

John Deere XT140LE Line Trimmer/Brushcutter

- Powered by a 1.6-hp, low-emission M-Series engine
- Features a solid steel straight 59-inch shaft and 17-inch cutting swath
- Commercial EZ Load string head is said to provide fast, accurate line feed
- Includes an anti-vibration clutch housing, anti-vibration front handles and overmolded throttle
- Weighs 12 pounds
- Brushcutter blade available
- Converts to a pole saw and hedge trimmer
- John Deere - 800/537-8233, www.johndeere.com

Circle 204 on reader service card



RedMax TR2300S String Trimmer

- Equipped with a 21.7-cc two-cycle engine
- Rugged, yet lightweight
- Power transmitted through a heavy-duty, solid steel shaft to a PT104 Plus head
- 4-inch tap-and-go nylon head has a metal insert to extend the tap knob's life
- Comes with a two-year commercial warranty
- RedMax - 800/291-8251, www.redmax.com

Circle 205 on reader service card



Shindaiwa Speed-Feed Trimmer Head

- Can be reloaded without dismantling
- Line is quick and easy to load
- Spool holds about 25 feet of 0.095-inch line
- Maximum line size is 0.105 inch of any shape
- Line tensioning system with split spool reduces head vibration
- Large bottom cover taps on ground to advance line and allows head to glide while trimming
- Shindaiwa - 800/521-7733, www.shindaiwa.com

Circle 206 on reader service card



Tanaka TBC-340PF Grass Trimmer/Brushcutter

- Powered by a 32-cc, 1.6-hp PureFire two-stroke engine
- Features a solid steel driveshaft with a lifetime warranty
- Blade and attachment capable
- Includes a Walbro carburetor with primer for reliable starting
- One-year commercial warranty
- Weighs 13.2 pounds with head
- Tanaka - 888/482-6252, www.tanaka-usa.com

Circle 207 on reader service card



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TRUCK



Isuzu NPR with 19' Dovetail Landscaper Body

300 HP Gas or 190 HP Diesel Engine, Automatic Transmission, 12,000 lb. or 14,500 lb. GVWR, Exhaust Brake (Diesel Only), AM/FM CD Player, A/C, P/S, Power Windows & Locks, Floor Mat, Tilt Wheel, (Other Options And GVW Ratings Available)



Isuzu NPR HD Crew Cab with 19' Dovetail Landscaper Body

190 HP Diesel Engine, Automatic Transmission, 14,500 lb. GVWR, Exhaust Brake, AM/FM CD Player, A/C, P/S, Power Windows & Locks, Floor Mat, Tilt Wheel, (Other Options And GVW Ratings Available)

BODY FEATURES



(2) Fold Down Sides



Tool Rack



Overhead Storage



Cooler Rack



Double Break Dovetail



Trimmer Rack

LANDSCAPE DUMP



Isuzu NPR HD with 12' Dump Body

300 HP Gas Engine, Automatic Transmission, 14,500 lb. GVWR, 19.5 Tires, AM/FM CD Player, A/C, P/S, Power Windows & Locks, Floor Mat, Tilt Wheel, (Other Options And GVW Ratings Available)

BODY FEATURES



(2) Fold Down Sides

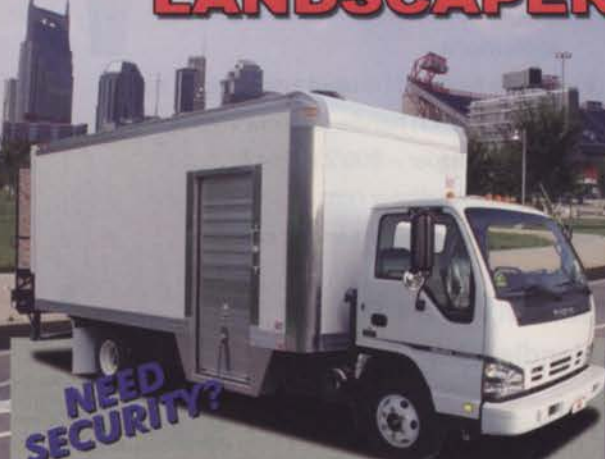


Thru Toolbox



Scissor Hoist

ENCLOSED LANDSCAPER



Isuzu NPR with 18' Enclosed Landscape Body

300 HP Gas Engine, Automatic Transmission, 12,000 lb. GVWR, AM/FM CD Player, A/C, P/S, Power Windows & Locks, Floor Mat, Tilt Wheel, (Other Options And GVW Ratings Available)

BODY FEATURES



Roll Down Side Door w/Lock



Interior Shelving



Split Dovetail Ramps

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Spring Cleaning

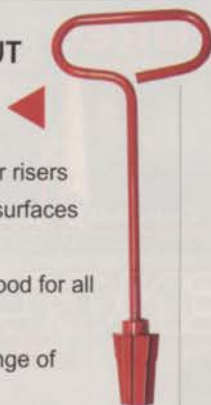
Spruce up landscapes this spring with these hand and power tools.

compiled by kathleen franzinger

Corona Clipper EZ Outs UT 65001/02

- Designed for removing sprinkler risers
- Feature four serrated gripping surfaces and all-steel construction
- Comfortable T-loop handle is good for all sized hands
- Two tapered sizes cover full range of applications
- Handle loop can be used to inset lever bar, pipe or wrench handle for extra leverage
- Corona Clipper – 800/234-2547, www.coronaclipper.com

Circle 208 on reader service card



John Deere XT140SSELE Stick Edger

- Powered by a 25.6-cc, low-emission M-Series engine
- Features a large guide wheel, straight 59-inch shaft and an 8-inch blade
- Adjustable depth control lets operators cut as deep as 2.25 inches
- Low-tone muffler with glass-wool lining reduces noise
- Includes a cast-aluminum edger blade housing and cushioned loop handle
- John Deere – 800/537-8233, www.johndeere.com

Circle 210 on reader service card



Stihl MS 192 T Top Handle Chain Saw

- Weighs 6.6 pounds
- Designed specifically for in-tree professional use
- Powered by a 30-cc, 1.75-hp engine
- Features a built-in, retractable lanyard ring; toolless tank filler caps with retainers; and translucent fuel and oil tanks
- Includes an IntelliCarb compensating carburetor
- Choice of 3/8-inch PMN or 3/8-inch PM1 Oilomatic saw chain
- Stihl – 800/467-8445, www.stihlusa.com

Circle 209 on reader service card



Echo PPT-260 Power Pruner

- Features an improved gearbox with dual-sealed bearings to retain lubrication
- Includes spiral-cut steel gears and a manual grease port
- Powered by a 25.4-cc Power Boost Tornado engine
- Telescoping shaft extends up to 12 feet, 8 inches and is available with an optional 3-foot extension
- Oregon Intenz side access chain tensioning is said to simplify chain adjustment
- Echo – 800/432-3246, www.echo-usa.com

Circle 211 on reader service card



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Shindaiwa 446s Small Pro Chain Saw

- Powered by a 44.6-cc, 2.9-hp engine
- Features an easy-grip handle, low-recoil Sure Start system
- Includes a no-sag, double-post inertia chain brake with glass-filled hand guard that also works as a heat shield
- A chain adjustment screw is angled at 45 degrees for easy access
- Mounts saw bars from 14 to 18 inches long
- Features one-piece ignition and choke-throttle interlock for fast starting, Walbro boot-mounted carburetor and an anti-vibration system
- Shindaiwa – 800/521-7733, www.shindaiwa.com

Circle 212 on reader service card

Maruyama ED2320 Edger

- Equipped with a 22.5-cc commercial engine
- Weighs 14.6 pounds
- Features a fully supported, heavy-duty flex steel driveshaft and steel clutch drum
- CARB-compliant
- Includes an open shield and oversized guide wheel
- Portable and maneuverable
- Maruyama U.S. – 253/735-7368, www.maruyama-us.com

Circle 213 on reader service card

Husqvarna 455 Rancher Chain Saw

- All-purpose chain saw works in all cutting conditions
- Offers a 3.4-hp engine and recommended bar lengths of 13 to 20 inches
- Smooth, narrow body is designed for operator comfort and easy handling
- Anti-vibration system reduces fatigue and improves control
- Smart System minimizes the pulling force needed for starting
- Features a dual-action chain brake, right hand guard and chain catcher
- Husqvarna – 800/487-5962, www.husqvarna.com

Circle 214 on reader service card

RedMax HEZ2500F Curved-Shaft Edger

- Powered by a 25.4-cc Strato-Charged two-cycle engine that meets clean air standards without a catalytic converter
- Features an aluminum die-cast shield with an anti-clog system
- Dual-purpose, extra-large steel protector protects the shield and gearbox
- A synchronized flap keeps the heavy-duty, smooth-operating wheel (with bearing) at the correct height and position
- Nylon throttle is soft and flexible to prevent breakage
- RedMax – 800/291-8251, www.redmax.com


Circle 215 on reader service card

Cub Cadet CS 5220 Chain Saw

- Powered by a 51.7-cc engine
- Features a 20-inch commercial-grade bar
- Equipped with a purge pump carburetor for easy starting, an inertia chain brake and an anti-vibration handle
- Offers easy access to air filter and spark plug for maintenance
- Variable automatic oiler eliminates oil consumption while in idle
- Cub Cadet Commercial – 877/835-7841, www.cubcommercial.com

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- Designed for use with mid-range 20- to 35-hp utility tractors
- Features welded steel construction and a 5- or 6-foot working width
- Can be drawn straight across for leveling and spreading soil or angled to the left or right to discharge excess material
- Attaches to tractors with a standard Category 1 three-point hitch
- Optional attachments include adjustable caster wheels, a 5-foot-wide scarifier to rip up hard-packed earth and a flip-down grader blade for moving or leveling large amounts of material
- York Modern Corp. – 800/643-9675, www.yorkmodern.com

Circle 217 on reader service card



Tanaka TLE-600 Walk-Behind Edger

- Shaft/gear-driven walk-behind edger is powered by a 50-cc, 2.5-hp two-stroke engine
- Features a solid steel driveshaft
- Includes a heavy-duty, two-stage air filtration system
- Said to offer a unique height-adjustment system
- Not available in California
- Tanaka – 888/482-6252, www.tanaka-usa.com

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USE READER SERVICE # 91

Winter Gear

Check out the following equipment to keep clients' properties free of snow and ice during the winter months.

compiled by kathleen franzinger

Ariens 11528LE Deluxe Sno-Thro

- THF high-profile steel discharge chute allows controlled distance snow placement
- Equipped with a Tecumseh 11.5-hp Snow King engine
- Features double-duty reversible skid shoes, drift cutters, and a heavy-duty aluminum gear case
- Variable-speed Disc-O-Matic drive ensures smooth shifting into six forward and two reverse speeds
- Clearing width is 28 inches
- Ariens Co. – 800/472-8359, www.ariens.com

Circle 219 on reader service card



Fisher 8- and 9-Foot XBLADE Snowplows

- 12-gauge polished stainless-steel mold board and powder-coated steel structure form a rust-free plow blade for commercial and municipal plowing
- 31-inch blade curl and 10-inch moldboard overhang for optimal snow rolling and foiling action
- 75-degree attack angle for ice-breaking and scarping
- X-Bracing on the back of the blade is said to provide good torsional strength and rigidity to eliminate moldboard stress
- Fisher Engineering – 207/701-4200, www.fisherplows.com

Circle 220 on reader service card



BOSS Snowplow SmartTouch 2 Hand-Held Control

- A five-button control is used with Power V-plows to move one wing at a time or both simultaneously
- A three-button control is used with Straight-Blade plows
- Plow automatically rises and drops by itself when the up/down button is pressed twice
- Control has a built-in sleep mode after 20 minutes of inactivity
- Features soft, illuminated buttons and a detachable head
- The BOSS Snowplow – 800/286-4155, www.bosspow.com

Circle 221 on reader service card

Western Products Model 500 Tailgate Spreader

- Fits compact pickup trucks and SUVs with a Class III trailer hitch
- 5-cubic-foot capacity poly hopper holds up to 225 pounds
- Choice of on/off switch or variable speed control
- Poly spinner is standard; adjustable deflector is optional
- Western Products – 414/354-2310, www.westernplows.com

Circle 222 on reader service card



Blizzard 8611LP Snowplow

- Designed to fit on ¾- and 1-ton trucks
- Blade is 8 feet, 6 inches wide with wings fully retracted
- When expanded to Wide Pass mode, the blade measures 11 feet, 3 inches in overall width
- Offers a 9 foot, 3-inch scoop position for forward plowing
- Blizzard Corp. – 888/680-8600, www.blizzardplows.com

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USE READER SERVICE # 92

A photograph showing a busy outdoor scene, likely a fair or festival, with people gathered around various stalls and structures. A large, dark, curved object, possibly a piece of machinery or a large wheel, is prominent in the foreground.

-

A young person with dark hair, wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and a red lanyard, is leaning over a table. They are focused on a task, possibly using a tool like a soldering iron or a small torch on a small object. The table is covered with various items, including a white cloth, a green folder, and some small components. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a workshop or classroom setting.



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- Leveler rod comes standard on all boxes
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- Standard two-pin plate for skid steers is available on 8- and 10-foot boxes
- Daniels Plows – 847/426-1150, www.danielsplows.com

Circle 224 on reader service card



SnowEx V-Maxx 8500 Bulk Spreader

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- Cab-mounted controller provides independent spinner speed and an infinitely adjustable ratio between the spinner and auger
- Spread width is variable from 5 to 40 feet
- Designed for use with pickups with 8-foot beds or larger, flat-bed trucks and dump-bed trucks
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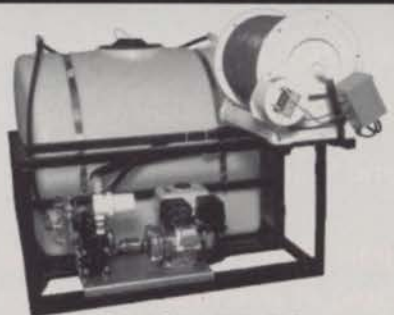
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- ☐ 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
- ☐ 14. School, College, University
- ☐ 15. Trade Association, Library
- ☐ Others (please describe) _____

2. What services does your business offer?

- ☐ 1. Landscape Design Landscape Installation
- ☐ 2. Seeding or Sodding
- ☐ 3. Turf & Ornamental Installation
- ☐ 4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation
- ☐ 5. Irrigation Installation
- ☐ 6. Landscape Lighting
- ☐ 7. Hardscape Installation
- ☐ 8. Water Features

Landscape Maintenance

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

Pesticide Application

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

Other

- ☐ 20. Mowing
- ☐ 21. Hydroseeding
- ☐ 22. Snow Removal
- ☐ 23. Interior Landscape Services
- ☐ 24. Structural Pest Control
- ☐ 25. Holiday Lighting
- ☐ 26. Other

3. 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 _____

10. Is this a Headquarters or Branch location?

- ☐ 1. Headquarters ☐ 2. Branch ☐ 3. Single Office

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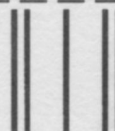
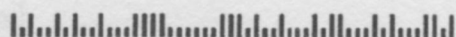
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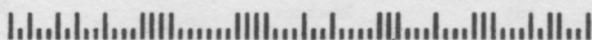
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• JRCO Inc. – 800/966-8442,
www.jrcoinc.com

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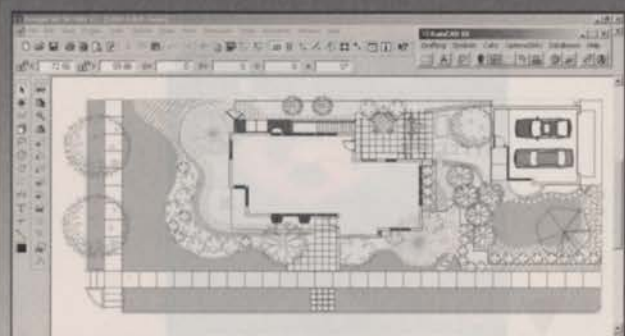
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- Can be programmed based on a seven-day week, in 1- to 30-day intervals or on odd or even days
- Toro Irrigation – 800/664-4740, www.toro.com

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Cub Cadet TANK Mowers with Diesel Options

- Two models of the TANK zero-turn riding mower line will feature a Caterpillar C1.1 diesel engine
- The M60-CT offers a 60-inch triple blade fabricated deck, and the M72-CT offers a 72-inch deck



- C1.1 is a three-cylinder inline compact diesel engine that has a total displacement of 1.1 liters, with an indirect injection fuel system
- Engine delivers 28.1 hp at 3,400 rpm, adheres to Tier 2/Stage II emissions standards and features low noise, vibration and harshness

- Cub Cadet Commercial – 877/835-7841, www.cubcommercial.com

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- Features an e-mail-based help option
- Irritrol Systems – 800/883-1234, www.irritrolsystems.com

Circle 236 on reader service card



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- Little Giant Pump Co. – 888/271-1368, www.watermarksolutions.ws

Circle 237 on reader service card



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- Caterpillar Electronics and Electrical Systems – 888/598-8186, www.catelectronics.com

Circle 238 on reader service card



John Deere 2305 Compact Utility Tractor

- Powered by a 24-hp, EPA Tier II-compliant Yanmar engine
- Features a sloped hood for good visibility, operator comfort and ease of use
- Two-piece design is engineered for easy access to all major service points
- Equipped with automatic transmission, power steering, wet disk brakes, dual-pedal foot control and ROPS
- Options include independent lift of the midmount mower deck, cruise control, material collection system and a quick hitch for easy attachment and removal of rear implements
- John Deere – 800/537-8233, www.johndeere.com

Circle 239 on reader service card

New Holland TZ Boomer Sub-Compact Tractors



- Three models available: TZ18DA (18 hp), TZ22DA (22 hp) and TZ25DA (25 hp)
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- New Holland – 888/290-7377, www.newholland.com

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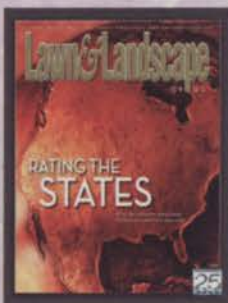


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USE READER SERVICE # 102

The author, David Kohler, is the Orlando branch manager for PROscape. He can be reached at 407/438-7442.

Managing Equipment Damage at PROscape

All lawn and landscape maintenance companies make a large investment in equipment to take care of their clients' properties. At PROscape, Orlando, Fla., we're no different, and as we've grown to the \$10-million mark with a number of large commercial accounts and homeowners' associations, our investment in equipment – especially hand-held machines – has grown substantially.

At PROscape, we have five- and six-person crews to manage our accounts. With equipment moving through so many employees' hands, we knew damage to our equipment would be inevitable. However, as we took on more accounts and hired more employees, we also noticed an increase in the beating our equipment was taking and also a rise in hand-held machines going missing either through theft or forgetfulness. Moreover, we found that crews

were replacing edger blades before the existing blades were worn out, which increased our costs for maintenance and parts.

In late 2004, our PROscape operations staff made an effort to eliminate those costs by keeping better track of equipment and its maintenance. Our first step was to make sure crews were going out with enough of the right equipment to complete their jobs. To simplify this, we constructed wheeled equipment racks for each of our crews. The racks are about 6 feet tall and 3 feet wide, with places on both sides to hang items such as edgers, weed eaters and trimmers, as well as a flat base where blowers are stored.

Each evening, our night mechanic ensures that each crew's rack has the equipment they'll need for the next day. In the morning, crew leaders arrive at the shop and go over a checklist with

5 Steps to Controlling Equipment Loss

1. Develop a rack or designate a place to store the equipment each crew will need for the upcoming day's work. Ensure that equipment is always returned to these areas unless it is on a job or being worked on in the shop.
2. Identify a chain of responsibility that involves crewmembers and equipment maintenance specialists. Ensure that all employees use equipment properly in order to avoid damage and create systems to account for each piece.
3. Keep a record of the type and condition of the equipment that crews leave with in the morning. Have a responsible crewmember and mechanic or manager sign the log at check-out and check-in.
4. Track equipment logs to determine if equipment stays in better condition longer, and to identify the associated cost savings to the company.
5. Use older equipment as back-ups, rather than purchasing additional machines.



At left: Orlando, Fla.-based PROscape designed racks to store each crews' equipment and have seen a tremendous reduction in equipment loss. (Photo: PROscape)

Below: A simple equipment sign-out log helps PROscape track the type and condition of machines used by each crew on a daily basis.

Equipment Sign Out Log

Truck # _____ Forman _____ Date _____

Equipment type	Quantity	Color	Out	In	Comments
Blower(s)					
Wind Eater(s)					
Edger(s)					
Shrub Trimmer					
Ez Shrub trimmer					
Ladder					
Other					

Mower(s)	Number	Condition on sign out	Condition at check in
Mower 1			
Mower 2			
Mower 3			

Sign out
 I acknowledge and accept the responsibility for the above equipment.
 Signature _____ Sup'l mechanic int. _____

Check In
 I have returned the above equipment in the same condition it was given to me.
 Signature _____ Sup'l mechanic int. _____

Comments:

the mechanic, signing out each piece of equipment for the day. Using an "Equipment Sign-Out Log" the mechanic notes the quantity and color of each type of hand-held equipment being signed out, as well as the number and condition of any mowers the crew takes for the day. The crew leader signs the form and the mechanic initials it, signifying that both employees are clear on how the crew is stocked for the day.

After sign out, the crew leader can wheel the entire equipment rack out to his or her vehicle for loading. Keeping each crew's equipment on the racks between the shop and the maintenance yard ensures that no equipment is left behind, saving the hassle and extra drive time of delivering forgotten machines to a jobsite.

When our crews return at the end of the day, the same equipment

check process happens in reverse. Crew leaders re-load equipment onto their respective racks, meet with the mechanic on duty and go through the checklist again to note that all equipment is returned to the shop in the same condition. This step has helped PROscape reduce the amount of misplaced and damaged equipment significantly. We've created a new level of accountability across our organizations, much of which is on the crew leaders' shoulders. The crew leaders are responsible for ensuring that their crews operate the equipment correctly on the job sites so as to avoid damage and also must answer to the mechanics if machines go missing or sustain more than normal wear and tear. (We've found that if our crews have to answer to the person who has to fix damaged equipment, more machines come back in good working

order.) Once again, the crew leader and mechanic both sign or initial the equipment log at check-in, so our documentation is consistent.

While there was an initial investment in developing and building the equipment racks, the implementation of the rack system has saved the company thousands of dollars. In the summer of 2004 we found we had to buy six or seven pieces of hand-held equipment to replace misplaced or damaged machines. In 2005, we didn't have to buy any. This has easily saved us \$3,000 to \$4,000, and we can continue to use older machines as back-ups because they're still in usable condition. As we continue to save money in this aspect of our business, it will allow us to focus those funds on growing our business and improving PROscape's bottom line.

— David Kohler

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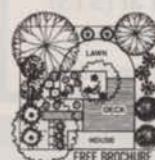
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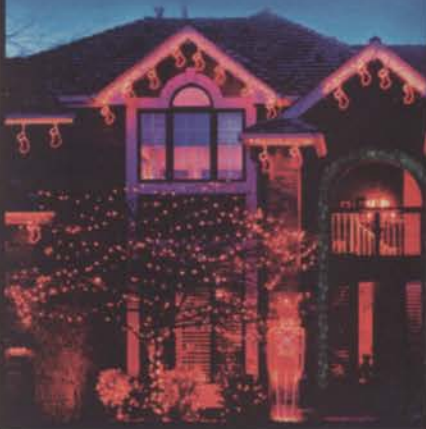
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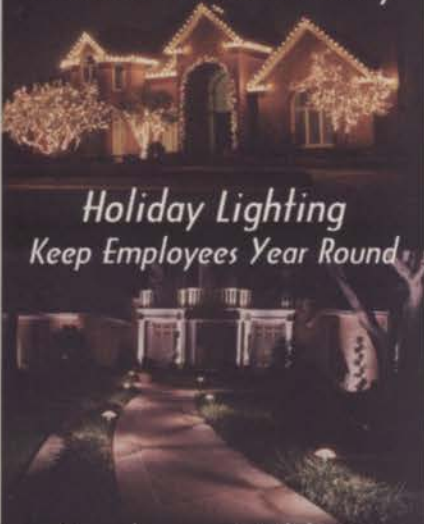
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