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TEAM TURF

INSIDE>>

Lock Up Equipment Theft

4 Ways to Price a Residential Maintenance Job

Irrigation Controller
Advancements

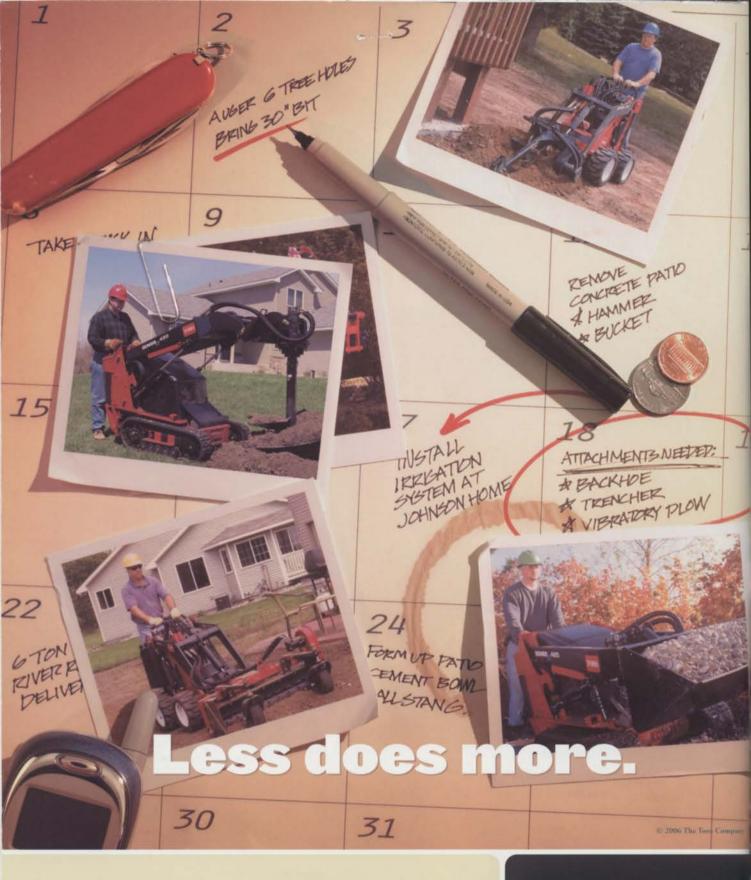
WORD-OF-MOUTH

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WORKS



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USE READER SERVICE # 10



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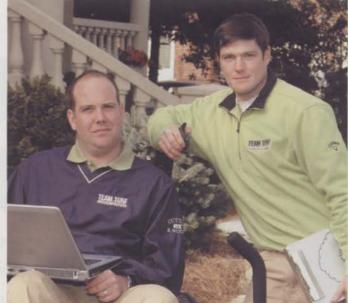
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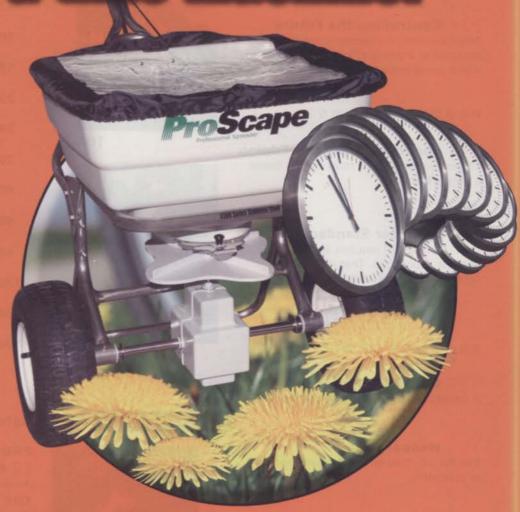
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Turn your spreader into a time machine!



Announcing Scape Confront 3 + Dimension NEW for Spring 2007!

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Lawn&Landscape

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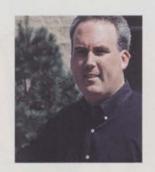
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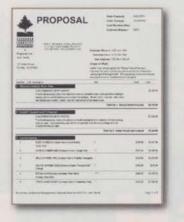
FORMS YOU CAN DOWNLOAD AND USE

This month, in our Business Opportunities department, Dan Foley, president, D. Foley Landscape, South Walpole, Mass., references a repair order form and a repair tracking log that his equipment maintenance department utilizes. To gain access to these forms, visit www.lawnand landscape.com/tools/businessforms and click on the Fleet & Safety section. These forms will also be available as Online Extras while the March issue cover is up on the *Lawn & Landscape* home page.





lawnandlandscape.com/tools/



businessforms and as an Online Extra while the March issue cover is up on the Lawn & Landscape home page.



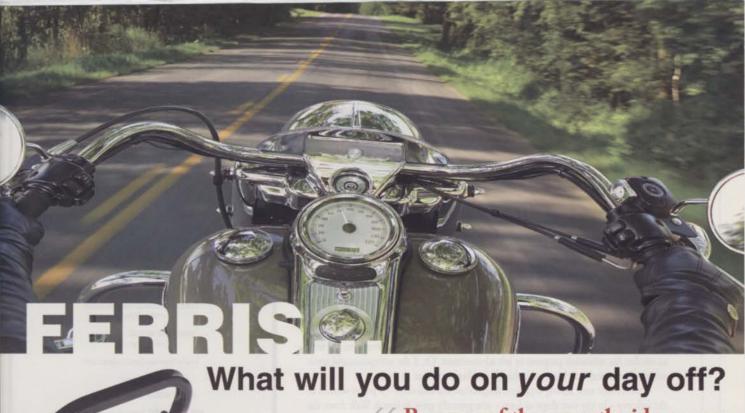
ONLINE EXTRA

Interested in purchasing a skid-steer attachment but feel like you're doling out a little too much dough for a piece of equipment that you're not sure how much you'll use yet? Why not rent it first to truly gauge your usage and how it works. Our online extra to the "Get Attached" feature in this issue discusses various rental options and pricing to give you an idea of how this option works.



"Our job is to get commitment from Senators and House members to support and co-sponsor this year's H-2B legislation and get them to tell the State Department to put sufficient staff in place to avert the crisis." - Tom Delaney, PLANET's director of governmental affairs

For more quotes like this, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com each Monday to view Industry Buzz, a weekly column of industry experts' views on pesticide legislation, emissions issues, water conservation updates and business-building advice.



66 Because of the smooth ride on my Ferris during the week, I'm able to ride more miles on my bike every weekend. 99

Pete Aceto · Aceto Landscaping · Utica, NY

Go for a ride - enjoy it! You *can* because a Ferris mower will increase your productivity and take the pain out of mowing. Our patented suspension systems have been proven to help prevent fatigue when compared to non-suspension machines. Ferris owners have been able to increase their productivity by as much as 20%! If you mow for a living, that could be an extra \$1,000 in your pocket every two weeks, from each Ferris machine in your fleet!

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USE READER SERVICE # 13

cindy code | editorial director



Experience Student Career Days

I 've always thought one of the coolest aspects of the green industry was the fact that no one who creates a career in it ever really leaves it. A contractor may move from one firm to another for relocation purposes or job advancement. Or, if the entrepreneurial spirit moves, that person may hang out a shingle and begin anew as an owner.

It's a familiar tune among suppliers, distributors and end-users – if you've worked in the industry – in any way, shape or form – you generally grow to love it. Walk down the aisle of a trade show or mingle among attendees at a turf plot and you'll hear conversations centered around who is working for whom. Rarely do you hear someone say that so and so left the industry for good.

The green industry's diversity and beauty draws lovers of the outdoors to it; and the tremendous opportunities to create, achieve and succeed keep them in it.

Enthusiasm for the green industry often starts at a young age and develops through the important college years. It's here that skills and expertise are enhanced; prepping young adults for careers in the landscape industry.

Remember those days? The days when your adrenalin was pumping so hard that you could have built five decks all on your own? Or, spread countless wheel barrows full of mulch without complaining about your aching back?

If you want to take yourself back to those surroundings and youthful fervor, be sure to attend PLANET's Student Career Days. Held annually in a different college or university setting, the 31st rendition of this event takes place at Michigan State University from March 29 to April 1. Approximately, 900 college students from more than 53 schools are expected to participate this year. These students are enrolled in 2- or 4-year landscape and horticultural programs with the goal of one day earning a paycheck as a landscape contractor, landscape architect, sports turf manager, arborist or a related industry specialty.

Rain or shine, participants at Student Career Days engage in a total possible 24 individual and team competitive events ranging from personnel management, sales presentation and exterior/interior design to irrigation troubleshooting, wood construction, equipment operation, patio installation, tree climbing and more.

The competitions provide a real-life opportunity for students to demonstrate their skills, leadership and teamwork as they cheer on their classmates. Most importantly, the event helps students meet future employers. In addition to the hundreds of students attending this event, Student Career Days also draws a noteworthy gathering of landscape, lawn care and interiorscape owners. When they're not watching students build decks or install irrigation systems, business owners participate in a career fair to interview students for full-time positions and internships.

The event also represents an opportunity for green industry veterans to tout the many benefits of well-maintained green spaces and the economic benefits that turf, trees and flowers bring to the environment.

You'd be amazed by the energy, sincerity and passion on display at this event. If you're in search of employees and future leaders or if you just need your battery recharged, Student Career Days is the place to be this spring.

For additional information on PLANET's Student Career Days, visit www.studentcareerdays.com.



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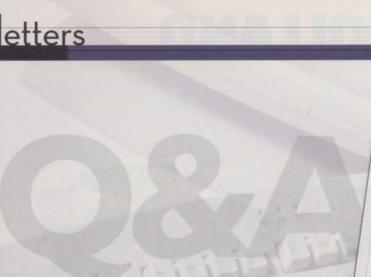


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USE READER SERVICE # 14

NEW HOLLAND



Q&A

Dear Jim Huston,

I read with interest "Taking the Mystery of G&A Overhead" in the December 2006 issue of *Lawn & Landscape*. I'm working on calculating how we measure up.

When pricing a job, we start with all of the costs and put a markup on the job based on the type of job and time of year.

When I look at your percentages for administrative salaries, it's easy to calculate where we are and what our sales should be based on multiplying by 10.

Where I need some assistance is in the other overhead/indirect costs and what you've included to come up with the percentages quoted.

Our company is set up with a variety of departments and we separate the costs that are charged directly to the job and then have indirect costs that relate to the department but not to any specific job. These indirect costs are made up of employee benefits, safety, commissions and depreciation. Where do costs like this fit into your calculations?

Karen Bezanson Controller Edmonds Landscape and Construction Services Limited Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Karen,

You ask a great question.

To start, your G&A overhead costs will probably be between 20 to 25 percent of each division's sales. I don't use percentages to allocate these costs to jobs. Rather, I use a G&A overhead per labor hour (OPH) rate. You calculate it by dividing your G&A overhead for the division by the total billable hours for the respective division. For installation work, OPH usually ranges between \$12 to \$16. It normally ranges from \$8 to \$12 for maintenance work. These ranges should be good both in the U.S. and Canada.

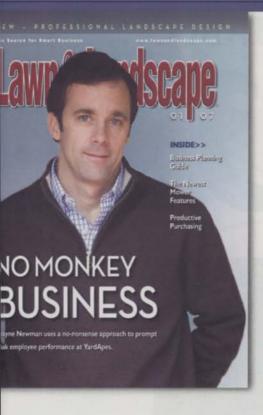
G&A overhead costs include all of the items that you cannot directly cost into a job – roughly 30 items, including such things as rent, bad debt, advertising, donations, computers, telephone, utilities and a number of other items that cannot be directly costed in bids.

Perhaps what is even more important is what is not included in G&A costs. It does not include general liability, equipment or workers' compensation insurance, truck or equipment depreciation, equipment interest and payroll taxes for field personnel.

Keep in mind these two principles: First you want your clients to pay all of your costs. Second, you want to include as many costs as possible in your direct job costs to include equipment, insurance and payroll taxes. What's left are the G&A overhead costs.

Jim Huston
President
J.R. Huston Enterprises





Dear Editor,

I have enjoyed reading your magazine for almost 10 years now. It has always been a valuable resource for my business.

I have to tell you that the cover story has given me a greater appreciation of what you do for our industry.

I say this because I have been surprised at how many landscape owners have called and/or e-mailed me to say how great the article was and that they have struggled with the same issues as me. I am humbled that they would ask me for advice. I am also thankful to make new friends.

Mostly, I am amazed at how well you have connected with your audience.

Keep up the great work!

Thanks again!

Shayne Newman President YardApes New Milford, Conn.



Dear Editor,

Many, many thanks for adding the "Professional Landscape Design" section to your publication. Far too many trade publications give only lip-service to the design side of the green industry and may not realize that, for some of us, design is what we do. I'll look forward to your future bi-monthly design features.

Sincerely,

John Gordon Owner Belvedere Landscape Design Ashton, Md.

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed seeing the new "Professional Landscape Design" section in *Lawn & Landscape's*January issue: It's nice to see a publication like yours addressing design issues that are often ignored by industry publications.

Thank you!

Tim Thoelecke Jr. American Academy of Landscape Design Glenview, Ill.

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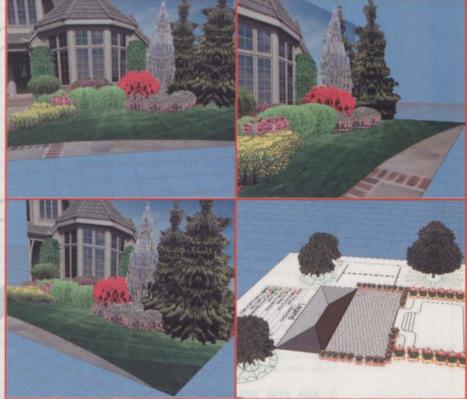
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sales and marketing



The Importance of Networking

t's important to network and get your name out. It's also important to never take your eye off of your clients and their happiness. Let's consider another facet of networking – how to get others to sell for you.

I have your attention now. Here are four ways to get others to sell for you:

- 1. DO A GREAT JOB. Not a good job, a great job. Exceed your client's expectations, not just meet them. For starters, underpromise and overdeliver. If you can complete your client's winter cleanup by Dec. 1, tell them you can have it done by the 10th. And when they come home on Nov. 30th to a clean yard, you'll look like a hero. If you really want to show how much they mean to you, put a wreath on the front door. There are many ways contractors can make a client smile and tell others about their services. It doesn't have to be much, just go the extra mile and show you care. For example:
- Apply free fire ant control application
- Plant some tulip and daffodil bulbs by the front door
- Aerate a client's lawn for free
- Snowplow your best client's driveway for free a time or two
- Send a handwritten thank-you note
- Visit a client's house, walk around and make certain they are happy
- 2. ASK FOR TESTIMONIALS. What others say about your company is infinitely more impressive and convincing than what you say about yourself. Ask a happy client to write a letter saying why someone should hire your team. At Grunder Landscaping Co., we mail them to prospects the day after we've met with someone. If you're not receiving unsolicited testimonial letters, then you aren't doing a great job. And if you're skeptical

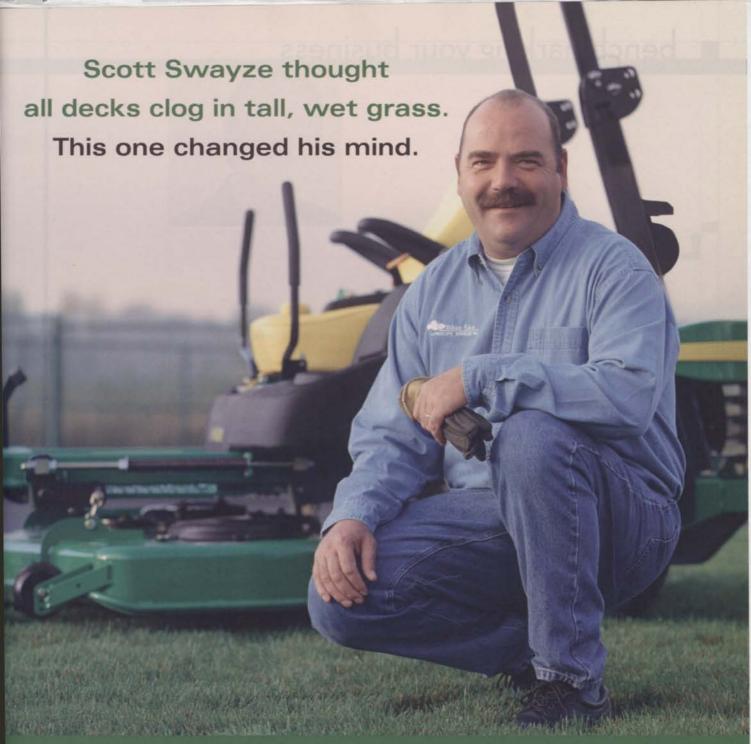
of the power of testimonials, look at the weight-loss ads in your Sunday paper. Not one lacks a testimonial.

- 3. REWARD YOUR CLIENTS. Show your clients how much you value their referrals and you'll get a bunch of them. I've implemented a program at many landscaping company that consists of a letter and a coupon the client gives to their friend, family member or neighbor. When redeemed, both the user and the person who gave the referral get a credit towards landscaping work. If you want to keep it simple, send a thank-you note with a gift certificate to a nice restaurant each time someone sends you a client. People remember these things and will send you more work in the future.
- 4. BE A FRIEND. The best way to get others to sell for you is to be their friend. You need to be someone who always has your client's best interest in mind. Don't sell the client something they don't need; sell them only what is best for them. If you become known as someone who can be counted on to do the right thing, you will reap the benefits over time. I have walked away from work because I did not believe it was in the client's best interests. Clients are surprised by my stance. But if it's not right, it's not right. At Grunder we spend a lot of time doing a lot of little things for our clients. We send them birthday cards; we send them thank you notes; if we see an article about them in the paper, we'll have it framed and take it over to them. These are all things a friend would do.

A company with happy clients is destined for success. Make a client happy and you've just added another salesperson to your team that comes at a price every budget can afford.

marty grunder

is a speaker, consultant and author, as well as owner of Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. Reach him at 866/478-6337, landscapesales@gie.net or via www.martygrunder.com.



The New John Deere 7-Iron II™ Deck.

'Here in Washington, we have to cut in wet conditions all the time," says Scott. "So we can't afford to clog. And with the new 7-Iron II deck, we didn't have to slow down, not even once." With a higher blade tip speed, the 7-Iron II makes short work of even the tallest grasses.

Scott Swayze, Blue Sky Landscape Services, Inc., Puyallup, Washington





benchmarking your business



Labor Benchmarks

Clients often ask me how their crews stack up against others in the industry. The best way to answer this question is to compare direct field labor costs – as a percent of sales for their respective divisions – to national benchmarks. These costs only include gross payroll and they do not include labor burden items the company pays, such as FICA, FUTA, SUTA, liability or workers' compensation insurance.

Here are some benchmarks to review and compare to your actual costs:

TYPE OF WORK	BENCHMARK %*	REMARKS
Residential installation **	18 to 22	If it is over 25%, you've got problems
Commercial installation**	17 to 21	I've seen it as low as 16%
Maintenance, all types	35 to 45	It can range as low as 30% and as high as 50%
Tree work	25 to 35	
Chemical applications	15 to 25	
Irrigation service	20 to 30	
Interior landscaping, installation	17 to 21	
Interior landscaping, maintenance	35 to 45	
Outdoor lighting	20 to 30	I've seen it as low as 15%
Outdoor ponds	17 to 21	
Paver installation	20 to 25	
Snow plowing	20 to 25	
Winter sand and salt applications	15 to 20	
Christmas decorations	20 to 25	

Keep in mind these benchmarks are averages and your comparison figures may vary dramatically due to your operation and production practices. However, your figures should be fairly close to these benchmarks.

Let me offer a couple other labor benchmarks you may find useful.

General and administrative (G&A) office salaries, to include a fair market value salary for owners, should be about 10 percent of sales (plus or minus 2 percent).

Turn this calculation around and determine what your sales should be for the amount of G&A overhead salaries you have. Multiply your total G&A salaries by 10. This will tell you roughly what your sales should be.

Commissions for salespeople, who are just selling, run 8 to 12 percent. And sales for salespeople should run roughly 10 times their salaries. For example, if a sales person wants to make \$50,000, they should sell at least \$500,000 worth of work.

One caveat: These benchmarks apply to individual bids, actual costs for jobs, and divisions specializing in a specific type of work (installation, maintenance, winter work, etc.). They may break down in two scenarios.

First, these benchmarks will be diluted when you combine diverse types of work into one financial statement. Second, if you do a lot of subcontracted work, the costs and related revenue from the subcontracted work will distort your cost percentages.

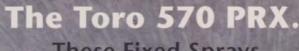
If you have questions or disagree with any of my benchmarks, please e-mail me your thoughts.

* Subcontractor costs can vary dramatically and can therefore greatly distort company percentages. I like to remove these costs and their related revenue from the division when calculating company percentages.

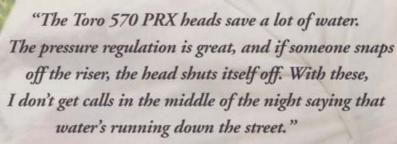
** Includes irrigation installation

jim huston

The author is president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, a Denverbased green industry consulting firm. Reach him at 800/451-5588, benchmarking@gie.net or via www.jrhuston.biz.



These Fixed Sprays Are A Good Call.



- Bruce Fjeld, Owner, Bruce Fjeld Landscaping and Turf Management



Sprinklers Save Water, Time And Money.

Bruce Fjeld and many other irrigation contractors have taken water management into their own hands. With the exclusive and built-in pressure regulation, the 570 PRX fixed spray is unequalled in efficient water use.

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DON'T PUT YOUR ON THE SIDE OF



Payload is the GVWR minus curb weight and includes weight of occupants, optional equipment and cargo, limited by weight distribution. Payload is not the Vehicle Capacity Weight as defined by FMYSS 10, which will vary according to installed optional equipment. 4s2 Regular Cab SRB Long Bed shown with available 57.2 VB (maximum payload achieved with available from Package delete). Before fowing, confirm your vehicle and trailer are compatible, hooked up and loaded properly and that you have any necessary additional equipment. Do not exceed any Weight Ratings and follow all instructions in your Owner's Manual. The maximum you can tow depends on the total weight of any cargo, occupants and available equipment. 2007 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

COMPANY LOGO ANYTHING LESS.





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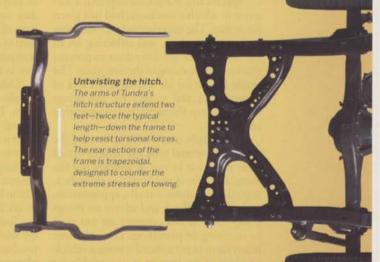
Meet the half-ton truck that's changing expectations of how much work a half-ton can do. The available 5.7L V8 can carry up to 2065 lbs. in its cargo bed,12 or it can pull up to 10,800 lbs,23 Not

once. Not once in a while. But all day long. Its drivetrain and chassis feature engineering innovations that help ensure those stats aren't just paper promises. They're capabilities you can count on.

> Leave no pound-foot behind. The weak link in many pickups is the ring gear in the rear differential. To strengthen this critical area, all three of Tundra's available engine choices-4.0L V6, 4.7L V8 and 5.7L V8-transfer torque to the rear wheels through exceptionally large ring gears: 10.5" on the 5.7L V8, 9.5" on the V6 and 4.7L V8



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THE TRUCK THAT'S CHANGING IT ALL.



TUNDRA



Be Aware and Take Care

ver the last 12 years GreenSearch has conducted seminars and contributed articles to a number of industry associations and publications. Rarely do we receive a lot of feedback from companies putting actionable effort forth along with a description of the results. That is, until recently.

The example I am referring to dealt with mechanics (technicians to be more exact) and whether or not these unsung heroes get enough appreciation from the rest of us who depend so heavily on their

expertise and services.

Specifically, the article depicted a scenario in which a mechanic had just given his notice. The superintendent, who now had to replace him, was reflecting on all the things he might have done to prevent this from happening in the first place. The major reason for his leaving was a lack of appreciation and respect for the things he did to keep the organization operating smoothly.

Apparently, many mechanics read the article and several took the time to e-mail their thoughts to me. It appears my fictional scenario is not fiction at all. In fact, according to those e-mails, appreciation, inclusion, feedback and advice are things many folks in this category are not used to receiving or providing. The only time many seem to get noticed is when a vehicle or piece of equipment is unavailable for use. When this happens, look out, here it comes and it's moving fast.

I know many companies do not operate this way when it comes to showing appreciation to those who show up every day, do their jobs very well and, by doing so, ensure their achievements are taken for granted. And you know who I am referring to. You hired them to perform those routine, but important, tasks. Usually, the tasks are deadline driven and, if they are not done, there's a ripple effect throughout the entire operation. When they foul up, complaints come in from everywhere. A mechanic's job is one of them, but there are many others, as well.

Smart owners and managers value the opinions of people in these positions. They never let too much time go by before they sit down with them over a cup of coffee and see how things are going. They show them a unique type of appreciation by listening and learning from them.

A CEO I know who runs a large company is very good at this. He keeps records of employees' anniversary dates. As that date nears, the employee receives a brief note of congratulations on achieving that level of tenure. It is all tracked on a simple computer program and is extremely effective in making people feel appreciated.

Others use different means to make people feel appreciated and part of the team. Dropping someone a brief, unexpected, hand-written note for a job well done is a big favorite. How about a "dinner for two" for an employee who has been working long hours to bring an important project to completion? The key is to take action before an employee feels compelled to ask for something.

Today, many companies in our industry deal with very similar cost structures, products and services and available employment pools. The difference between an employee's leaving and staying is not always tied to additional income, but rather

to additional appreciation.

To reinforce this notion, here is a quote from an e-mail I received: "I appreciate the article you wrote and identify with all of it. I have been in the industry for 13 years now... People like you make my job not seem so bad at the end of the day.

It doesn't take much - all I did was write an article. III

tish

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



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USE READER SERVICE # 19





Powerful Combinations

In an increasingly challenging business environment, lawn care companies look for every opportunity to reduce expenses. One money-saving strategy is combination applications, which allow companies to apply herbicide, fungicide or insecticide simultaneously with their fertilizer. This two-in-one approach equates to one less trip to the customer's property and one less trip across the lawn.

LET'S GET TOGETHER. A combination product is as it sounds—a granular fertilizer product with a liquid control product. The control product starts out as a concentrate in solid form before it is melted into a liquid that can be sprayed onto the outside of the fertilizer granules. And they are made with a variety of fertilizer analyses to meet your lawn care program's needs.

Getting this control product off the fertilizer granule is critical for effective product performance, which is why some combination products, particularly insecticides, come with the directions to irrigate after application. The control product that dries on the fertilizer granule remains in concentrate form. The post-application irrigation moves the fertilizer into the soil and separates the control product.

As the granule breaks down and moves into the root zone for plant uptake, the control product goes to work. For example, a preemergent herbicide forms a weed barrier on top of the soil. And a host of university research verifies that combination products deliver comparable results to two separate applications.

SET YOUR SCHEDULE. You may think all applications should be made in combination form, but that's not necessarily the case. Preemergent herbicide applications are well suited for combination products, particularly when you have concerns about

the effects of early spring cool temperatures on liquids in your spray tanks.

Meanwhile, round two applications are typically comprised of a broadleaf herbicide along with fertilizer. The key to effective weed control here is you want the product to attach to the weed. For any granular postemergent application, you need to have the lawn wetted down before hand, which is why this application is generally not made via combination products. Most choose to spray liquid weed control and then fertilize separately, especially for the phenoxy herbicides.

This round two application is the most time-consuming application of the year, but it is also the most important for a lawn's performance over the year. Fortunately, equipment innovations can reduce application time. Liquid fertilizer is an option for this application, but these are not slow-release products, which often lead to spiked turf growth. As a result, the fertilizer's performance won't line up with the six- to eight-week schedule for lawn visits most companies strive to set up.

The third application in most lawn care programs targets surface-feeding insects along with some fertilizer, and it can be made via a combination product. The lawn doesn't have to be wet for leaf-feeding insects so long as the product gets down into the crown area. However, for grubs, be sure that the product gets watered in since grubs will feed on roots.

Some companies include a fungicide application with round four. If that's your preference, any systemic fungicide can be used in a granular or combination application because you want those products to move through the plant. Protectant fungicides, however, are designed to coat the plant, so they don't work well in granule form for most broad-spectrum disease-control applications.

j.b. toorish and brian kelley

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



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power keeps the crew going 12 hours a day. We cut downtime, too, thanks to increased fuel efficiency and interchangeable parts. I opened my doors with STIHL equipment, now I wouldn't use anything less. I have 330 reasons why."

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<u>In the News</u>

The Brickman Group Refinances with Private Equity Group

major commercial landscaping firm put to rest rumors about its financial dealings by announcing it has a new private equity partner.

The Brickman Group confirmed that it closed on a recapitalization of the company on Jan. 23. The transaction was undertaken to provide an exit strategy for CIVC Partners, Brickman's long-time private equity partner since 1998, and to refinance Brickman's public bonds, which were issued in 2002, with more favorable private

To facilitate this process, Gaithersburg, Md.-based Brickman brought in Leonard Green & Partners, a new private equity partner.

President and CEO Scott Brickman says the Brickman family, management and stockholders will continue to retain a majority share of the company. Leonard Green will own slightly less than 50 percent.

From an operational and leadership perspective, nothing will change. The company's management, employees, customers and vendors will continue to experience business as usual, Brickman says.

He compares the transaction to a smaller landscaping company switching banks.

"You change the bank you use and your checking account," he says, adding, "Will this change the business for you?"

The company was No. 3 on Lawn & Landscape's most recent list of top-earning landscape industry companies, with a 2005 revenue of \$454.5 million. Brickman says the recapitalization process is a positive for the company and the industry, which historically has been comprised of smaller companies. "This raises our industry's profile with lenders and others in the financial world," he says. "This should benefit the industry as a whole." – Heather Wood

HOME BUILDER REPORT

Economy Performing Well Despite Housing Downswing

Growth of U.S. economic output (real Gross Domestic Product) has slowed to some degree in recent quarters as the housing production component (residential fixed investment) has contracted substantially, according to the National Association of Home Builders.

However, housing contraction has not generated serious spillover effects in other sectors of the economy (including personal consumption expenditures), and strengthening activity in some sectors, including nonresidential construction and foreign trade, has helped offset the negatives from housing, the association points out.

As a result, the economy has not skated close to recession and the probability of an economic downturn in 2007 is not high.

Economic resilience also is evident in the labor market, NAHB reports. The housing downswing caused job losses in residential construction during most of 2006, and further losses are virtually inevitable during the first half of

this year. However, overall job growth was well maintained in 2006 and solid performance in 2007 is expected.

The unemployment rate is likely to gravitate upward from recent expansion lows, but remain in a historically low range,

NAHB adds.



A LOOK AT LABOR

Unemployment Rate Creeps Up Slightly

The unemployment rate in January rose 4.6 percent, a four-month high, while job growth was slow.

Employment rose by 111,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. This was short of economists' predictions of a 115,000-job

lob growth continued in several service-providing industries over the month, and construction employment also rose. The number of manufacturing jobs continued to decline, according to the bureau.

LABOR SOLUTIONS

The First Step to an H-2B Fix Is You

The H-2B guest worker program is a fundamental source for labor in our industry. It is the most reliable source of documented.



seasonal, visa-holding non-immigrant workers who fit our labor needs. We all need to strongly support the permanent extension of the H-2B guest worker program and vigorously oppose legislative actions to limit or eliminate it.

Our hope is that our friends in the House and Senate will introduce legislation to make the H-2B repeat worker extension permanent. It will also have to contain a wording fix for the interpretation by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services that the previous H-2B bills would require a returning worker to not be counted as a returning worker but as a new worker after three consecutive years of not being counted under the

The second part of this fiscal year's cap of 33,000 has already reached 33,637 on Feb. 9. This is the number of beneficiaries or workers approved by the U.S. Department of Labor. The USCIS has the responsibility to decide how many beneficiaries (estimated at 51,000) will equal the number of 33,000 visas to be issued by the State Department and actually used. The cap

continued on page 30



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BU070006

industry news

continued from page 27

will surely be reached soon, which will bring some attention to our effort.

To exasperate the problems this year, the normal H-2B application process has become more time-consuming, complex and more expensive for both employers and agents alike.

Another problem to slow the process happened recently at the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey, Mexico. It informed agents, along with the entire H-2B user community, that it has discontinued accepting applications for H-2 visas for the foreseeable future.

The U.S. Consulate/Monterrey issues nearly 80 percent of the international volume of H-2 visas – in excess of 100,000 annually. While the situation has changed and the reasons for the shutdown were unclear the effect could have slowed down H-2 visa issuances by several months. In a recent visit to the State Department we received some hope that they may once again get up to the numbers they have done in the past.

For more information, please contact me at 800/395-2522 or tomdelaney@landcarenetwork.org. – Tom Delaney



Tom Delaney

KEEP THE BUZZ GOING

Interested in more comments from Tom Delaney and other industry experts on pressing issues affecting how you do business? See www.lawnandlandscape. com for our weekly Industry Buzz columns, highlighting news on four key topics – business, legislation, water use and noise and air pollution.

Winter Doesn't Stop H-2B Fly In

Users of the guest worker program lobby Congress during the first of two Fly-ins.

The threat of wintry weather didn't keep a few dozen H-2B users from various industries from attending a Fly-in on Capitol Hill Feb. 13 for the guest worker program.

Representatives from the seafood, hotel, resort and quarry industries joined lawn care professionals for a day of appointments to bend the ears of their Congress members. Hank Lavery, president of the organization Save Small Business,

rallied the group and offered talking points before sending them off to their meetings.

"Without the H-2B program, I'd say pretty much everyone in this room is out of business," Lavery says. "Save Small Business doesn't have a lobbyist. It's all of you coming to these events. It's you guys connecting with Congressmen. Every office you approach, you must find a way to pass it. If it's not today, it's an e-mail later, it's a call later. It's follow up, follow up, follow up. If we don't do it, H-2B's gone."

Lawn and landscape professionals in attendance included Terry Culver of Rocco Fiore & Sons, there



Representatives from industries that utilize H-2B workers joined together for a day of appointments Feb. 13 to bend the ears of their Congress members about the importance of the guest worker program.

to represent the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association. Culver estimates that a third of Rocco Fiore's workforce are H-2B workers. During one of his appointments, he talked to a staff member of Representative Luis Gutierrez (D-III.) about the challenge of finding American workers.

"My son quit three times," Culver says. "My own son won't even work for his father."

Others in the group had similar troubles trying to find U.S. citizens to work. Their message throughout the day was that if the H-2B cap exemption is extended

for good, they will be more likely to find the amount of labor their businesses need.

A bill was originally expected to be announced in the Senate mid-February that would extend the amendment to make returning workers exempt from the 66,000-person cap. The amendment currently is set to expire Sept. 30.

Those who were deterred by the snow and freezing rain got another chance to lobby their representatives in Congress because a second Fly-in was planned for March 6. Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) hoped to introduce an H-2B

cap extension bill the week of the first Fly-in, but the Senate was tied up with other business. Expectations are that the bill will be introduced in March, so H-2B users planned a second Fly-in to make sure the issue was fresh in their elected representatives' minds. -HW

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USE READER SERVICE #28

industry news

GET NOTICED NOW

Think You're in the Top 100?

Fortune has its 500. The green industry has Lawn & Landscape magazine's Top

Each year Lawn & Landscape conducts a survey to identify the largest 100 industry contractors based on revenue. We recognize that basing this list solely on revenue doesn't account for recent growth, innovation, management excellence or employee skills and benefits, but we believe it's relevant and important to provide this industry benchmark nonetheless.

Plus, you have to admit, it's an interesting read.

Whether you're big or small, we'd like learn about your company to consider you for this year's Top 100 list as well as stories we write throughout the coming year.

Please take a moment to fill out the 2007 Top 100 submission form, which can be found as an Online Extra to the March issue at www.lawnandlandscape. com, and fax it to 216/961-0364 by March 15.

Questions? Contact Associate Editor Marisa Palmieri at mpalmieri@gie.net or 800/456-0707.

SUPPLIER NEWS

Cub Cadet. **Yanmar Form** C.U.T. Supply Co.

Cub Cadet and Yanmar will enter into a joint venture to market a full line of compact utility tractors and implements in the U.S. and Canada. The joint venture has lead to the formation of C.U.T. Supply Co., headquartered in Valley City, Ohio.

Yanmar's Masashi Shimo was appointed president of C.U.T. Supply Co. We feel these qualities will allow us to deliver smart, user-focused solutions to the growing number of consumers and commercial and government users in need of a compact utility tractor," Shimo says.

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Shemin Adds New Jersey Site

Shemin, The Landscape Supply Co., is opening its newest location in Lawrenceville, N.J.

This site will serve the Mid-Jersey and northern Philadelphia markets with Shemin's line of nursery stock, hardlines and landscape lighting supplies.

The new site will also be established as the newest Shemin irrigation supply location.

"We will be ready and open for business with the start of the spring planting season," says Steffan Burns, Shemin CEO. "The new site staff will include two Shemin veterans who are seasoned in landscape materials and customer service."

The new site fills in the gap between three established Shemin locations in Branchburg, N.I., Aston, Pa. and Oaks, Pa.

Shemin provides landscape professionals a selection of nursery stock from woody ornamentals to annuals, perennials, specimens and groundcovers. Shemin locations also offer commercial-grade tools, grass seed, mulches, fertilizers, pesticides, stone and paver products and landscape lighting. Most of Shemin's 29 locations also offer a complete irrigation department.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

Changes Coming to Irrigation Association Certifications

The Irrigation Association certification program is making changes to accommodate expanding educational opportunities and to bring policies in line with the Environmental Protection Agency WaterSense label.

Beginning in April, courses and exams for Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor and Certified Golf Irrigation Auditor will no longer be required to be linked. The courses and exams may still

be offered together, but it will not be mandatory that the class and exam be provided or taken as a unit, said IA Certification Board Chair James Dowd.

In addition, CLIA and CGIA candidates must verify that they have at least one year of field experience and submit an independently completed audit verified by an Irrigation Association auditor in good standing.

The IA was accepted as the first

WaterSense partner in November, and the EPA is reviewing applications to allow IA certifications to carry the WaterSense label.

The labeling program will raise consumer awareness of water efficiency and

> the importance of certification in the same way the Energy Star label raised awareness of energy efficient products. Professionals with WaterSense-approved IA certifications will be eligible

to be WaterSense partners and use the WaterSense label as well as the IA certification logo.

To offer an exam, download the exam site agreement from the IA Web site, complete it and mail it to the IA at least 60 days in advance. For additional information, write certification@irrigation.org.

The exam site agreement is available at https://www.irrigation.org/certification/pdf/exam_agreement.pdf.

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USE READER SERVICE #29

IRRIGATION





PLANET Holds National Student Career Days

They climb trees in record time, build patios brick-by-brick, dig ditches, identify dozens of horticulture specimens and safely maneuver dangerous machinery through a course while facing fierce competition. All of this to prove they are the best and brightest in their field and to gain scholarships and recognition from some of the country's top landscape, lawn care, interiorscape and tree care firms and related companies.

This is the Professional Landcare Network Student Career Days held each year at a different college or university across the country. Now, in its 31st year, the event is steadily



DID YOU KNOW ...

Forty-six percent of landscape contractors purchased trimmers/ edgers in the past 12 months and 30.8 percent plan to purchase them in the next 12 months. The average landscape contractor spends \$1,068 annually on trimmers/edgers.

For a story on the latest edger advancements, as well as a peak at some of the new edger products available on the market, turn to pages 148 and 158, respectively.



USE READER SERVICE #30

Spring Clean-up Time!



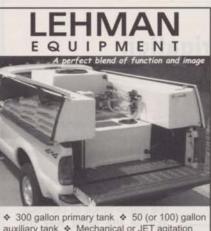
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USE READER SERVICE #32

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Photos: Jim Paluch

growing and expects nearly 900 college students from more than 53 schools to participate at Michigan State University from March 29 to April 1.

The excitement gets underway rain or shine and includes 24 individual and team competitive events. Events range from personnel management, sales presentation and exterior/interior design to irrigation troubleshooting, wood construction, equipment operation, patio installation, tree climbing and more.

The competitions not only provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their skills, they also validate what the students have learned in

REGIONAL REPORT

school. Fellow students crowd the events to cheer on their classmates.

PLANET Student Career Days also draws the largest national gathering of landscape, lawn care and interiorscape employment recruiters. Students are serious about this competition and many give up their spring break to participate. This is the best resource for qualified employees in the green industry. A career fair that takes place during the event offers students the opportunity to interview with green industry companies for full-time positions and internships.

For additional information on PLANET's Student Career Days, visit the Web site at www.studentcareerdays.org.

in Effect
ber owners, even landlords

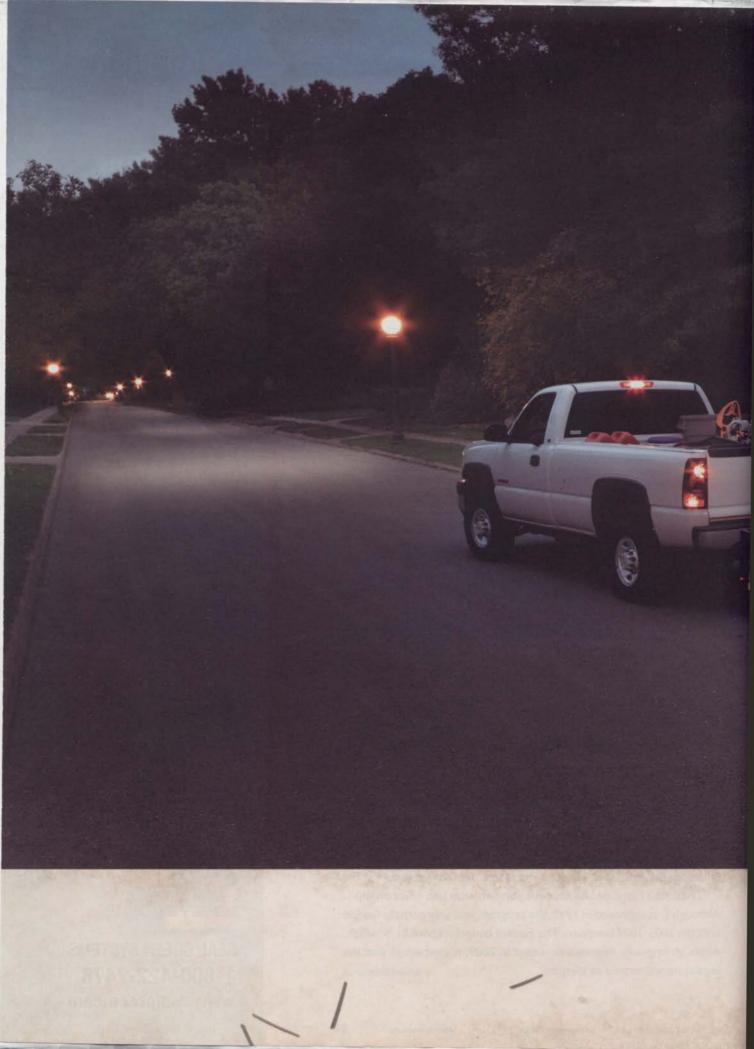
Oregon Pesticide Reporting Law Now in Effect

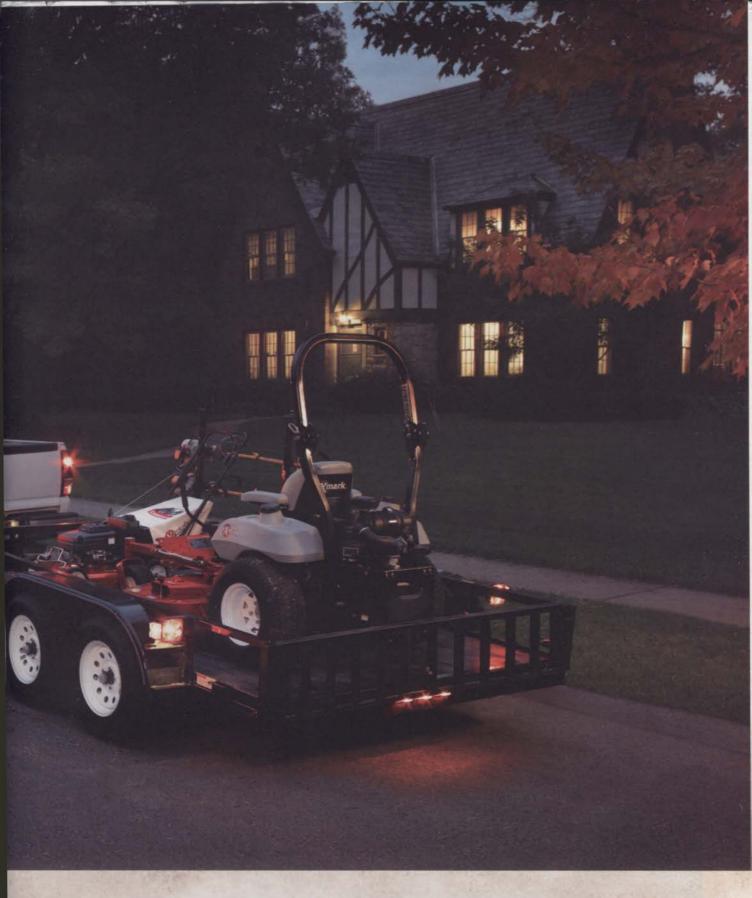
Oregon lawn care companies, farmers and timber owners, even landlords and apartment managers who use herbicides and pesticides to control vegetation and pests, are now required to electronically provide the State Department of Agriculture with information about what type of chemicals they use, their quantity and where they are applied.

The state's Pesticide Use Reporting System went into effect on Jan. 1. Although first approved in 1999, the program was only partially funded until the 2005-2007 biennium. The current budget is about \$1.9 million. Although originally intended to sunset in 2009, it's expected that the legislature will extend its lifespan.

continued to page 38







Working 60 hours a week makes you a workaholic.
Working longer makes you a landscape pro.

continued from page 35

A temporary system, implemented about 2002, was not user friendly, according to Sara Jones, with the ODA's pesticide division. The new system will be used by more than 120,000 pesticide applicators statewide and could generate nearly 8 million reports of individual applications annually.

Reporting is via Web site only. Information can be found at www.oregon. gov/ODA/PEST/purs_index.shtml.

Original plans called for the system to record data that farmers and others feared could be used by environmental extremists to single out individual pesticide users. That's not the case with the new program, which will record location data in a broader way by watershed or ZIP code.

Katie Fast, associate director of legislative affairs for the Oregon Farm Bureau, says the program adds a "burden on the agricultural community to report their pesticide use on all products that have an EPA label."

"It's going to take time for the farm community to get used to the program and the computer system," Fast says. "The amount of time required will depend on the size of each operation."

Spraying companies already keep indepth records of their pesticide usage, so uploading that information to a state computer system shouldn't be a major problem, says Debbie Ego of Rasmussen Spray Service, Salem, Ore., and a regular tester of the State Department of Agriculture's programs.

Greg Sullens, who owns Santiam Spray Service in Sweet Home, agrees with Ego. "It's probably just going to be time consuming," Sullens said. "It's a matter of just doing it. It's a necessary evil, just dotting your 'Is' type of thing. It will be cumbersome at first, but after a while, it will be as easy as turning on a light switch." For more information about pesticides, visit www.pestfacts. org.

- Albany (Ore.) Democrat-Herald





PEOPLE

Davey CEO Retires

R. Douglas Cowan stepped down as chief executive officer of Kent, Ohio-based The Davey Tree Expert Co. at the end of 2006 in keeping with his previously announced retirement plans. Cowan will remain chairman of the board.

Karl J. Warnke, a 27-year veteran of Davey who has served the past seven years as president and chief operating officer of the company, assumed the dual role of president and chief executive officer Jan. 1.

Warnke assumes leadership of the company during a time of growth and expansion, with Davey recently closing its 19th acquisition of the past three years – Southeastern Reprographics Inc., an asset management firm headquartered in Alpharetta, Ga.



SPANISH LESSONS

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

In an effort to aid landscape and lawn care professionals in their communication efforts, Lawn & Landscape will be running a few phrases each month in English and Spanish, including a pronunciation guide, courtesy of the book The Lingo Guide For Landscapers by E.G. White. To inquire about ordering the book, which costs \$14.95, visit www. lawnandlandscape.com/store or contact the Lawn & Landscape Book Department at 800/456-0707.

If there is a phrase you are having trouble with, let us know at nwisniewski@gie.net.

- ENGLISH: How long have you been working with water gardens and ponds?? SPANISH: Cuanto hace que trabaja con jardines acuaticos y estanques? (KWAHN-toh AH-seh keh trah-BAH-hah kohn hahr-DEE-nehs ah-KWAH-tee-kohs ee ehs-TAHN-kehs?)
- ENGLISH: We need to dig a hole. SPANISH: Debemos remover el cesped/grama/pasto/tepe/terron. (deh-BEH-mohs reh-moh-VEHR ehl SEHS-pehd/GRAH-mah/PAHS-toh/TEH-peh/teh-RR ROHN.)
- ENGLISH: We need to install the liner.
 SPANISH: Debemos instalar el delimitador/la funda. (deh-BEH-mohs eens-tah-LAAR ehl deh-lee-me-tah-DOOR/lah FOON-dah.)
- 4. ENGLISH: We need to install the pipe for the fountain.
 SPANISH: Debemos instalar la caneria para la fuente. (deh-BEH-mohs eens-tah-LAHR lah kah-knee-eh-REE-ah PAH-rah lah FWEHN-the.)
- ENGLISH: We need to put rocks around the edge.
 SPANISH: Debemos colocar piedras/rocas alrededor del borde. (deh-BEH-mohs koh-loh-CAR pee-EH-drahs/RRROH-kahs ahl-rrreh-deh-DOOR dehl BOHR-deh.)

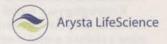
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Harmony In Growth

TIME MANAGEMENT

Go From Interruption-Driven to Goal-Driven

o you become easily diverted or distracted by situations, new tasks or people rather than maintaining the focus on your goals and objectives? Consider for a moment that if your e-mail program is set to download e-mail every five minutes, in essence, you are scheduling an interruption for yourself every five minutes.

While many people feel the need to multi-task, there are many similarities between managing your mind-set and managing your schedule. Each activity or task that you engage in requires a change in your thought process and focus.

The solution to this problem is time blocking, the art of allocating blocks of designated time for specific activities or tasks throughout the day that are aligned with your goals and the realistic number of hours you have.

First, look at the hours you have to work with. If you have a nine-hour workday, you realistically have about eight hours (or less) because buffer time is needed for activities that take longer than expected or are undetected during daily planning, i.e. unscheduled meetings, traffic, emergencies, new projects, family/client demands, etc.

Then, make a list and prioritize the tasks to be included in your daily routine. Establish time lines for each task. For instance, if you spend time prospecting or cold calling, separate new prospect calls from follow-up calls so you don't shift your energy away from your focus on each task.

Now that you have a schedule, learn to better manage the interruptions. The biggest culprit when it comes to interruptions is e-mail. For example, let's say for every five minutes you check your incoming e-mails, you lose one minute. That's 12 minutes per hour, and one hour and thirty-six minutes per eight-hour workday.

A solution: Change the time you have your e-mail program set to receive e-mails from every five or 10 minutes to every four hours.

E-mail is a great tool for communication, collaboration and correspondence, enabling you to communicate quickly and conveniently, but you need to make sure this tool continues to be productive and efficient for you.

If managing your e-mail like snail mail sounds extreme, ask yourself these questions to determine a realistic e-mail checking frequency:



I. "Are the bulk of my e-mails time sensitive? Does my ability to quickly respond to an e-mail determine whether or not I will earn a new customer's business?"

 "Can I still honor my prospecting campaign, provide the same level of service to my customers, and not compromise my ability to attract new customers or perform my job effectively if I respond to e-mails only twice a day?"

This same strategy can be used for telephone calls.

If creating blocks of time to respond to e-mails or phone calls would compromise your ability to do your job effectively, then this strategy may not work for you. However, if you have a degree of flexibility in your job to do so, try checking and responding to e-mails and phone calls every two hours. If two hours still doesn't work for you, try doing so every half hour.

Take the next week to determine if there's a specific time throughout your day when you receive the bulk of time sensitive e-mails and phone calls. There still may be an opportunity for you to block out designated times for responding to calls and e-mails at less frequent intervals than you are doing now.

The fact is, even if you change the frequency of when you check your e-mail from every five minutes to every 10 minutes, you have just cut the time you can lose in half.

Become someone who is driven by goals rather than by distractions. The more effective you are at time blocking, the greater the quality of your life will be. If you are responsible for attracting and retaining your customers, your ability to manage your customers' expectations is a direct reflection of your ability to not only manage your schedule but your mind-set as well.

Make time your ally. - Keith Rosen

The author is president of ProfitBuilders, a business consulting firm. He can be reached at 888/262-2450 or info@profitbuilders.com.

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CALENDAR

Calendar Note

To ensure that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to Heather Wood, Web editor, at hwood@gie.net.

MAR. 7 – 10 Hardscape North America 2007, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: www.hardscapenorthamerica.com/woh/

MAR. 13 Target Specialty Products Seminar, Anaheim, Calif. Contact: www.target-specialty.com, 800/352-3870

MAR. 22 – 23 The Professional Grounds Management Society's Regional Grounds Management Seminar & Site Visitation at the Biltmore Gardens and Estate, Asheville, N.C. Contact: www.pgms.org/2007regionalseminars.htm

MAR. 27 New York State Turfgrass Association Adirondack Regional Conference Lake Placid, N.Y. Contact: www.nysta.org, 518/783-1229



MAR. 29 – APR. I Professional Landcare Network's Student Career Days, Michigan State University. Contact: www.studentcareerdays.org, 800/395-2522





USE READER SERVICE #37

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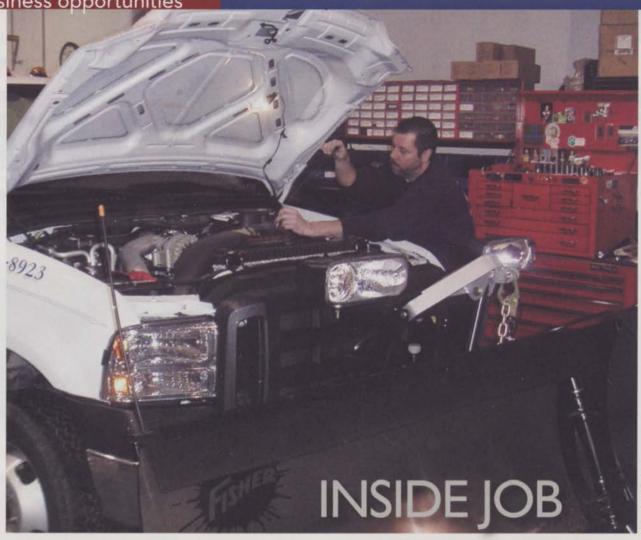
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Questions?

business opportunities



Considering bringing equipment maintenance in-house? Take cues from D. Foley Landscape, a company that's worked to refine its shop's systems over 12 years.

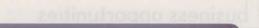
quipment is one of a landscape business owner's greatest assets, depending on whether or not a contractor owns his or her facility. And it's also one of their top direct costs, usually second to labor, says Dan Foley, president of D. Foley Landscape, based in South Walpole, Mass.

Although many contractors recognize the benefits of bringing equipment

Although many contractors recognize the benefits of bringing equipment maintenance in-house, it can be difficult – financially and logistically – to implement. Many owners are hesitant to spend the money, others are bogged down by day-to-day tasks and some are simply inexperienced in maintenance and what it takes to add a shop. "It doesn't take much for a contractor to have a fleet worth over a million dollars, but almost none of us have the experience to manage it," Foley says.

D. Foley Landscape, a \$3- to \$4-million maintenance firm, first added in-house equipment maintenance by hiring a part-time mechanic in 1994. "It's hard to do it well when you do it part way, but it's hard to do it all the way when you're small," he says. "You might not have enough equipment to justify a full-time maintenance employee. There's a point where you get stuck in the middle."

by marisa palmieri | associate editor





That in-the-middle point is difficult to define, Foley says, based on a company's type of work, equipment inventory, number of trucks, number of employees and dealer relationships, to name a few. However, Foley estimates the \$2-million mark is a good size for a contractor to consider a full-time, in-house mechanic.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS. "You have to ask yourself, 'Does it add value to your landscape customer to bring it in-house?" Foley says.

His company's philosophy is to keep production crews and account managers focused on adding value and servicing clients – not worrying about equipment. "For us it was very clear – with the speed that we were growing, with the level of our dealer relationships and our want to control our own destiny – that it was the right thing to do."

However, Foley didn't realize his company was slightly behind the curve until several dozen contractors toured his facility in 2002. At that time, D. Foley operated with a part-time mechanic, who worked nights repairing trucks and equipment, while crew leaders were still responsible for their equipment's preventive maintenance and tasks such as changing oil and sharpening blades.

The reaction some of the tour participants had to Foley's maintenance procedures spurred him to reassess the system. "People couldn't believe we didn't have a full-time mechanic," Foley says. "Until then, I wasn't conscious of the daily and preventive maintenance that wasn't happening, as well as the distraction that fleet management had become to our management team whose primary role is to be totally focused on producing results for our clients."

Soon afterward, D. Foley promoted a crew leader with an interest in and a knack for automotive repair as his full-time mechanic. The company

titled this newly created position fleet supervisor. "We call them this because we want them not just to turn wrenches and tighten bolts, but to be aware of the well being of the entire fleet," Foley says.

Bringing maintenance in-house worked well initially, but Foley says the company did not have the experience or systems in place to be 100 percent effective from the beginning. "We just kind of let it evolve on its own," Foley says.

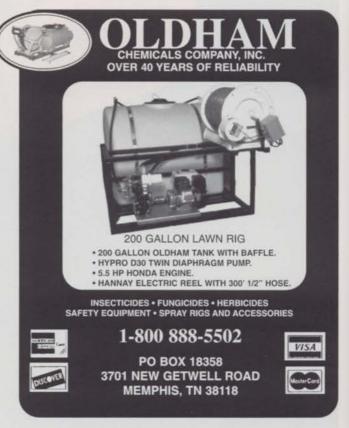
A NEW HIRE. Last summer, when D. Foley's first full-time mechanic left the company to pursue interests outside of the industry, management was forced to define what it was looking for in terms of a fleet supervisor's skill set and procedures for success.

The company realized it needed a fleet supervisor who is flexible and diversified enough to maintain the company's wide variety of equipment. To find such a candidate, Foley pur-

SYNTHETIC PUTTING GREENS & LAWNS



USE READER SERVICE # 40







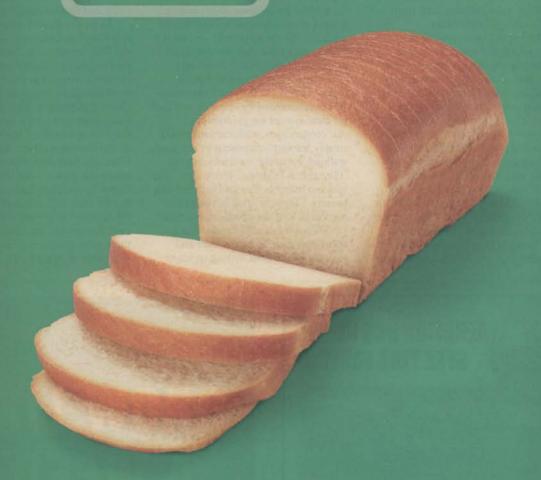








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posely looked outside of the industry. The company interviewed several candidates and eventually found Ron Greene, a 25-year veteran of a Ford dealership. "What he brought to us was experience in completing repairs and organizing a shop from an industry whose core business is to maintain and fix things," Foley says.

During the interviewing stage,

Foley asked probing questions to see if potential mechanics believed they were "above" the gritty, sometimes mundane, tasks vital to maintaining landscape equipment. To dig this deep, Foley explained to applicants what servicing a lawn mower entails (including sharpening blades and scraping grass clippings off mower decks), and waited for their replies. "Some candidates would say, 'I thought I'd have a helper for that,' or 'Don't the guys do that?' You can just tell when talking to the mechanics who thought they were too good to be doing that. If you ask the right questions, you can discover a great deal of important information."

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT. A

revamped repair-tracking process also helped the shop run smoother than in years past. "We really lost focus there for a while because we didn't have a system where there were clear responsibilities, the crews weren't specifically held accountable and there was some poor communication," Foley says.

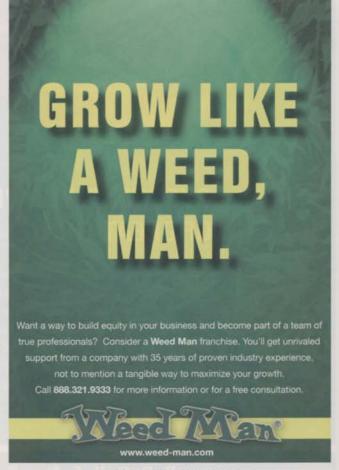
Before, crews submitted work orders directly to the mechanic, who was overwhelmed by requests and had no clear system for prioritization. "It can create chaos, with crewmembers simply leaving equipment in the shop, walking up to the mechanic saying 'Hey, this is broken." Foley says. "He had too many bosses and internal customers." Tension arose between the mechanic and the production crews.

"What we need is for our equipment operators to be our eyes and ears out in the field, letting us know when something's not working right or needs to be looked at," Foley says. "But if they're given a hard time when they bring in something to be repaired, they're not going to want to do it anymore." The repercussions can be disastrous in terms of safety, productivity and further equipment damage.

To fix the flawed system, Foley appointed one manager as the head of the fleet department. Now, production employees submit repair orders to their managers at the end of the workday when they turn in their time sheets and receipts. This procedure keeps managers in the loop. In turn, the managers submit the repair orders to the fleet department manager. Next, the fleet department manager enters the repair order (RO) into a shared spreadsheet and issues a number for each RO. For easy tracking, the first two digits are the year, the next two are the month and the final three are a unique number, specific to that piece of equipment.



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what goes out?

Although the company's accounting program has an equipment management function, Foley prefers using a spreadsheet for the quick, easy ability to sort by RO number, status, person requesting work, piece of equipment or any other field. "It's as simple as a Word document for a repair order form that we fill out and an Excel spreadsheet," Foley says. "You don't have to spend a lot of money on this."

After the order is entered, it's in the fleet supervisor's hands. He tracks the status of the repair in the log and notes any hours or miles if applicable, which is helpful when repairing the equipment in the future. "What this did was create a paper trail – a public declaration of a problem," Foley says. "And team members are rewarded for reporting problems by our making sure to thank them for caring."

PIECES AND PARTS. Another lesson D. Foley Landscape learned during its in-house maintenance evolution was

Bringing a mechanic on board doesn't mean a contractor will never have to send out equipment to a dealer or repair shop again. At D. Foley Landscape, Fleet Supervisor Ron Greene considers the actual cost of an outsourced repair vs. the direct cost of doing it in-house, the shop's current schedule and capacity, transporting costs and the need for any specialized equipment. D. Foley, for example, still outsources auto body work, painting and heavy truck repair, because it does not have the proper lift. "You have to do a cost/benefit analysis of each item. It may not always be less expensive, but you may get a better investment on time, money and resources," Foley says, noting Greene manages a \$160,000 annual budget that includes vehicle and trailer maintenance and accessories, equipment maintenance, supplies and fluids and shop labor.

the importance of streamlining the parts inventory.

At one point D. Foley owned seven different brands of mowers. "Our solution was a one-brand initiative so we could stock fewer parts."

In 2004, D. Foley invested \$81,000 for a new batch of equip-

ment, all from the same manufacturer. The company generated about \$35,000 from the sale of all its existing equipment.

"Rather than stretch the process over several years, we bought it all at once," Foley says. He recommends contractors take stock of what they



own currently. "If you can simplify brands and models, I'd do that."

Another parts-related tip Foley mentions is to minimize the mechanic's time spent out of the shop searching for parts and supplies. Contractors should contact their vendors to request delivery. "Most of the time, if you commit to their business, they'll commit to delivering to you," Foley says, noting it's worth paying a \$10 delivery fee because a mechanic adds value when he's servicing equipment, not out picking up supplies.

PREVENTIVE POINTER. Even with a full-time mechanic, ensuring maintenance equipment receives efficient, proper, routine preventive maintenance can be difficult. After grappling with this challenge for several years, the management at D. Foley came up with the idea of the service set – an extra, identical set of equipment that rotates among maintenance crews.

Each crew is assigned a service

day, the morning of which they drop off their equipment at the service bay and pick up the service set. During the day, the fleet supervisor conducts preventive maintenance on the equipment, and the crew it belongs to retrieves it at the end of the day. This practice ensures that the mechanic touches every single piece of maintenance equipment once a week. The rotating service set, which Foley notes is not the same as a backup set, is then serviced during an evening or on a Saturday morning.

Foley calls the investment for the service set, approximately \$18,500 (including four mowers, two string trimmers, one power edger, one backpack blower and one hand blower), a "no-brainer."

"If we didn't invest in an extra set, other challenges come, like hiring someone to service the equipment at night or having the guys do it," Foley says. When his crew leaders serviced their own equipment it took them

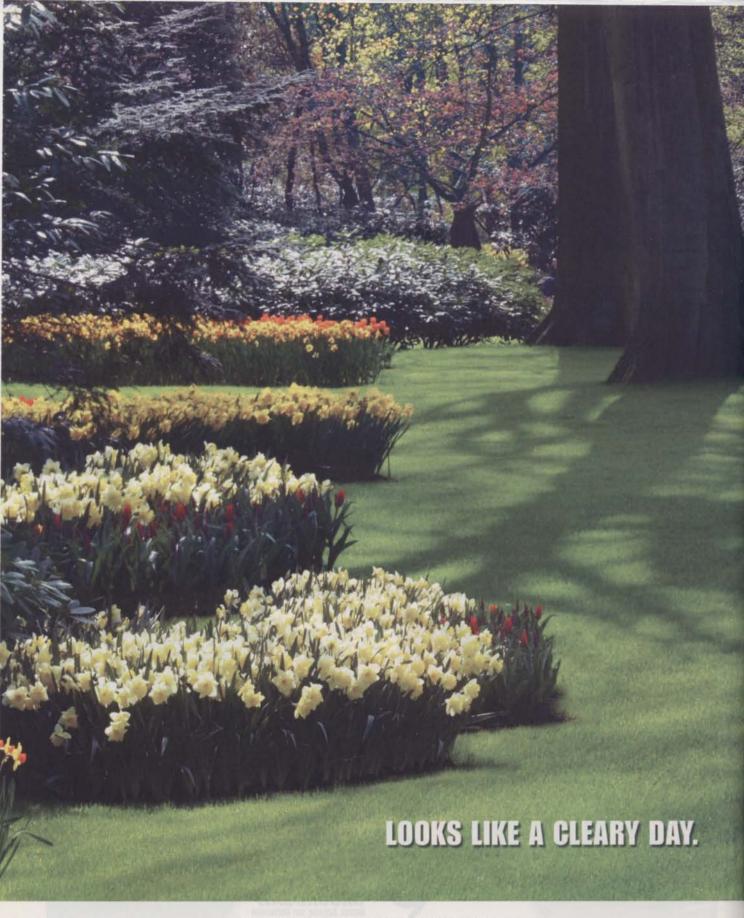
longer and they may not have been doing it properly. While the company does not track exact savings, Foley estimates a yearly savings of \$4,500 to \$5,100 in direct mechanic labor cost (including overtime and labor burden) – not counting the savings accrued from improved preventive maintenance, which also reduces future avoidable repairs and downtime.

"We finally got it figured out after 12 years and are enjoying the journey to continually get better," Foley says. "It's become part of our core strategy in the marketplace. We don't want our production teams being distracted from delivering results for our clients. I don't think we could live without it now due to our size, but even if we were smaller, it would allow us to be a better service provider to our clients."

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View D. Foley's RO form and repair tracking log in the March Online Extras section.





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Team Turf uses presence, reputation and referrals for power growth.

word-of-mouth Works

fficially, Jonathan Tucker and Matt Hubbard started Team Turf Landscape Management in 1996. The truth, though, is these life-long friends

and business partners began cutting lawns around Marietta, Ga., at the age of 9.

With an old Honda lawnmower, Tucker and Hubbard began mowing for \$3 a lawn. And for an extra quarter, they'd blow the grass clippings off the driveway.

At 11, this entrepreneurial duo expanded their service area with the help of an old tractor and a small trailer that had wheels but lacked tires. It was their first growth spurt.

"You could hear us coming from a mile away," Tucker says. "Sometimes those metal wheels would spark as we dragged that trailer along."

At 16, Hubbard's father purchased a commercial mower he rented to the teens for \$500 a year and the fledgling contractors never looked back. Tucker and Hubbard continued to work at their budding landscape business, in one incarnation or another, until they formed Team Turf in 1996. Today, Tucker, 29 and Hubbard, 30, are still taking care of lawns and still experiencing growth.

"In fact, we still have some of those same customers today from when we were kids," Tucker says.

None of this should come as any surprise because near-perfect customer retention is a Team Turf hallmark. Attention to client needs, coupled with operating in a very tight service radius has allowed them to chalk up impressive growth over the last decade. According to its numbers, the landscape company reported a little more than \$200,000 in revenue in 2000. Over the last six years, the company has experienced more than 400 percent revenue growth with \$1.05 million in 2006 and projected \$1.25 million in 2007.

"We said from the very beginning that we didn't want to grow too fast," says Tucker, who manages the company's business affairs. "Has this been too

by mike zawacki | managing editor

Team Turf's Jonathan Tucker, left

Steve Swiete

Team Turf Landscapes

fast? We've always grown like this so we don't know anything else."

In addition, Team Turf budgets zero for marketing, instead relying on presence, reputation and a referral-reward program that generates up to 90 percent of the firm's new business.

"We have a hard time saying 'no' to clients," Tucker says. "It's hard to set goals when you don't market yourself and deliberately go out to find customers. Instead, they're coming to us."

OVEREXPOSURE. Tucker and Hubbard have always worked within a tight radius of clients.

Starting out, keeping clients in close proximity to one another came more out of necessity than from a solid business strategy. As pint-sized landscape contractors, Tucker and Hubbard were limited to how far they were willing to drag their equipment.

Today, Team Turf operates four three-man crews, one of which is a floating crew. And while their competitors maintain clients in a 60-mile radius from their respective headquarters, Team Turf subscribes to a strategy that maximizes a high-end client base of more than 250 properties within a relatively compact service radius of about 10 miles. It's so tight that the average Team Turf truck, which goes out every day, barely logs 7,000 miles on its odometer in a year's time. "Our strategy has been to not have to drive around to serve our clients," Tucker says. "We want them to be close by and reside within the same neighborhood.'

Because they operate in a tight radius, Team Turf is able to project that it has more trucks in the community than it really does. "It gives them the perception that we're a much bigger landscape outfit than we really are in the area," Tucker says.

To maintain this illusion, all Team Turf vehicles look the same and are cleaned every Friday. Trucks are maintained to the highest standards and their beds painted every other year to keep up appearances. The company also maintains a distinctive appearance in the field compared to its competitors.

"We don't try to overpower people

CO-OWNERS: Jonathan Tucker, Matt Hubbard

HEADQUARTERS: Marietta, Ga.

FOUNDED: 1996

EMPLOYEES: 12 year-round workers

SERVICE BREAKOUT:

60% Maintenance/Mowing 30% Installation (no design) 5% Design/Build 4% Chemical Lawn Care 1% Tree & Ornamental Services

CLIENT BREAKOUT:

85% Residential 10% Commercial Residential 5% Commercial

REVENUE BREAKOUT:

2007 Revenue:	\$1.25 million (projected)
2006 Revenue:	\$1.05 million
2005 Revenue:	\$906,000
2004 Revenue:	\$795,000

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- 2. Insurance costs
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> with multicolor displays like other companies," Tucker says. "Our truck beds are blue, unlike most other companies that are green, and we have white signs with blue lettering to match the truck."

Likewise, Team Turf's workforce maintains a muted, yet crisp appearance in the field.

"Our workers wear light gray shirts and our logo on the front and back is the same blue as the trucks," Tucker says. "Employees wear Team Turf shirts – short-sleeved, long-sleeved or sweat shirt – and khaki pants, and are given new shirts frequently, at no cost to them, so they always look clean and professional."

REFERRAL PROGRAM. Tucker and Hubbard budget nothing on marketing or branding their landscape services. Instead, much of Team Turf's growth comes from word-of-mouth referrals.

In 2000 Team Turf pursued its only attempt at a traditional, organized marketing campaign. Tucker and Hubbard purchased the addresses of the neighbors to the right and to the left of each client. Then they mailed each a letter introducing the company, explaining that Team Turf took care of their neighbors' lawns and they could maintain their properties.

"We only did this once because it was so much work," Tucker says of the campaign. "We got a few new customers, but one new client we obtained from that letter-writing campaign gave us four referral

clients.

Tucker and Hubbard were onto something. In 2002, the duo formalized their client-referral program. Initially, every new customer of an existing client brought to Team Turf that panned out earned that individual a half-month of free maintenance. This incentive kicks in after the third month of service to protect Team Turf from losing money on a fair-weather new client.

"To make it attractive enough for the client to want to call people and tell them about us we increased it to a month," Tucker says, adding the savings for the client is between \$250 and \$300, depending on the depth of their service.

"Some clients really take advantage of this program and end up earning a half-year of maintenance for free," Tucker says. "We may end up operating at a loss for that one client, but it's worth it because we make

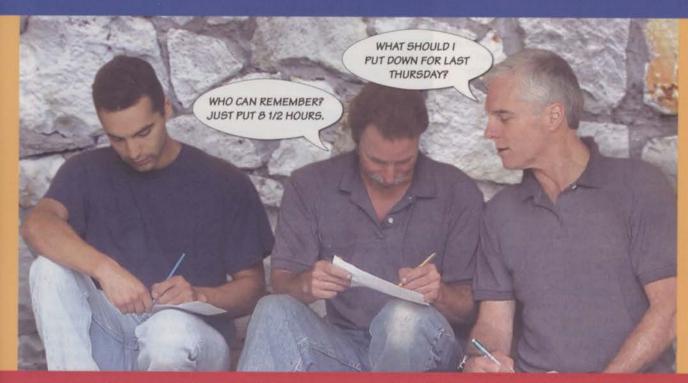
it up in new clients.'

In fact, having Team Turf trucks circulating in clients' neighborhoods on a regular basis generated better referral results for Team Turf than most marketing campaigns, Tucker says. And many times, the new client referral is in close proximity to an existing client, allowing Team Turf to further maintain its tightly held service circle.

Sometimes, though, Team Turf takes on a referral client without know who gave the referral.

"We ask the new client why they chose us and they say they heard about us from someone," Tucker says. "We ask them who and they don't say. So we pick up the referral without paying out a referral bonus."

HOW MUCH IS THIS CONVERSATION COSTING YOU?



WHY DEAL WITH THIS?

Namer DAVID B. Dutes: 9-/3									
Day:	Start:	Lunch:	End:	Jobsite:	Activity:	Hours:			
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Friday	7	1/2	4	,,	-	8/2			

>TRACKING service work? >DOZENS of cost codes? >Crews on the MOVE?

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PocketClock

WHEN YOU CAN HAVE THIS.

Bur	ns, E	David		Date Range: 4/9/2007 through 4/13/200				
Day	Date	Jobsite	Start	Stop	Cost Code	Hours	Total	
Mon	4/9	Brentwood	7:08 AM 12:41 PM	12:05 PM 3:22 PM	Irrigation Irrigation	4:57 2:41	7:38 hours	
Tue	4/10	Brentwood	7:12 AM 12:43 PM	12:07 PM 3:23 PM	Irrigation Irrigation	4:55 2:40	7:35 hours	
Wed	4/11	Brentwood	7:12 AM 12:46 PM	12:02 PM 3:49 PM	Irrigation Irrigation	4:50 3:03	7:53 hours	
Thu	4/12	Crestview	7:17 AM 12:50 PM	12:19 PM 3:46 PM	Planting Planting	5:02 2:56	7:58 hours	
Fri	4/13	Crestview	7:13 AM 12:44 PM	12:07 PM 3:39 PM	Planting Planting	4:54 2:55	7:49 hours	

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QUALITY CONTROL. Client referral is a vital component to Team Turf's growth strategy; however, the incentive program is only as good as the quality of work performed in the field.

Who would recommend landscape services to a friend or neighbor if those services were sub-par? For their high-end clients – average home prices in their market range between \$500,000 and \$600,000 – conveying poor taste in a landscape firm isn't worth a \$300 savings on lawn maintenance. Tucker and Hubbard recognized this and knew for the referral program to work they had to make sure there were no slip-ups in the field.

"Excellent service is vital in our line of work," Hubbard says. "If you don't take care of the customer then someone else will."

It starts with dependability and servicing clients on the same day every week. Crew leaders are responsible for



Team Turf does not have a formal marketing budget, instead it relies on presence, reputation and a referral-reward program to generate new business.

inspecting each property to make sure pruning, mowing, weeding, blowing and any other services are completed to the standard that the company has set, Hubbard says.

"Sloppy work is safeguarded by a system of checks and balances," Hubbard says. "It starts with the laborer who does the work and checked by the working crew leader after the job is done."

Every other week, Tucker and Hubbard spot check each property to make sure everything has been completed to company standards.

"We so more or less often depending the standards of the standard

"We go more or less often depending





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team turf's 5 keys to customer service

on the time of year," Hubbard says. "And the customer is always watching..."

High-end clients are a fickle bunch. Tucker and Hubbard realize an unhappy high-end customer is more than willing to pay someone else.

If a customer complaint comes in on the day of service, the responsible crew is contacted and immediately dispatched

back to the property. At the same time, either Tucker or Hubbard meets the crew on-site to discuss the matter with the crew leader, personally oversees the corrective action and talks to the client to ensure everyone is on the same page and satisfied with the job.

"We will go above and beyond to impress a client and to keep one,"

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Hubbard says. "We know high-end customers pay more attention to detail than others. We take pride in our work and we would rather go that extra mile to please a customer than to do a mediocre job to make a buck."

When a client complaint comes in a day or two after the initial service was performed, a crew is dispatched to deal with the problem within the next day, two at the latest. Tucker and Hubbard says clients are fine with this arrangement as long as the problem is addressed and corrected.

"Because our crews are in such a confined working area it is usually not a problem to have them go back to a property the same day the complaint comes in," Hubbard says. "If our quality slips so do the number of



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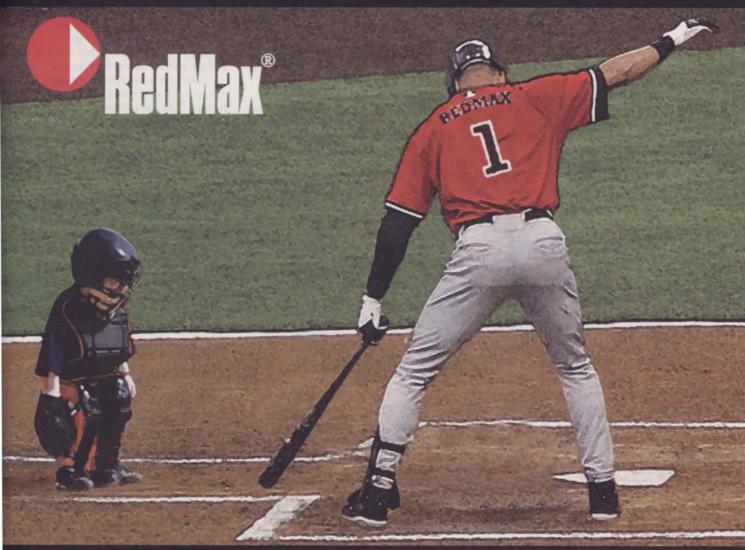
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referrals. Therefore, we make sure we are always at the top of our game."

COSTS, MARGINS AND EFFICIEN- CIES. Relying on referrals and market presence to generate new business begs the question of how Team Turf spends its money.

Team Turf maintains its profit

margins at around 25 to 30 percent, which Tucker recognizes could be better. To increase these margins, Tucker says they're working to increase operational efficiency and frequently take advantage of cost-saving deals when purchasing cellular phones, insurance, equipment and materials.

Team Turf also exercises greater

in-field efficiency, Tucker says. For example, when a work crew gets to the shop in the morning they clock in and are rolling within five minutes.

"They carry enough gas on the trucks to fill up once or twice a week," he says. "On these stops they can get drinks, etc., but on the days that they do not go to the gas station they must get these items before they come to work."

On site, the mantra of efficiency and quality is stressed to maintenance crews. "We tell crews to get on-site, do what needs to be done and get out," Tucker says. "But we also tell them not to sacrifice quality. If they need to stay longer, so be it. We may lose a little money here and there but committing extra time helps us in the long run."

In terms of investing back into the company, Tucker says they do so as the need arises. "Based on our average growth of approximately 15 percent to 20 percent a year over the past six years, we plan to add another crew/truck every other year," he says. "And with a new truck comes a new set of equipment."

Team Turf monitors all of its equipment and is vigilant about maintenance. Equipment turnover is roughly every three years, about the same time it begins to cost more to repair an item than it is worth. Training, though, remains constant regardless of growth, Tucker says.

"We always want our employees to be knowledgeable about plants, the equipment they're using and especially safety," he says.

Últimately, Tucker and Hubbard look to expand within the next one to two years by taking on larger commercial projects.

"We'll be adding another crew this summer to service more customers in our area," Tucker says. "In the next five years, we will most likely be expanding our service area a little and maybe add a branch in a booming area to the north."

Regardless, Tucker and Hubbard are committed to steady, but not rapid, growth for Team Turf. "Growing too fast can cause you to lose sight of the big picture in this business, which is taking care of the customers you have," Tucker says.

THE TEAM IN TEAM TURF. Tucker and Hubbard work so well as business partners because they each possess



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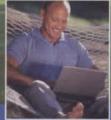




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skill sets that the other doesn't.

You would think being together for so long that we would have had a lot of disagreements," Hubbard says. "But we haven't. Over the past 10 years I can only think of a couple incidents, which were settled pretty quickly. We know each other's strengths and weaknesses and we know when to step away and let the other one do what they do best. This works well for both of us because we don't step on each other's feet too often.'

When it was a smaller company, both Tucker and Hubbard were responsible for field crews, with Tucker tackling paperwork in the evenings. Today, Tucker focuses his detail-oriented personality on the business side of the business, including scheduling, invoicing and bill-paying. He also handles the bulk of the sales-related work. "If I work on equipment I end up with stitches," Tucker says.

Hubbard, more comfortable in the field and with equipment, is respon-



Team Turf spot checks each client's property to make sure everything has been completed to company standards.

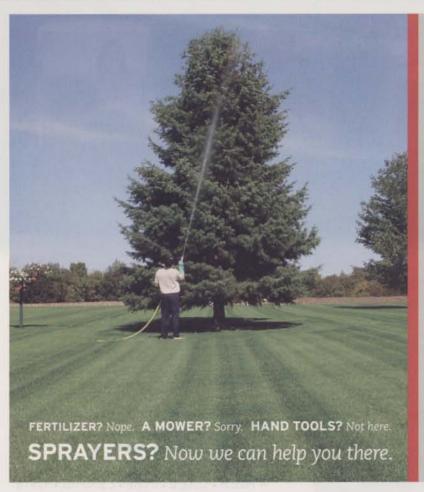
sibly for managing Team Turf's work crews. "We do what we do best and count on the other to do his job," he says. "Because we do this we have kept a great relationship over the years.'

Could either of us have done this alone? No way," Tucker says. "Together we're a greater force and the company

would not perform as well without both of us doing what we do best." III

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For more Team Turf word-of-mouth marketing tips, check out the March issue online.





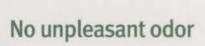
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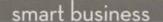
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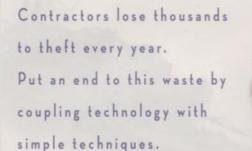
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LOCK UP EQUIPMENT THEFT

osing \$54,000 worth of equipment in one day would be a blow to any small business owner. But Lee Helmberger, owner of Lee's Lawn Service in Omaha, Neb., was hit especially hard when his 2001 Ford F250 with a fully loaded 16-foot trailer was stolen on June 6, 2006. The stolen truck and trailer was the company's only maintenance vehicle. "We're a pretty small operation," Helmberger says of his company, which operates one maintenance and one tree crew. "It was pretty devastating."

The funny thing is security couldn't have been tighter in Omaha where Helmberger and his crew stopped for lunch that day. President George W. Bush was in town and the Secret Service had conducted security sweeps in the bustling boardwalk area where Helmberger parked. That wasn't enough to deter the thieves, however. In fact, striking on such a day may actually have been a getaway strategy. It took police two hours to respond.

actually have been a getaway strategy. It took police two hours to respond.

"It seemed perfect timing for the thieves," Helmberger says. "Whoever targeted us was very good at their job," he says. "Like the police said, they probably got in the truck in a matter of seconds."

by marisa palmieri | associate editor



Thankfully, Helmberger had an inland marine insurance policy and received the replacement value of the stolen equipment. While his insurer processed the claim, fellow members of the Omaha Grounds Maintenance Association stepped forward to lend him equipment. "We were back out mowing the next day with borrowed equipment," he says. "But I lost a lot of production talking with the insurance company and the police, and I put in a lot of extra hours purchasing replaced equipment."

Lee's Lawn Service protected its equipment like most other landscape

crews protect theirs – he locked his truck and secured handheld equipment on locked racks. If a busy area and federal agents didn't deter a crime like this, what's a business owner to do?

"The best way to avoid having things stolen is to have loss control procedures and the proper training in place so these things don't happen in the first place," advises Michael Weisburger, president of Weisburger Insurance Brokerage, White Plains, N.Y. "Some companies actually budget for lost or stolen equipment, which I would recommend." Although it varies widely from firm to firm, Weis-

burger says budgeting for 10 to 20 percent in lost or stolen equipment annually is appropriate.

Unfortunately, many contractors don't instate loss-prevention plans until a serious theft happens to them. But with a combination of insurance, technology, common-sense tactics and practical tips, companies can reduce losses and prevent their equipment from being picked off.

ON THE RISE. More than 62 percent of contractors have experienced equipment theft, according to a recent poll conduct-



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continued from page 67

ed by Lawn & Landscape. In 2006, landscape contractors lost an average of \$3,425 to theft. And maintenance vehicles like Helmberger's are just one vulnerability. Construction sites and storage facilities are other common hot spots for prowlers.

Why? Landscape equipment, like that of other contracting trades, is an easy target, according to the National Equipment Registry, a database service that records heavy equipment ownership and theft information to increase recovery rates and reduce

Heavy equipment in particular is often stolen because the reward for the thief far outweighs the risk, NER says. For example, heavy equipment often has limited machine and site security, is valuable and easy to resell. The same can be said for other frequently pilfered landscape supplies, including handheld equipment, irrigation components and plant material.

Low recovery rates (88 percent of contractors reported recovery rates of less than 5 percent in our survey), few arrests and light penalties demonstrate why equipment theft is attractive to outlaws.

24% of landscape contractors have had equipment stolen from a construction site

JOBSITE: SITTING DUCKS.

Equipment left on worksites is some of the most vulnerable. These machines are generally valuable

and versatile pieces - so not only are the returns greater, there's a larger pool of potential buyers.

Across the construction trades, skid-steers account for the greatest number of stolen heavy equipment (32 percent), according to NER's 2005 Equipment Theft Report. Nine percent of all heavy equipment stolen is classified as a landscape loader.

On average, green industry insurance provider Hortica receives 28 mobile equipment claims a year with an average claim of \$5,400 (including skid-steers, tractors, loaders, etc.). Since 2000, Hortica has received 190 mobile equipment claims with a loss of \$1.03 million dollars. "And that's just what's claimed," adds Andrew Mauschbaugh, assistant vice president of loss control.

Due to security concerns, many power equipment manufacturers have introduced anti-theft devices that can be installed by the manufacturer or retrofitted by equipment dealers.

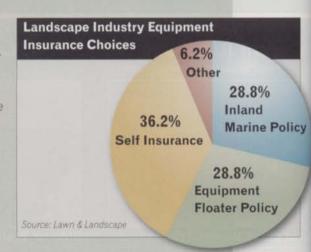
There's quite a few anti-theft devices in the marketplace," says Gerry Steenbergen, an internal consultant for Caterpillar, Peoria, Ill. "They include everything from devices that isolate the battery/electricity or fuel supply to some that shut off air supply to the machines. Others have electronic control modules that let certain keys be recognized or not recognized on that particular machine. So you can control who has access and at what time of day." The cost of these

devices varies among manufacturers, dealers and the type of technology employed. It can range from several hundred to several thousand dollars per machine.

Aftermarket tracking technology, which is more commonly installed on cars and trucks, is also suitable for construction equipment. The chance for recovery skyrockets when contractors install global positioning systems or radio frequency transceivers on heavy equipment. Compared to NER estimates that say 10 to 15 percent of stolen heavy equipment is recovered, 70 percent of construction equipment outfitted with LoJack Systems, one brand of radio-frequency tracking technology, was recovered in less than 24 hours after being reported to the police. Depending on the technology employed, the cost ranges from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars. The price for the LoJack system on construction equipment is \$795.

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Equipment Floater Policy

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Self-Insurance

Some companies opt to self-insure equipment, meaning they budget for losses, instill loss-prevention measures and replace lost items themselves. Many companies who self-insure opt for a "stop-loss" policy with a commercial carrier - they set a limit up to which they are responsible for retaining losses.

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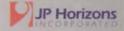
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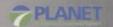
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Several years ago, Columbus, Ohio-based Peabody Landscape Group lost \$50,000 worth of equipment to theft in one year. In addition to having trucks stolen and trailers burglarized overnight at its facility, Peabody had a skid-steer stolen from a jobsite adjacent to a state highway patrol facility. Realizing no site was safe enough, Peabody installed anti-theft mechanisms on its heavy equipment. The devices cost several hundred dollars, President David Peabody says. "It was well worth it since our insurance deductible is \$1,000," he says. "You just have to look at what your savings are relative to deductibles.

The threat of being dropped by its insurer also prompted Peabody to institute other theft-prevention measures.

In addition to installing a perimeter security system and anti-theft devices on construction equipment, Peabody invested in GPS for its fleet

Not one piece of equipment has been stolen from a maintenance truck since La Verne, Calif.-based SCLM Co. installed trimmer traps four years ago. Photo: SCLM Co.

of 28 vehicles and trailers to improve recovery. The installation cost was about \$40,000 and the system costs about \$2,100 per month. Although Peabody acknowledges implementing GPS wasn't "inexpensive by any means," he says it was the right move to keep its insurance carrier. "Equipment is our lifeblood," Peabody says. "It helps us expedite projects, so obviously we wanted to be proactive in protecting it." GPS also has helped

Peabody reduce labor costs and protect against client disputes and false claims.

42% of landscape contractors have had equipment stolen from their facilities

FACILITY: NIGHTTIME PROTECTION.

Some contractors' worst theft problems occur on their home turf. Often,

this type of theft is an "inside job," as employees or their acquaintances know how tight (or loose) security is – and may even have the necessary keys or codes to help themselves to property with little effort.

Take, for example, Foegley Landscape of South Bend, Ind. Like many other landscape companies, Foegley has experienced equipment theft problems since it was founded in 1959. "We've lost string trimmers, backpack blowers and who knows how much plant material has walked out of here in years past," President John Foegley says. His company's facility, which includes a difficult-tomonitor 20-acre nursery, had been outfitted with a motion-detector alarm system for years, but it was

often more trouble that it was worth. For example, the motion detectors were repeatedly tripped by deer or raccoons, requiring both Foegley and the police to get out of bed in the middle of the night to go check it out.

In 2005, the company logged its usual \$10,000-a-year loss as a result of theft. "I'd had it," Foegley says. "I was just tired of this going on and I was bound and determined to put a stop to it."

That winter, Foegley hired a local company to install a video surveillance system and a silent alarm, which he can activate remotely via telephone. Now, when the system is tripped, the security company only calls if there's suspicious activity — not animals — and it automatically e-mails a clip of the footage to Foegley, which he can review from any computer.

Not only will Foegley

recoup the cost of the \$10,000 system this year as a result of no stolen equipment, he sleeps much better these days. "All I can tell you is it's been a miracle," he says. "Once we installed the surveillance cameras, it virtually eliminated all nefarious activity we had.

"You hate to think it's an inside job and that someone from your crew is coming in and swiping stuff, but I find it coincidental that once we installed cameras everything stopped," Foegley adds. "But who knows, maybe thieves are coming in now and casing the joint to see we have cameras."

La Verne, Calif.-based SCLM Co. also ramped up security with video surveillance when it moved to a new shop in March 2006.

"I've had quite a bit stolen over the years, some right off the trucks, some from employees – trusted ones, too," President Dan Hanson says. "It's tough when you have to protect against people not only stealing equipment off of your trucks, but people who work for you who you trust with keys to your facility."

In addition to adding alarms and video surveillance, Hanson eliminated

insurance incentives?

Insurance is a business of risk, explains Andrew Mauschbaugh, assistant vice president of loss control for Hortica, an Edwardsville, Ill.-based green industry insurance provider. "If you have a high rate of equipment theft, you'll continue to have increased rates and possibly even have the threat of being dropped."

Those repercussions, which can affect operating costs and the bottom line, should be enough to get any landscape contractor asking how he or she can minimize equipment loss. Often, insurance companies require certain loss control methods; a common example is a highly detailed equipment inventory. In some cases, carriers offer incentives for businesses that take steps to protect their property. Contractors should check with their agents or insurers to see if they are eligible for adjusted deductibles or reduced premiums to reflect use of anti-theft devices or theft-preventive measures.

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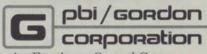
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all keys to the facility by installing an electronic card access system. The system logs every time a person enters the building and identifies his name, time, date and point of entry. For added protection, some storage areas require card access, too. For example, SCLM has one irrigation technician who works on Saturdays. He is authorized to enter the facility and the irrigation storage area, but not the rest of the building. "I can assign a card to anyone and control what doors they can get in and out of and when," Hanson says. The system also logs when an unauthorized user attempts to access a restricted area. Another perk: If an employee who has a set of keys is let go, Hanson doesn't spend \$400 getting new locks on all the doors.

"This has 100 percent eliminated the problems that we previously had with employees removing property after hours and on the weekends," Hanson says. "You can't watch every single employee. There are a couple of bad apples in every bunch and sometimes they just can't resist temptation."

SCLM spent about \$50,000 for its entire security system, including alarms, surveillance and the card access system, which accounted for about \$12,000 of that total.

44% of landscape contractors have had equipment stolen from maintenance vehicles/sites

MAINTENANCE: MOVING TARGETS.

Before 2005, Nature Scapes of Lilburn, Ga., lost "a few pieces of equipment" per year to theft. In the spring of that year, rampant theft

plagued landscape contractors in metro Atlanta and Nature Scapes lost more than \$22,000 worth of equipment, including one truck that was stolen from a residence at an upscale gated community. Other Atlanta-area contractors experienced more severe situations, including armed robbery. Police suspected the offender was a theft ring that shipped stolen landscape equipment out of the state or even out of the country. "There were people going around stealing from full landscaping crews at gunpoint," says Rick Upchurch, president of Nature Scapes. "They pistol-whipped people to give up their equipment.

Officials at the Metro Atlanta Landscape & Turf Association (MAL-TA) called an emergency meeting.

As a result, Nature Scapes reevaluated its loss-prevention policy, altering some procedures, educating employees

LOSS PREVENTION TACTICS:

SIMPLE TIPS AND SAVVY TECH

oss control plans are often an afterthought – companies don't impose preventive measures until they've been hid hard – or repeatedly – by office intruders, blower bandits or lawnmower larcenists.

Just like any business challenge, there are simple, low-cost measures as well as high-tech, big-ticket solutions to combat equipment theft. Loss prevention is no different. Below we've indicated a low-cost, easy-to-implement measure and a high-tech solution for five major equipment theft challenges.

CHALLENGE: Internal Theft

Simple Tip: Limit the number of keys issued to employees. "Exercise the same care with keys as you would with a thousand dollar bill," the Small Business Administration advises in its publication "Curtailing Crime." Keep a close record of keys you distribute, so you're sure which ones have been issued to whom. Consider creating a system where only the most trusted individuals are issued keys and those folks rotate opening/closing up shop. When keys are lost or employees leave the company without returning them, change all locks. Avoid using master keys and only have one key and lock for outside doors and a different key and lock for your office. COST: \$0 to \$500

Savvy Tech: Eliminate all keys by installing an electronic access-control system, like a card-access system. Such security systems allow business owners to dictate who is authorized to enter a building and when. It's also possible to set up different internal access points, admitting or denying access to various storage areas or offices. All entrance information is tracked and recorded, so the administrator can see who entered the building – or attempted to – at any time. Also, when a card-bearing employee leaves the company, his card is simply deactivated – no need to re-key the entire facility.

COST: \$2,000+

CHALLENGE: Building Security

Simple Tip: Lighting plays an important role in the security of any building – darkness buys criminals time. According to insurance provider CNA, outside lighting should be provided within 20 feet of the main entrance, around dark areas (back and side doors, windows, etc.) and in exterior storage areas. Illuminate interior areas easily visible from outside the building, which allows police and pedestrians to see suspicious activity. Also beware of trees, shrubs and trash bins that could provide hiding spaces or "ladders" for would-be intruders. COST: \$500+

Savvy Tech: A variety of commercial security systems are on the market from local and national security companies. These can include a combination of any of the following: alarm systems, closed-circuit television, video surveillance, perimeter security systems and others. **COST:** \$1,000+

continued on page 76





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LOSS PREVENTION TACTICS:

continued from page 74

and boosting security at its facility.
"There's a different mind-set here
now," Upchurch says. "After going
through that, I think about theft daily."

For example, the company incorporated theft-prevention reminders into its weekly safety meetings. "A lot of it is educating your guys to let them know they're being watched every minute," Upchurch says. "The thieves are professionals. It's a crime of opportunity. They're watching and waiting on you to walk out of sight."

A negligence policy also is now in effect. An employee who's responsible for a piece of equipment being stolen (i.e., not locking it up), is required to pay for the loss. "If employees have to buy one blower, they'll learn."

To further boost equipment security, Nature Scapes improved the locks it uses to secure equipment. The cost of a lock jumped from about \$15 to \$50. "But it's worth it," Upchurch says. "We haven't had anything stolen off of the trucks since."

Also, in 2005 the company began replacing open, ramp-bed trucks with box trucks, which start at more than \$25,000. "We switched out about six trucks to enclosed ones," Upchurch says. "We have 25 or 30 more to go. As we buy new trucks, we'll buy enclosed ones."

SCLM Co. used to average a piece or two of stolen equipment per quarter, but nothing has been stolen off of a maintenance truck since the company began using trimmer and blower racks. The three-trap trimmer racks cost between \$250 and \$300; blower racks cost about \$100 each. The racks also provide damage control. SCLM spends 25 percent less on repairs since it installed the racks. In addition, SCLM uses ½-inch chain and padlocks to secure mowers, which cost less than \$50 per truck.

Upchurch, the current president of MALTA, says the organization promotes one particular piece of advice to all contractors for the purpose of thwarting this growing problem: "Don't buy equipment from guys you don't know," Upchurch says. "If you can't verify the serial numbers – that's hot stuff. If you're buying it, all you're doing is creating the atmosphere that causes the problem."

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For a list of common insurance and theft terms defined, visit the March Online Extras section.

CHALLENGE: Deterring Worksite Equipment Theft

Simple Tip: Shiny new equipment is more frequently targeted by thieves than the old, beat-up kind. Consider making equipment unattractive by painting it bright colors to discourage theft. Although paint is a temporary solution, by the time it wears off the tool won't be shiny and new – and thus attractive to a thief – anymore.

COST: Labor plus paint required to mark up equipment

Savvy Tech: Manufacturers, outdoor power equipment dealers and other aftermarket suppliers provide a plethora of anti-theft devices for landscape equipment (primarily construction machines). These systems include ignition locks, "smart keys" and fuel-cut-off or air-supply cut-off devices, which inhibit a machine's ability to be started by an unauthorized user. **COST:** \$500+

CHALLENGE: Inventory Management

Simple Tip: Insurance providers and police recommend keeping an updated record of every piece of equipment in a company's inventory. The record, often managed by the firm's mechanic or fleet supervisor, should include the type of equipment, manufacturer name, model number, serial/VIN/PIN number, license plate number (if applicable), date of purchase, receipt and a current photograph for identification purposes. Having this complete information at your fingertips will help expedite any insurance settlement and improve the chance for recovery. COST: Labor to create the document

Savvy Tech: Inventory management software tracks equipment serial numbers, maintenance, values, photos and other pertinent equipment details. This type of system also easily allows equipment owners (especially heavy equipment) to store their property information on a national database like the National Equipment Registry (www.nerusa.com), which police use to check the ownership of suspicious equipment. COST: \$500+

CHALLENGE: Equipment Identification and Tracking

Simple Tip: Engraving or stamping equipment with identifying marks is a simple measure all contractors should take if they're not already, insurance providers say. One added tip: "You want the marks to be in two spots," says Andrew Mauschbaugh, Hortica's assistant vice president of loss control. "You want a mark that you can see when you drive by and also a hidden marker. If the thief gets rid of the obvious one, they'll likely not find the hidden one."

COST: About \$25 plus labor to engrave equipment

Savvy Tech: Tracking devices, which have been used successfully for a number of years on vehicles, also can be appropriate for landscape construction equipment. After all, skid-steers are one of the most frequently stolen pieces of heavy equipment among all contracting trades. There are several forms of technology available, including GPS and radio-frequency tracking.

COST: \$500+ per machine

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USE READER SERVICE #61

For long-term success, being vigilant about quality control is crucial for landscape contractors. Lawn & Landscape Message Board participants troubleshoot ways to ensure that quality remains No. 1.

Seal Of Deal O

ne of the pitfalls of growing a landscape company is the loss of quality control.

Business owners, who once had direct contact with and oversight of each job site, must entrust managers and crew leaders to maintain the landscape company's quality standards and practices. It's a concept that is sound in theory but, as many landscape contractors discover, very weak in practice.

Why does quality so often suffer, Lawn & Landscape Message Board participants debated recently and how can this obstacle be overcome?

Ronald Barnhardt, president of Barnhardt Landscape in Rockwell, N.C., faces the same dilemma. The owner of a small but growing landscape firm, he can no longer be in the field as frequently as he once had. Lately, despite his best efforts to counter it, the quality of his crews' work has slipped.

"I've attempted to keep the quality of work at a high level," Barnhardt posts. "But I am losing control. It is impossible for me to go to all of the

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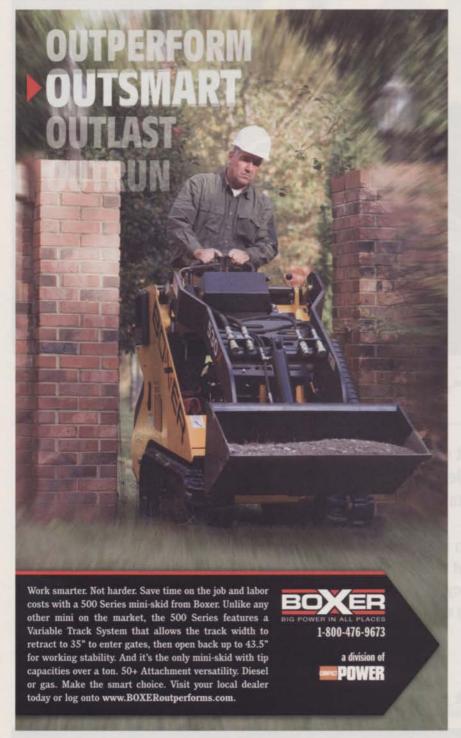
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properties to follow up on crews. How do I get control of quality?"

When employees don't perform to high standards it is often a reflection of a failure in training, some landscape contractors offer.

"Who's doing your training? You?" posts Matthew Schattner, owner of Mat'z Snow & Lawn in Kansasville, Wis., "Are there inconsistencies from other trainers that you're using? Or, are your employees simply becoming too lax about quality standards?"

Poor training seemed a logical answer for deficiencies in job quality. However, some contractors offered that this may be a communication problem and the quality standards needed to be re-evaluated. Setting extremely high standards sets up



quality control or a budget

otivating employees to consistently produce quality work is not always easy for small-sized landscape contractors, who often do not have the resources to exercise expensive motivation strategies.

There is, however, a way for the small-sized business owner to offer financial incentives to employees for quality work, according to the National Federation of Independent Business.

During the annual budgeting process, some service companies – such as landscape firms – set aside funds to pay for mistakes, site repair work or warranty work that corrects improper installations.

In these cases, the NFIB suggests a sure-fire quality-control program can be implemented by offering to share with employees any unused budgeted funds. Employees, knowing there is a financial reward available, will work more effectively and place greater care on the quality of their work throughout the year.

It is important, though, for the owner to spell out the potential reward and to eliminate any false expectations among employees. For example, if a contractor budgets \$5,000 a year for warranty work, make that amount known and explain how it could be distributed equally to workers at year's end.

The results of this reward program can be far-reaching, according to the NFIB. Since the money was budgeted to be spent anyway, distributing this money to employees costs the company nothing. Also, not only are employees more motivated to achieve excellence in their work, but there will also be greater customer satisfaction. In the short term, this will increase sales; in the long term, it can improve word-of-mouth referrals.

workers for failing in that they can never achieve the level established by the owner.

"When it comes to quality control problems, most of the time I've done a poor job of communicating with employees what the company's expectations are (for them or for a particular project)," posts Michael LaPorte, president of Commercial Scapes in Bristow, Va. "It is important to get the foreman or manager to see what you see."

Some contractors say quality control is a personnel issue and that

"The foreman should be held accountable for the work. Don't be afraid to let the problem people go. You just can't tolerate anything less than excellent quality."

– Kory Ballard

sometimes an owner doesn't have the right leaders, those conscious of quality-control issues, in charge of maintenance or construction crews.

"I would take a close look at your employees and really figure out what the problem is," says Kory Ballard, owner of Perficut Lawn & Landscape in Des Moines, Iowa. "The foreman should be held accountable for the work. Don't be afraid to let the problem people go. You just can't tolerate anything less than excellent quality."

SMART HIRING. Employees do play a major role in delivering high-quality landscape services to clients. However, landscape contractor Michael Lysiak, owner of Lysiak Enterprises in Johnstown, N.Y., posts he has had difficulty finding a maintenance crew leader or a foreman who can keep up productivity and quality standards.

Paying a competitive wage is a good starting point for securing a quality job-site leader, contractors post. In fact, quality control, contractors say, boils down to having skilled, quality-conscious foremen and site managers in place to lead work crews and ensure company standards.

On average, landscape contractors pay their foremen annual salaries of \$31,077, according to *Lawn &* Landscape's 2006 State of the Industry report. The greatest variance in foremen salaries, though, is seen between landscape firms earning less than \$200,000 in gross sales (\$25,576 in annual salary) and those earning more than \$200,000 in gross sales (\$33,076 in annual salary), the findings show.

However, once employed, an owner's ability to retain quality workers, both inside and outside the green industry, remains increasingly difficult. For example, 49 percent of employers indicated they implemented special employee-retention strategies in 2006, up from 35 percent in 2004, according to a Society for Human Resource Management study.

The best employee-retention strategies, cited by human resource



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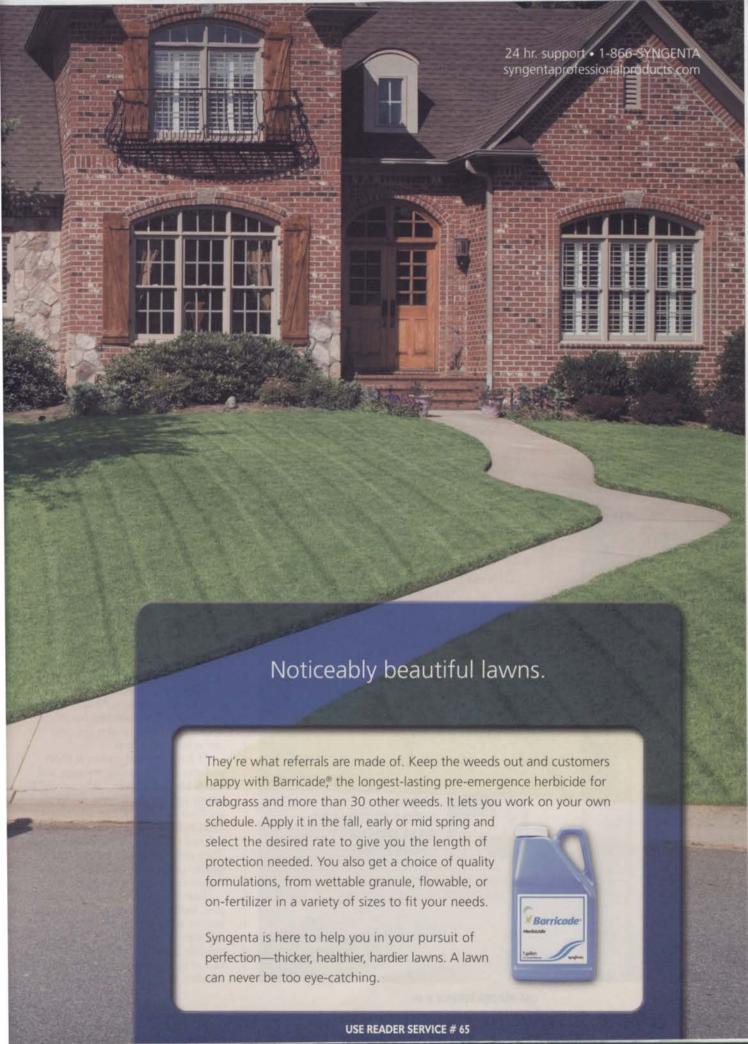
Root development

Nutrient efficiency

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Stress tolerance





professionals in the SHRM study, were promoting qualified employees, offering competitive merit increases and salary adjustments and providing career-development opportunities.

Coincidentally, the top reasons employees left their employers were better compensation, better career opportunities and dissatisfaction with their career development path, according to the SHRM study.

Financial compensation plays a vital role in retaining a quality foreman or site supervisor, contractors say.

"Figure out a way to pay him a good salary year-round," posts Jamie Bush, president of Jamie's Lawn Service in Plano, Texas. "You can cut back on a laborer's hours and he may leave, but you can replace him. But come spring, you need to know the foreman is going to be there."

A good rule of thumb, some contractors post, is to pay them the amount they could be making if they were doing the jobs themselves. If a good foreman can do all of the tasks on his own, what is the incentive to stay at another contractor's company? Consistent pay and a rewarding job experience will win out, they post.

However, while a sound principle, Schattner argues that providing quality pay does not always ensure loyalty.

"Last year I had a really good employee all summer and through the winter," Schattner posts. "We had a bad drought last year, but I kept him busy doing stuff I really could have handled myself because I wanted to keep him in the money. I did my best to keep him, but when a factory job offering \$11 an hour to start came along he took it. The moral to the story is that sometimes you can do everything possible to keep a good employee, but in the end it all boils down to luck."

EMPLOYEE EVALUATION. Employee evaluation is another important step in maintaining quality control standards, posts Chad Stern, owner of Mowing & More, Chevy Chase, Md.

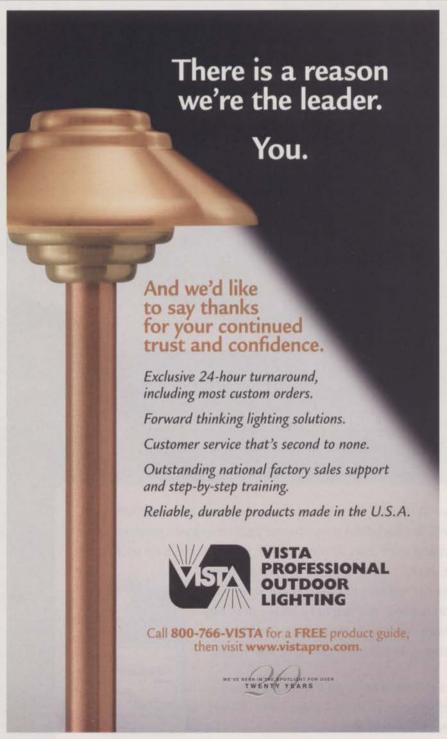
"Being a good manager of good people yields good results," Stern says. "Work on hiring an awesome field foreman who runs a tight ship and does not let anybody get out of line. Your foreman will be able to ensure quality and efficiency if he is good at what he does and if he has a good crew and good equipment to match."

When a completed job does not meet his expectations, Andrew Aksar, president of Outdoor Finishes in Walkersville, Md., makes the crew tear it out and redo it.

"I don't vell and ser

"I don't yell and scream at them and stand there waving my arms and hands like a mad man," Aksar says. "I calmly explain the flaws and why they are flaws and I calmly explain that we must redo. And I help in tearing it out and I help in getting them started. They either learn to have my eye for quality or they tell everyone I'm the biggest (expletive) and they quit."

Barnhardt, who made the original post, believes his quality control issue is more of an attitude problem. "Guys just want to get it done as quickly as possible. It may be that I should look first at the managers doing the training then at the crew leaders."



USE READER SERVICE # 66

PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPE DESIGN

march/april 2007

inside

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From Design to Implementation

Creating Walls with Interest

Top 3 Plant Trends of 2007

Natural Talent®

Scapes' Jim Lesti creates sleek, yet sensible, designs.

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natural talent

Scapes' Jim Lesti creates sleek, yet sensible, designs.

Natural but polished. This look defines the landscapes designed by Jim Lesti, senior landscape architect and creative design director for Scapes in Marietta, Ga. His sophisticated, eye-catching creations certainly are derived from his own artistry and inspiration, but they're influenced in a way by a brand, a look for which Scapes is known.

"I don't think I'd ever sacrifice the Scapes look," Lesti says. "The minute I thought my design wouldn't look like a Scapes design and would become mediocre, I don't think we'd be the right company for the job. Sometimes that happens."

The Scapes look he speaks of is organic but tidy – large plants for instant impact and sweeping, curvilinear bed lines and tight groundcovers for a finished feel. This look is embraced in the landscape-savvy Atlanta market. "People here are well-traveled," Lesti says. "They've seen bad design and good design and they appreciate spending the money for a good company with good designers."

Lesti has a handle on design preferences in various markets – he's worked in four of them. Fresh out of college, he joined a Brickman design/build branch in Philadelphia. After two years there, he made the switch to a design-only firm. "I wanted to try to get both sides of things," Lesti says. The transition to a Pittsburgh-area design house was a drastic one. "It was very urban, very commercial. I realized I enjoyed designing 'people spaces." After moving back to Cleveland and into a design/build role at The Pattie Group for a few years, Lesti had an itch to move south. In 1997 he landed at Lifescapes, which became Scapes, where he works today.

In addition to achieving a certain "look" and staying within budget, balancing form and function is a challenge Lesti takes seriously. Aesthetics are important, he says, but making the most

By Marisa Palmieri / Associate Editor







USE READER SERVICE # 67

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professional profile

of a homeowner's space should be No. 1. "I feel that architects are so far ahead of us in designing spaces for people's use," Lesti says. Residential architects analyze how people spend their time and move around their houses. "As landscape architects we need to do the same thing outside. We need to ask, 'How are people using these outdoor living spaces?" Designers shouldn't merely specify an outdoor grill, he says, but should consider incorporating counter and buffet space to create cooking stations. They should create pools that accommodate sunning areas and shade structures, possibly with ceiling fans.

At Scapes, one way Lesti and his colleagues foster a design dialogue and share ideas is with an annual design tour in the early spring. "I think the No. 1 mistake designers make is never going back into the field to see what they've designed," Lesti says. "If you don't go out and see how it turned out, how do you really know it was a good design? You don't know what plant combinations look good, what types of paving or what size spaces look good unless you go out there and see the space."

Each Scapes designer has at least one property he or she designed the previous year on the tour. This process, which allows designers to review each other's work, has become as much about reinvigorating the group's enthusiasm as it is about technical takeaways, Lesti says. "It makes people get excited again. You get to see each other's ideas and take home their creative outflow. You come back in the office and say, 'What we do is pretty cool.' You can really learn from others."

What, then, has he learned from these experiences?

"As I grow in my career," Lesti says, "I'm realizing that most of the time the best designs are very simple – elegant yet bold." PLD

SCALING BACK WITHOUT SACRIFICING YOUR VISION

One of a designer's greatest challenges is striking a balance between his or her vision for a client's



property and the budget. "A lot of times you start out with the Cadillac of designs and you know in the back of your head it's going to have to be scaled back," says Jim Lesti, senior landscape architect for Scapes, Marietta, Ga. While he affirms he'd never compromise the integrity of his design or Scapes' standards, he says there are several things a

designer can do to find a middle ground with clients.

Plan phases – Create a master plan with the intention to add arbors, fireplaces and other discretionary elements in several months or years.

Change materials – Augment a design's hardscape elements with more affordable materials, for example stamped concrete vs. stone.

Alter plant selection – Choose lower-cost species or consider reducing plant material size, especially if the client plans to be in the home for more than five years.

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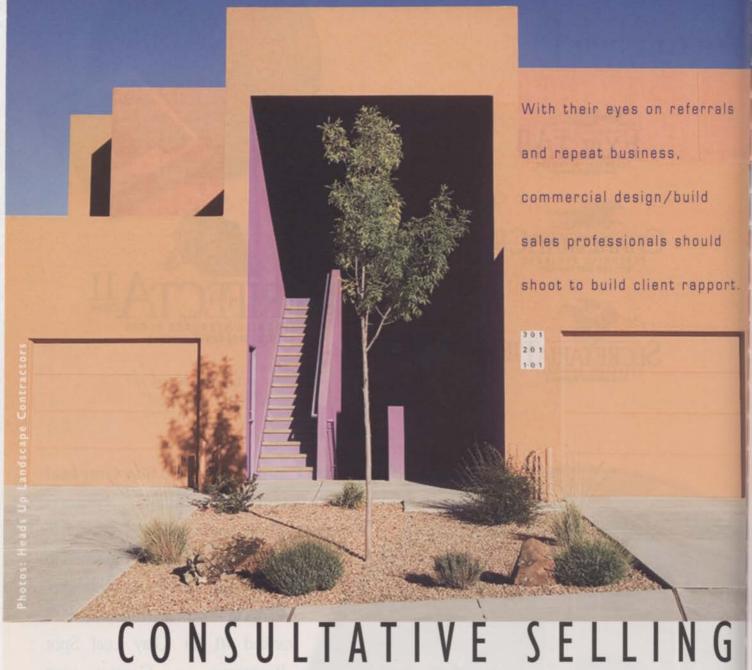


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By Marisa Palmieri / Associate Editor

All sales professionals welcome referrals and repeat busi-

ness. Qualified leads, little effort. What more could they ask for?

That's why in commercial landscape design/build sales, relationships are everything, says John Barringer, president of Barringer & Barringer, a Charlotte, N.C.-based landscape design/build and maintenance firm that prides itself on repeat business from major institutions like hospitals and museums.

Unlike residential projects, where designers typically deal with two decision makers (husband and wife), contractors designing commercial projects usually have one point of contact. There's a small chance they'll deal with an owner or board member but, likely, the details of a design/build project have been delegated down the chain of command to a

manager. This person must get the job done right, on time and on budget.

In this case, design and sales professionals should strive to make their commercial contacts look good. Return all messages promptly so they can report to their bosses on time. Educate them on achieving the look they're after within codes and regulations and, most importantly, help them hit their budgets.

And when the time comes for another design/build project or the contact knows of a colleague who's been assigned a similar task, who will reap the reward of referrals? The sales and design professional who made them look good. Hopefully, it's you.

GIVE THEM WHAT THEY NEED. "Many independent landscape architects will have a plan the
client likes, but it will be way over
budget, which is frustrating," says Gary
Mallory, president of Heads Up Landscape Contractors, Albuquerque, N.M.
"It needs to look great and be creative,
but you have to balance their budget
and get it approved for them."

HULC, which employs licensed landscape architects, has created a niche by capitalizing on these challenges. "You have to provide strong plans, on budget, in short time periods, ready for approval," says Mallory, citing his company's commercial design/build philosophy. More than 90 percent of HULC's construction division work comes from design/build jobs for developers, general contractors, architects and homeowners' associations.

Because many commercial clients require work to be completed as soon as possible, a quick design process is imperative. In Albuquerque, where landscape plans require city approval, HULC has studied the codes in addition to forging relationships within the local government to expedite the process.

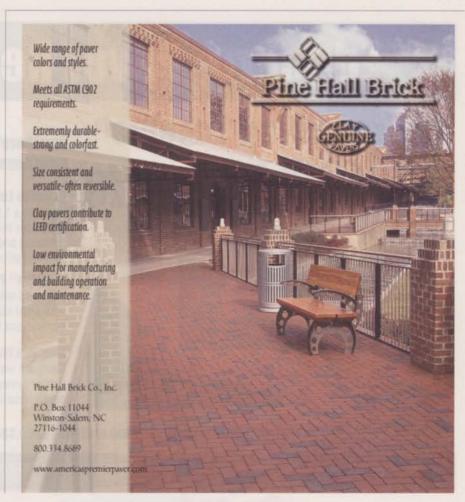
"Our goal is to really turn projects around," Mallory says. "In as short as a week they can have a set of plans."

HULC's emphasis on timeliness often affects what materials its designers will specify. "We design in things we know we can get right away – not something with a 12-week lead time," Mallory says, naming plant material and lighting components as two products in particular HULC is careful about. Companies can build this strategy over time by sending designers to vendor training sessions to create relationships and find out which materials are readily available. In addition, HULC, a \$14.2-million firm, has gotten to the size and volume where suppliers will stock materials for them.

Unlike residential projects, which require more emotional appeal and many meetings, commercial design/build can usually be sold with one or two client meetings and rigorous e-mail exchanging. "On commercial jobs, typically you meet there, take drawings and then do a lot of e-mailing back and forth," Barringer says. He stresses that business-to-business sales and design professionals should take a diplomatic approach, educating clients first and foremost and allowing them to ask questions. "You want to always



Contractors say design fees are easier to pass along in commercial sales. "Your clients tend to understand it's a business and it costs you to have a person on staff to do the design," John Barringer says. "Business people understand that you're going to charge them, they just want to know the information upfront so they can build it into their project."



USE READER SERVICE # 69

give them the opportunity to feel like their question is important."

However, it's equally important to be assertive and gather the information you need to prepare a plan as soon as possible. "Don't be afraid to ask, 'What are you allowed to spend on this?" Barringer says. "You can ferret that out in a diplomatic way. Time is money in design."

The need for a quick exchange is one reason many commercial contractors prefer CAD drawings to hand-drawn designs. "Frequently in commercial, clients will email us site and grading plans, we'll begin working on a design and send it to them for review," Mallory says. "It's much easier to do revisions with CAD, and it's a much more interactive design process."

Also, commercial clients may not value color renderings like homeowners do. "With commercial design, you frequently don't need to hand-color the designs because the client is used to looking at plans all day long," Mallory says. "We might do artistic, hand-

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For full-sized examples of SLM's proposals, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com.

colored renderings for public meetings."

Commercial design/build contractors have discovered that presentation of the cost is usually what matters most. "We get a lot of compliments on the way our proposals are presented and broken down," says John Biehler, co-owner of Suburban Landscape Management, Wichita, Kan. "We try to make it easy for customers to compare because we're not trying to hide anything." His company provides detailed proposals that

break down each aspect of a job, including component/materials prices, labor costs and warranty/guarantee information, in an easy-to-read format. The packet is presented in a three-ring binder, along with color copies of all plant material, hardscape and decorative elements and general company marketing pieces, including references.

While all of these pieces contribute to success in commercial design/build sales, contractors say providing clients with timely information is the key to closing sales and keeping customers coming back.

"Respect the people you're dealing with, give them the information they're seeking and respond appropriately," Barringer says. "Make them look good."

Sales professionals should aim to serve as a resource, rather than simply a salesperson, Barringer says. "You're trying to make sure the person has the information they need. That's what success is and what will make them trust you and go with you nine times out of 10." PLD

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USE READER SERVICE #70



TRANSLATING DESIGN

into implementation

By Mihaela Zaharescu & Jeff Suiter

As a landscape architect or designer, clearly communicating with general contractors is a necessity.

Here are some basic tips for improving that working

relationship.

Every great project starts with a good idea and a reliable team, and ends with a successful implementation. Landscape architects often serve as prime consultants on a project team and are expected to have the talent and foresight to administer drawings and deliver a design solution that portrays the owner's vision well within the budget. But the task of physically transforming the idea into reality falls upon the general contractors. How can this transition between idea and reality be as seamless as possible? EDSA, a planning and landscape architecture firm, offers the following tips for working with general contractors.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL. The landscape architect is responsible for accurately depicting the design ideas to the general contractor through drawings and specifications. It is imperative that the written specifications match all drawings and construction documents. The more clearly a landscape architect specifies every water feature, every planter, every light fixture and every retaining wall detail, the more obvious the design intent and objectives are to the general contractor. This is particularly true in the case when the general contractor does not get involved until 100 percent of the construction documents are issued. In this instance, a landscape architect who can anticipate the general contractor's questions to help simplify the RFI (request for information) process is very important. When this careful attention is paid prior to meeting with the general contractor, costly oversights, design shortcomings and construction errors can be eradicated.





Decorative fence drawing and final project. Photos: EDSA



THERE'S NO "I" IN TEAM. Another key to implementing a successful project is teamwork. The landscape architect and the general contractor are equally committed to providing the owner with the product promised in the drawings and contract, including quality standards, an appropriate timeline and well-maintained budget. A good general contractor will get to know the landscape architect and understand his or her vision. A good landscape architect cannot expect a general contractor to immediately interpret and relate to his or her needs, but should welcome the general contractor's ideas and insight to ensure the vision is shared. Likewise, during construction, the best projects are built when the landscape architect monitors the implementation of his or her design with high regard for the general contractor and subcontractors' expertise. Landscape architects should welcome questions and discussions regarding details that are unclear or site conditions that change. This can produce a more attractive, yet cost effective result. Regular meetings and frequent visits to the site in the company of the general contractor can also ensure a smooth construction phase. Good teamwork makes the construction phase as efficient as possible.

ESTABLISH HIERARCHY. Besides reinforcing a good working atmosphere, establishing the team's hierarchy in the earliest stages of the construction effort and determining all points of reference is wise. When problems arise, the entire team should be cognizant of the chain of command on the jobsite. Regardless of how smoothly a project is running or how well a team is working together, all communication must be catalogued, and records should be kept accurate and up-to-date.

The nature of each project implementation is dependant on the design firm's niche, the construction delivery method, and the individual contract. But if the landscape architect is fortunate enough to get the general contractor involved early, communicates well and institutes teamwork, everyone will benefit. Relationships created now are relationships that outlast one construction project. Every landscape architect/general contractor relationship is different, but as with any business endeavor, a little respect goes a long way. PLD

The authors are senior associate and vice president at EDSA, respectively, and have 25 years of landscape design experience combined. EDSA, with headquarters in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and offices in Orlando, Los Angeles, Baltimore and Beijing, China, is a full-service planning, landscape architectural, and urban and graphic design firm with more than 220 employees. Reach the company at 954/524-3330 or via www.edsaplan.com.



USE READER SERVICE #71





CREATING WALLS WITH INTEREST

With the need for retaining and freestanding walls on the rise, designers should take a careful look at the color, material and wall forms they're specifying.

> Transforming an unfit yard or commercial property into an optimal outdoor space is often not achieved without the construction of some type of wall, whether it's a retaining wall or freestanding wall. Traditionally, these structures were installed because they had to be - usually for erosion control purposes.

> Today, there's a greater need for maximizing usable yard space thanks to America's ever-decreasing residential property sizes. Both retaining and freestanding walls are being installed all over, adding architectural interest, creating pathways and planting areas and changing backyards into private outdoor retreats.

> A home design trends survey conducted in 2006 by the American Institute of Architects indicates that lot sizes are shrinking, but homeowners are using their properties more intensely. Thirty percent of residential architects report an increase in formal lot boundaries, including walls. "It makes sense that with a smaller lot you need to use it differently and improve it better than if you have a big property," says the AIA's Chief Economist Kermit Baker. "That's why we're seeing an increase in formal lot boundaries and upscale landscaping."

> Becky Felling, director of marketing for Keystone Retaining Wall Systems, Minneapolis, says property owners are installing walls for both practical reasons and aesthetics. "More and more they're used for both form and function," she says. "In many middle-end homes where there's a lot of cookie-cutter designs, it's one thing homeowners do to set themselves apart from their neighbors. On the West Coast, however, there's just not flat, buildable land. Retaining walls are a necessity to make backyards more usable for families."

> Manufacturers say they've seen a surge among commercial properties, too. Restaurants, in particular, are interested in creating patios and eating areas." They like to give boundaries to their seating areas," says Nancy Johnson, landscape product manager for Anchor Wall Systems, Minnetonka, Minn.



By Marisa Palmieri / Associate Editor

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Whatever the purpose of the wall, landscape architects and designers should strive for creativity in wall design. Not only is there a greater selection of materials available for use now, but the HGTV phenomenon will only increase homeowner's awareness of what the Joneses are building next door.

"There are more options available," says landscape designer Diane Bloom of Bloom Gardens in Richmond, Calif. "You can offer clients so much more with retaining walls. You can incorporate flagstone benches or flat surfaces for plants and pots."

NATURALIZER. Walls are constructed from a variety of materials including stone, timber, poured concrete or manufactured concrete blocks, often referred to as segmental retaining wall systems (SRWs).

The function of a wall should be a designer's first consideration when selecting a material. Budget and aesthetics should follow. "The nature of what you're trying to retain will dictate what material you'll use," says Andy White, president and landscape designer, Wayside Landscape Services, Ashville, N.C. Often, retaining walls more than 4 feet tall require approval by an engineer; anything less than 4 feet is probably a cosmetic element like a garden wall, he explains.

While it's not necessarily a new trend, consumers continue to request natural – or natural-looking – materials when it comes to retaining and freestanding wall design.

Natural stone is often the product of choice, and the specific types of stone clients prefer is largely based on the region where they live. Native stone is popular not only because it typically blends well with an area's landscape and architectural styles, but it also eliminates the high cost of shipping in materials from outside the region.

Not only are stone walls aesthetically desirable, they're extremely reliable when they're properly designed and constructed. Although they're the most expensive option, ranging in price from \$55 to \$75 per finished face foot, they're built to last "lifetimes," contractors say.

"There are natural stone walls still standing that the Romans built," White points out. Because budget is always one of clients' top concerns, White says designers should consider longevity before they help their clients select a material.

Consumers are often attracted to the warm, rustic appearance of wooden retaining walls (commonly constructed from pressure-treated lumber) and their tendency to be inexpensive, starting at about \$15 per finished face foot. Depending on the type of material used and climate, these walls may have to be replaced in 15 years, contractors say. "Over the course of a person's life they may have to replace it several times," White says. "If they would have put in a masonry wall it would have lasted their whole life."

A third option for retaining and freestanding walls is manufactured concrete block-based products, which range in price from about \$15 to \$40 per finished face foot. Designers once lamented SRWs, introduced as an affordable alternative to stone, for their institutional, "parking garage" look. Manufacturers have responded with increasingly natural-looking products over the years.

"They're adding a lot of color to the mix so it looks more like stone, blocks are tumbled or distressed in some way so they look more natural," White says. "I expect that trend to continue."

Shape and color have been the manufacturers' focus. In addition, many of these products are now available for use as free-standing units.

"Our newest shapes have been much softer, whereas a traditional concrete product was hard-angled with a sharp-looking edge," says Anchor Wall's Johnson. "We've also had requests for products with multiple face widths and heights. It's more similar to natural stone, which comes in lots of different sizes."

Keystone's Felling agrees. "What's really come about over the last five years is the antiqued tumbled look," she says. "Homeowners in the middle end want the natural-stone look, but most can't afford a \$50,000 wall in the backyard."

In addition to a push for the natural, designers are adding a variety of upscale elements like lighting, columns and caps as another way to provide a well-designed, finished look.

Any way designers can stylize a stone or concrete wall will add interest for the client. "If you can do a job with some artistic value, you can create a niche," Bloom says. "And that's better advertising for you." PLD

COLORCUES

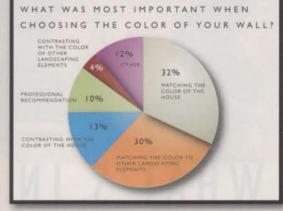
olor is one of the most sensitive considerations when it comes to retaining and freestanding wall design, says Andy White, landscape designer and president of Wayside Landscape Services, Asheville, N.C.

"I think the customer should be very involved in color choice," White says. "Choosing the color for them would be like trying to pick the color of someone's house. If you pick it and they don't like it, you're in trouble."

White selects color by complementing an existing element of the property, usually an architectural feature. Because he believes the customer should have a major say in the decision, he narrows down a few options

and presents those to the client.

"We use some samples, but there's a limit to how many you can haul around," White notes. "Probably the best approach is to try to find a wall or project that has the color you're interested in and go see the product in place if you can." White also says designers can take their clients down to the supply yard. Initially, seeing the product's full color blend



Note: Percentages don't equal 100 due to rounding.

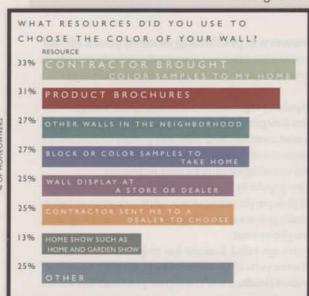
on a pallet is preferable to just grabbing one brick and taking it to a meeting.

> In 2006, Anchor Wall Systems, a Minnetonka, Minn.-based manufacturer of segmental retaining wall systems, conducted research that sheds some light on the topic of how homeowners select retaining wall colors. Anchor Wall's advertising agency surveyed homeowners in 38 states who had hired a landscape contractor in the past year. The results show that consumers consider matching the color of the house as the most important factor affecting color choice.

> Another interesting finding: 58 percent of homeowners said they made a product choice in the planning phase before hiring a contractor.

HOW CONSUMERS CHOOSE PRODUCT I. OVERALL STYLE 2. COLOR 3. PRICE 4. TEXTURE 5. CONTRACTOR RECOMMENDATION 6. RECOMMENDATION OF A FRIEND 7. RECOMMENDATION OF A STORE

Charts: Anchor Wall Systems



Note: Multiple responses allowed.



WHAT'S IN FOR 2007

New plant trends include perennials, cut flower gardens and a minimalist look.

One considerable challenge for growers is predicting several years ahead of time what the trends in the garden will be and how homeowners' tastes may change in the near future. But there are a few trends we're seeing that growers have been able to respond to overwhelmingly.

THE POWER OF PERENNIALS. The popularity of perennials continues to gather strength - and we're seeing people move them from the borders of their gardens to containers, featuring them throughout their patio area and garden space. Historically, most containers were filled with annuals for easy, instant color. But now it seems that designers and homeowners are looking for innovative containers with more foliage textures and colors, dramatic shapes and cascading varieties for hanging planters.

Echinacea (coneflowers) have taken on a new popularity recently. What were once just available in pink or lavender, Echinacea now come in bright pink, purple, yellow, orange, white, pale green and wine. There are also dwarf varieties available. Additionally, growers are breeding Echinacea for more fragrance, with some varieties having a sweet mango or raspberry scent.

A fabulous cranesbill introduced a few years ago called Rozanne has re-ignited the interest in geraniums with its showy blue flowers that in some parts of the country bloom virtually year-round. Heucheras (coralbells) and Heucherellas (hybrids of Heuchera and Tiarella) are perennials that are en-

An example of a minimalist garden using Picea spiral. Photo: Monrovia

By Nicholas Staddon

joying a renewed interest, as well. In recent years, growers have introduced varieties with leaf colors like bronze, marmalade, crimson, variegated, and bright yellow or lime with deep magenta crow's feet designs. These plants love dappled shade and are ideal for brightening up shady spots in the garden or in a container on the patio. Because many of the Heuchera have dark red foliage, in a mass planting be careful not to create a black hole in a shady spot; mix the brights with the darker varieties.

MIGRATING PLANTS. Another trend we're seeing is homeowners wanting to utilize the plants in their gardens for cut flowers, migrating the plants indoors. Yet they don't want to be limited to the usual roses, tulips and daisies. Woody ornamentals last a long time in an arrangement and bring a great new look. Some varieties of Forsythia, for example, look lovely in an arrangement, as they were developed with quarter-sized flowers that grow all the way down the stem. The Fantasy™ series of Symphoricarpos (snowberry) has extra large and numerous berries that also last longer in a cut arrangement. Additionally, dramatic foliage looks impressive in an arrangement. Large variegated Canna leaves are stunning in a large vase - especially when placed in front of a light so the foliage becomes almost translucent.

MINIMALIST GARDENS. Gardens with a sleek, architectural prominence are definitely in demand. They tend to have a heavy emphasis on hardscapes of stone, wood and concrete with bold architectural plants incorporated. Water features, sculpture and containers are important in the minimalist garden; and plants, while fewer in numbers, are actually highlighted and add drama. As Asian gardens have always illustrated, we are more likely to notice a plant's stunning attributes when it is not competing against scores of other plants for attention.

Growers are introducing new varieties that work in the minimalist garden like dwarf varieties that are well suited to containers, new types of shrubs and trees with a tidy habit and dramatic architectural plants that can be a focal point in



A colorful perennial - Heuchera Peachy Keen. Photo: Monrovia

the modern garden. Architectural plants tend to have large leaves, interesting foliage, a strong and distinctive shape and really make a bold statement in the landscape.

Trees in a minimalist garden tend to have a more upright habit, so they become a structural element. Their canopies are not too large, and there may be several in a row to create a hedge effect. The new Crimson Pointe™ Purple Leaf Plum is a columnar-shaped variety that stands out when a few are planted in an allée to draw the view toward a focal point.

Containers are a standard in the minimalist garden, often with just a single neat and tidy

plant, like a topiary or a trimmed boxwood, or an upright plant chosen for its drama, such as Phormium, Yucca, Agave or Cordyline.

Phormium evergreens have clump-forming foliage and grow from 18 inches to 4 feet. They're tough and happy in a range of conditions, from tropical to cool and full sun to light shade. There are many new varieties with a range of foliage color from reds and deep purples to golden greens.

We're seeing a growing demand for Cordylines. These tropical-looking plants have sword-like leaves that can reach up to 3 feet. They make great specimens for the architectural look and do well in containers.

Yuccas create a sleek, architectural look and are ideal in drought conditions. Their tough, sword-shaped leaves, topped by tall stalks of whitish flower clusters in the summer, make a striking silhouette.

We've seen a significant increase in sales of Agaves in the past few years. They have large clumps of fleshy, strap-shaped leaves that range from twisty and curly to thick and spiky. There's a new variety out this year called Spot - with shiny green leaves and dark purple spots. Another popular variety is the Octopus Agave vilmoriniana, aptly named for its light bluish green color and wide curling, twisting leaves that make it look like an octopus.

Topiary shapes are very eye-catching in the minimalist garden and are in high demand. The latest shapes feature special forms that combine traditional topiary shapes, such as squares with spirals and poodles and cones. We've seen the demand for espaliers increase as well. Espalier fruit trees like quince and ornamental pear look great against a stark, painted wall.

Shrubs that maintain a tidy appearance, such as dwarf Pittosporum or boxwood, are also suited to the modern garden. PLD

The author is director of new plants, Monrovia Growers.



The extra large berries of Symphoricarpos Charming Fantasy add interest to indoor arrangements. Photo: Monrovia

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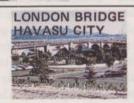


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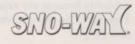
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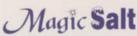
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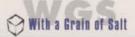












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While horsepower helps, serviceability and location of key components are essential in choosing a new engine.

ichard Cafaro always tries to get the largest horsepower on an engine, whether it's a walk-behind or zero-turn. But it's not the engine's most important attribute, says the president of LMS Co., of Allison Park, Pa. "I don't know that you can ever have too much power on a mower," he says. "When you look at the costs associated with upsizing the engine, having more horsepower costs little per dollar considering the overall investment."

For Cafaro and contractors like him, serviceability, location,

factors in choosing an engine that suits their needs than horsepower alone. Adding horsepower to zip around a property just won't cut it. "You have to be careful weighing out speed as part of the equation," Cafaro says. "While you'd like to get the work done as quickly as possible, the property still has to look great when you're finished."

Contractors spend plenty of money on new engines, Lawn & Landscape's 2006 State of the Industry research reveals. In the last 12 months, 12 percent of contractors bought new engines, while 8.8 percent plan to do so in the next 12 months. On average, contractors spend nearly \$2,000 a year on engines. Increases in productivity, efficiency and quality are the challenges that will always be there, says Doug Page, director of marketing for Milwaukee-based Briggs & Stratton. "Let's say I have a fleet of 10 mowers. Every year, those 10 mowers need to perform more than they did last year... and probably because my expenses may be going up my margins aren't going up as fast," Page says. "So the question is — 'How can I do more with the same amount of machines and people?'"

by mark phillips | associate editor



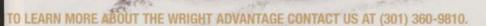
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THE HORSEPOWER RACE. "Higher horsepower engines themselves are not that important," Page says. "They only become important in the mower manufacturer's engineering and the engine's engineering departments, where we make sure the engine, the deck size, machine size, cut quality - all those things are in balance, so when a dealer sells to a contractor, the contractor ultimately is more productive, regardless of machine size.

Manufacturers are nevertheless involved in the "horsepower race," says Rich Koehl, director of marketing and quality for Kohler, Wis.-based Kohler Engines. Manufacturers continue "trying to squeeze the most horsepower out of the smallest frame. People are trying to keep under that magic 1 liter," Koehl says. "So you have frame sizes that go up to 999 cc's." The reason manufacturers stay below the magic 1 liter figure is there are additional regulatory compliances, Koehl says. "You have other emissions and regulatory aspects that come into play. Mainly, lots of governmentdriven emissions items.'

The best indicator for the type of engine required is dictated by the jobs the contractor needs to complete, Page says. "Regardless of engine size,

it's always a matter of keeping with what the customer is trying to accomplish," he says. "Usually our customers are seeking more productivity, easier maintenance and the ability to have quality of cut in all conditions."

Bigger isn't always better, Page says. "Let's say that same contractor has numerous, smaller residential customers," he says. "Perhaps they need a more medium-size or smallersize machine to get through gates, to get around the landscaping. At that point, the productivity isn't in the bigger machine, the productivity could be in the smaller machine that's more nimble, that's able to get in and out of the vards."

It's always about matching the machine to the intended work and that would drive productivity, because sometimes a big machine doesn't help if the physical property doesn't lend itself to a big machine, Page says. For zero-turns, the deck size will determine how big the engine needs to be, Koehl says. "On most of today's mowers up to 60-inch decks, 30 horsepower and below winds up doing just fine," he points out. "When you get into very wet and tall grass, you're going to need more horsepower in order to get through it."

And with walk-behinds, manufacturers have begun to measure work capacity in terms of torque, instead of horsepower. "When you look at torque, you want to look at peak torque, meaning what is the total outtorque you're going to get from that engine with a muffler," Koehl says. "The higher the torque, the higher and wetter grass you'll be able to mow. A lot of people are going with gross torque measurements. When you look at gross torque, that's what the engine has the capability of doing if it was a perfect world."

Torque is a rotational force that can be illustrated with the common cordless drill. When these drills run into resistance during operation, they tend to twist the arm of the operator. How hard the person's arm is twisted is the measure of torque. But an engine doesn't need a lot of horsepower to reach a high measure of torque.

"You can have a very high horsepower and a very crappy torque engine," Koehl says. "You can have a very low horsepower and a very good torque engine. The higher the torque, the better the grass will get cut. If I move it through that grass without the blade losing speed, then I will cut that grass and it won't kill the engine.





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AIR-COOLED VS. LIQUID-

COOLED. Whether a contractor wants an air-cooled engine or a liquid-cooled engine comes down to how long they intend to keep the engine and how much they're prepared to spend. Air-cooled engines are cheaper and simpler to maintain than their liquid-cooled counterparts. "A

radiator, and it has coolant."

A contractor can expect to pay 20 to 30 percent more on a mower featuring a liquid-cooled engine. Koehl says liquid-cooled engines are very durable, long-lasting, quieter and more efficient, "Liquid-cooled really becomes a question of - 'Do I need the super-quietness of the engine, like

plan on keeping it five years," he says. Or let's say you plan on cutting more acres per year, then you might want to consider liquid-cooled."

Manufacturers have made strides in recent years that make air-cooled models attractive. They're lightweight and have fewer moving parts to service. Some two cycles now meet

stricter EPA and CARB Tier II emissions rules without the use of a catalytic converter, which adds weight and cost to the mower. "Air-cooled engines are very simple, easy to maintain. They will last a long time," he says. "It depends on the contractor's business plan." Walk-behinds are the domain of air-cooled engines; when it comes to zero-turns,

both air-cooled and liquid-cooled come into play. "On a walk-behind, you wouldn't find liquid-cooled because of weight and size restrictions," Page says.

continued on page 110

"I don't know that you can ever have too much power on a mower. When you look at the costs associated with upsizing the engine, having more horsepower costs little per dollar considering the overall investment. - Richard Cafaro

liquid-cooled engine will run cooler than air-cooled, which means they'll have longer engine life," Page says. "A liquid-cooled engine requires a little more maintenance because it has a

my car engine?" he says.

A contractor who intends to keep an engine running for three years, for example, may want an air-cooled design, Page says. "But let's say you



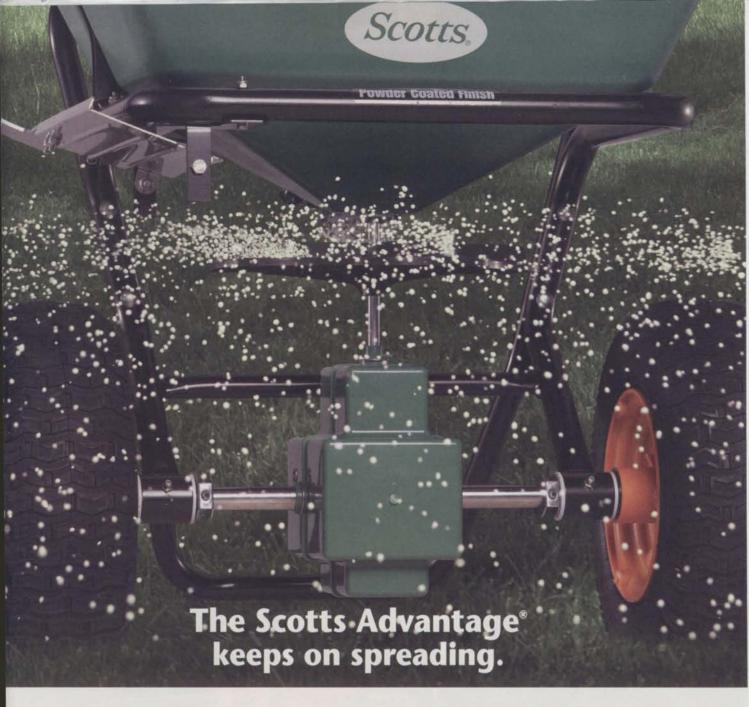
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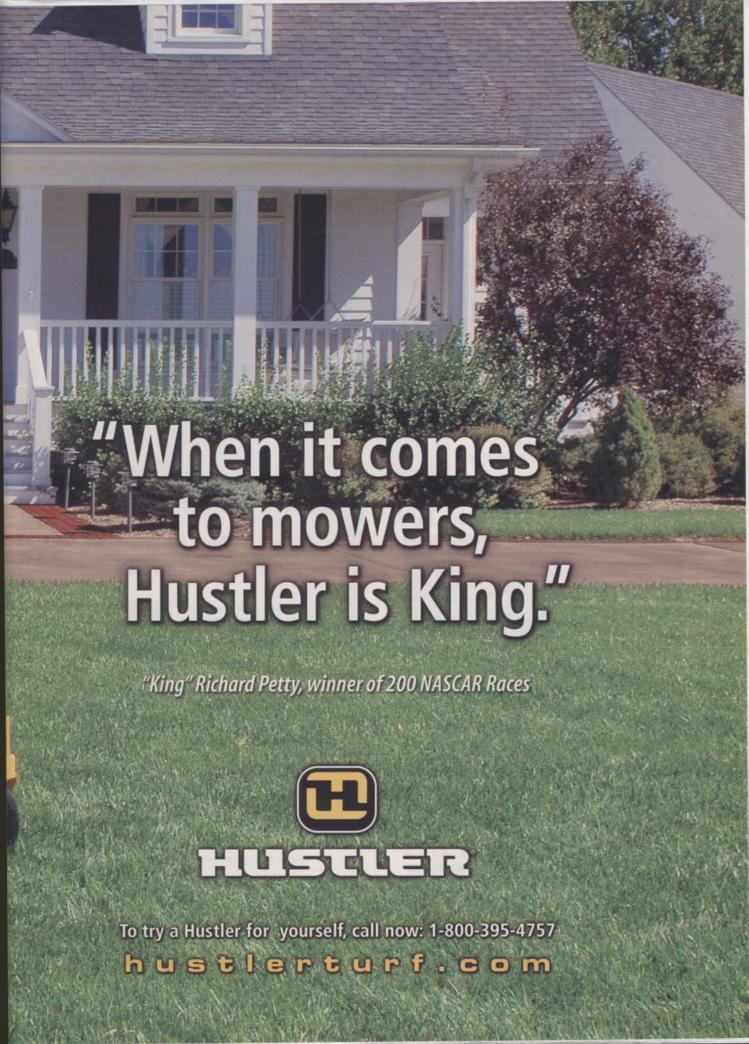
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continued from page 106

The quietness many contractors sought in liquid-cooled engines is available on air-cooled models. "Aircooled engines these days are very efficient," he says. "The noise has come down; the amount of heat dissipation so that you can mow on even the hottest days, you're going to be able to mow without much of a problem."

FUEL-INJECTED VS. CARBURE-

TOR. The fuel-management system is another important factor in choosing an engine. Cafaro is partial to fuelinjection. "The fuel injection on those engines is just tremendous. The power really stays," he says. "Particularly if you're mulching, having steady, consistent power is important and makes all the difference.

As with liquid-cooled engines, contractors looking to buy a fuel-injected system will expect to pay more. "There's usually some price premium associated with fuel injection, but it would be awfully difficult to say what

efficiency boost

while larger engines might have higher horsepower, it doesn't necessarily mean there are more emissions, says Doug Page, director of marketing for Milwaukee-based Briggs &

"If you think about machines as how much work they get done per hour, would a larger engine in a mower, car or truck have more emissions?" Page asks. "Yes, but not necessarily more per acre cut." It all comes back to always thinking about what is being accomplished with that piece of equipment. "In some ways, in the right situation, a big machine could be better for the environment if they're getting more grass cut per hour."

To sell a piece of equipment in America, with the EPA and CARB rules, engines are being constantly refined with all kinds of improvements. Those improvements have to do with what happens inside the block itself as well as the air intake and exhaust system. "Engines unto themselves are always being refined and that refinement usually benefits everything," Page says. "When we have a more efficient machine and you get more power per cc, you're enhancing the engine's output and making it run cleaner. All those things go hand-in-hand."

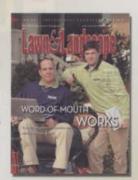
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Even carburetors are becoming more efficient in the way they deliver fuel, Koehl says. But a carburetor will never be as efficient as an electronic fuel-injected engine. "You have electronic fuel-injected engines out there both open-loop and closed-loop,' he says. "What's interesting about opened-loop systems, they're nice systems and they do work slightly better than carburetors, but the true fuel efficiency savings only come when you run it in that perfect condition." In a closed-loop system, the fuel ratio is determined by both main engine sensors and exhaust sensors. In an open-loop system, only the main engine sensors dictate the fuel ratio. "One of the things contractors should be asking if they're looking at fuelinjected systems is if it's open-loop or

closed-loop," Koehl says. "If you're truly looking for the perfect-running engine, closed-loop is the engine to look for."

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND.

Regardless of the features a contractor deems important, as a practical matter, the engine should be as easy to service. "Serviceability and location of the oil filters, as well as being able to access the air cleaner are critical," Cafaro says. "A nice, large air cleaner is great."

Contractors should choose engines with large oil filters and oil systems that are fully-pressurized. "The advantage is that you don't have to worry about the incline that you're mowing on or how your engine is positioned," Koehl says. "Let's say you do a lot of hill-mowing where you're sideways. Some mowers are partially-pressured. If they run for an extended period, you can seize that engine, because depending upon where that oil gets

sucked up from – whether it's actually going to be there or not – a fully-pressured system says you should be able to make a 35-degree incline and run that way forever, without affecting your engine."

Also, the larger the fuel filter the better the engine performance. "Fuel is probably one of the hardest things to control," Koehl says. "The larger the fuel filter, the better chance you have of not getting crud from the gas into your engine and your carburetor."

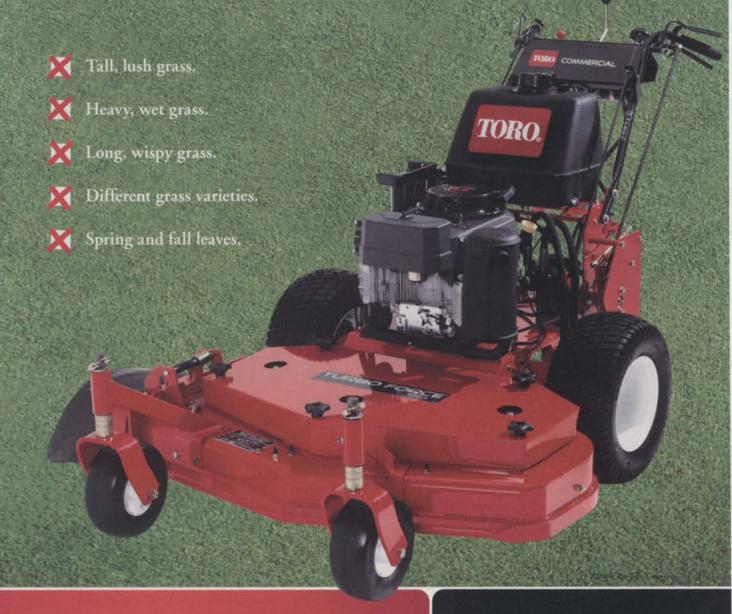
Contractors should consult their dealers in order to decide on the best engine. "The dealer will have a variety of equipment," Page says. "The dealer can find out what profile of customer that contractor is trying to satisfy and what equipment will best match that contractor's workload."

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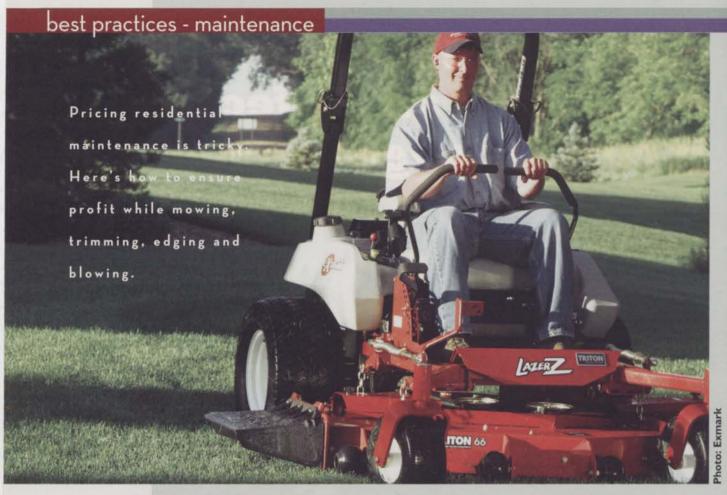




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To Each His Own

sk any three contractors their methods for pricing residential maintenance services and you're sure to yield three different responses. Some use complicated calculations, others simply guess. Some are highly profitable, enlisting spreadsheets and software programs, others aren't even sure if they're making money.

No matter the method contractors use, it's clear there's no set formula. Industry consultant Jim Huston of Englewood, Colo., says the most common method isn't really a method at all. "The way most people do it is grab a number out of the air, usually it's an hourly rate," he says. "You ask them where they got that number and they usually say, 'That's what everyone seems to be doing,'"

This is a dangerous strategy. "It might be in the ballpark of what the market will bear, but they're probably not making any money," Huston says.

One of the biggest mistakes contractors make is not accounting for drive time in their estimates, Huston says. "A lot of times when guys come up with hourly rates, let's say \$35, they're only charging for time they're at the curb." Forgetting to account for load/unload time, drive time between each residence and the time it takes to drive back to the yard at night could mean the difference between being profitable or losing money.

For typical residential maintenance, including mowing, edging, trimming and blowing, Huston recommends pricing the services as a lawn maintenance package. It speeds up the estimating process without sacrificing accuracy, he says.

Essentially, this approach averages a contractor's costs for the day, accounts for a desired profit margin and then uses a daily rate to determine what price to assign to a residential maintenance job.

"A lot of guys get lost in the numbers," Huston says. "But the most important thing is for a crew to achieve a daily minimum."

Read on to see Huston's suggested approach and three real-life examples from *Lawn & Landscape* readers from different regions of the country.

by marisa palmieri | associate editor



NO. I: THE CONSULTANT

lim Huston, consultant I.R. Huston Enterprises, Englewood, Colo.

How it works: Create a day rate for crews - the amount the crew has to bill every day to cover all costs and be profitable. Setting daily goals for crews is a good way to track and ensure profitability and forecast a crew's seasonal revenue.

1. Determine labor and equipment requirements for a typical day.

2. Calculate productions costs, including production labor (the total number of hours per day minus drive time) and equipment costs (the cost per hour to run a piece of equipment multiplied by the average number of hours a mower, blower, edger or trimmer will be used in production).

3. Next calculate "general conditions," which include load/unload and drive time and the crew truck/ trailer costs. Add "margins and markups," including sales tax, labor burden and general and administrative overhead. After subtotaling these numbers, you've reached your break-even point.

4. Add a net profit margin and a contingency factor (if desired) to the break-even point to arrive at a price

for a generic day for your maintenance package.

5. Calculate the curb-time man-hour rate by dividing the total daily price by the production hours and multiplying it by the number of people on your crew.

6. Use this rate to bid residential jobs by applying it to the amount of time a crew will spend at a particular job.

Why it works: By creating a daily billable goal for the crews, contractors are able to easily monitor their profitability every day. "You're making money and being profitable every day you hit this number." One key to this method is accurate estimating for how long a job will take. "It really all boils down to time," Huston says.

Sample pricing: Following the steps outlined above, Huston shows how to create an average daily rate for a two-man crew where the crew average wage is \$10 per hour. (Note: The costs and percentages used are for illustration purposes only. Labor costs, equipment costs, etc., will vary from contractor to contractor.)

1. Determine labor and equipment requirements.

A. Labor

 Crew average wage: \$10/hour; labor burden: 30%; overtime factor (50 hours/week; 10 hours/day): 10%; risk factor: 10%; overhead per hour: \$8/hour

• Črew truck with trailer: \$8/hour; 36-inch walk-behind mower: \$5/hour; 21-inch mower: \$3/hour; blower: \$3/hour; edger: \$3/hour; stick trimmer: \$3/hour

2. Calculate production costs.

A. Assuming the two-man crew works a 10-hour day with drive time and load/unload time of two-hours a day per man (four man-hours a day); there are 16 production labor hours per day. At a rate of \$12 per man per hour (\$10 crew average wage with 10 percent overtime factor and 10 percent risk factor), that equals \$192 production man-hours.

B. Assuming the following equipment usage times and above costs per hours, it will cost \$48 to run the equipment.

36-inch walk-behind mower: 6 hours

· 21-inch mower: 2 hours

Edger and stick trimmer: 4 hours

3. Calculate general conditions.

A. Four hours of load/unload and drive time at a rate of \$12 equals \$48.

B. Also included here are the crew truck/trailer costs at \$8 per hour for 8 hours for a total of \$64.

C. Add markups and margins:

• Sales tax: \$0

• 30 percent labor burden: \$72

General and administrative overhead: (Number of man-hours x overhead per hour)=(20 x \$8)=\$160

 You've arrived at your typical daily break-even point, \$584. Break-even point=(Total direct costs + G&A overhead)

4. Add net profit margin and contingency factor (if desired). In this example if you add \$65 for a 10% net profit margin, you'll arrive at a \$649 (rounded to \$650) daily total price.

5. Calculate the curb-time man-hour rate. Divide the total daily price by the production hours (\$650/16 on-site man-hours = \$40.63 curb-time man-hour rate) and multiply by the number of crew

members: \$41 x 2 = \$82 per curb crew hour. 6. Use this rate to bid jobs by applying it to the amount of time a crew will spend at a particular job.

For a job site that requires a half-hour of curb time: .5 hour x \$82 = \$41 per visit to the job site. Huston notes that using these numbers, this fictional crew would bring in gross revenue of \$135,000 per 40-week season with a net profit of \$13,500.

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To download Jim Huston's example from this article and for other materials that help with accurate pricing, visit the March Online Extras section.

best practices



NO. 3: THE CALCULATOR

Paul Wieting, owner Seagull Lawn Services, Houston

How it works: After visiting a residential account and measuring the length and width of the yard, Paul Wieting calculates square footage and estimates edging and trimming lengths. He then assesses how long this property will take to maintain according to production rates he's refined in the field by timing himself repetitively. He also counts interferences (trees, mailboxes, gates, etc.) and adds 30 seconds per obstacle (which accounts for both mowing and trimming).

Wieting has calculated a total per-hour cost of \$18.70, which includes labor, labor burden, equipment costs and a 10-percent contingency factor. To that he includes a multiplier for liability insurance (2.4 percent) and state sales tax (8.25 percent). Finally, he accounts for 25 percent of what he calls "raw profit" – which he breaks down as 10 percent pure profit, 10 percent supervision, administration, advertising and office expense and 5 percent retained earnings. The result is a \$28 per-hour rate.

Additionally, rather than charging clients a drive time and load/unload time specific to their accounts, Wieting has measured his route and divided it by the number of stops to identify a six-minute travel time per account. This six-minute drive time (12 man minutes) plus six minutes load/unload time (12 man minutes) amounts to \$11.20 and is added to the price for each job. Clients who are neighbors (and don't require re-loading of the truck and trailer) split the travel and load-time fee, thus each household receives a discount of \$5.60. "Where I'm successful I become more successful, where I'm not it will guide my business away," Wieting explains.

Why it works: Wieting's methodical, "home-grown" approach works well because as the owner of a two-man operation, he's able to measure every property himself. "I might get to the point where I stop measuring because I've gained pattern recognition," Wieting says, "but I don't know that I'll ever get big enough that I won't go look at everyone's yard." Additionally, Wieting created the company's production rates by timing himself and can enforce them because he works on the crew. "I'm 55 years old. If I have a 25-year-old working for me I can really enforce these rates — they just have to keep up with me."

Sample pricing: Wieting shared an example, assuming a property with 7,500 square feet of turf, 300 feet of trimming and 300 feet of edging, plus 16 "interferences."

Mowing: \$7.45 (.266 hours at \$28 per hour)

Interferences: \$3.47 (.133 hours at \$28 per hour)

Trimming/edging: \$4.66 (.166 hours at \$28 per hour)

Travel time: \$11.60

TOTAL: \$27.04; would round to \$27

NO. 2: THE EDUCATED GUESSER

Russell Hunt, owner Total Lawn Care, Steubenville, Ohio

How it works: Russell Hunt says he arrived at the price of his weekly mowing service for residential clients through experience. He's been in business for 10 years, and has identified his per-man-hour prices for each segment of his business. For his weekly mowing service, which includes mowing, blowing, edging and trimming, Hunt sets a minimum price of \$40 per visit.

"We keep it to a set minimum, that way everyone's on the same playing field," Hunt says. "We won't mow anything for less than \$40 per cut. Then we work up from there."

Things that could add to the price: add-on services (fertilizing, weed control, etc.), a fence that would require the crew to use a push mower, a steep hill or excessive trimming or edging. The price goes up (at a \$40 per-hour rate) by the amount of time Hunt estimates the job to take.

Why it works: Hunt is confident in his estimating skills and prices. At his company's current size, he's able to personally estimate every job. Though he doesn't measure every inch of the property like some firms do, Hunt says he's usually right on when estimating his crews' production abilities.

"I try to get out and meet every customer. I think it's very important," Hunt says. "Anyone can spout a price over the phone. I want to sell them on the job before I even tell them the price. Once they see what they're getting, it's going to be easier for them to understand the cost. "The most important thing in this business that someone told me a long time ago is you have to price the job to get the job done, you can't price the job to get the job," he adds.

Sample pricing:

For Hunt's weekly mowing service at a typical eastern Ohio 7,500- to 10,000-square-foot yard, he charges a \$40 minimum. In this per-hour maintenance price he's accounted for his labor, labor burden, overhead, equipment costs, travel time and profit.

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best practices - maintenance

NO. 4: THE MEASURER

Jeff Bowen, president Images of Green, Stuart, Fla.

How it works: "If it's a brand-new yard, we'll measure it up," President Jeff Bowen says. "We'll quantify it completely – how much grass is there? How many trees? How much edging?"

Bowen learned this method, what he calls "squares and linears," from The Brickman Group, where he worked for seven years before founding his own firm in 1995. "I'm sure they still teach their estimators the same thing – how to quantify a yard."

These details are entered into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet then applies labor hours based on production rates to each task, and in turn, dollars are assigned to the labor requirements. The spreadsheet also accounts for the type of equipment used for each task. "We end up getting a dollar amount per occurrence and then the spreadsheet multiplies it and comes up with an annual number." The annual price is then broken down evenly for a monthly rate. "We don't write any contracts for less than two years," Bowen says.

Why it works: Using a spreadsheet to calculate prices ensures uniformity across the organization, especially considering that Bowen isn't the company's sole estimator; account managers typically conduct this task. It also nearly eliminates the chance for mathematical error. In addition, Bowen knows the production rates that are applied in the spreadsheet are accurate or possibly even conservative. "How did we get these rates? By making our own time trials," he says. "We looked at how long it takes to do a normal yard and the edging numbers come from me – I measured them myself," Bowen says. "So if anything, the estimate might come in high because I probably edge a lot slower than some of my young employees."

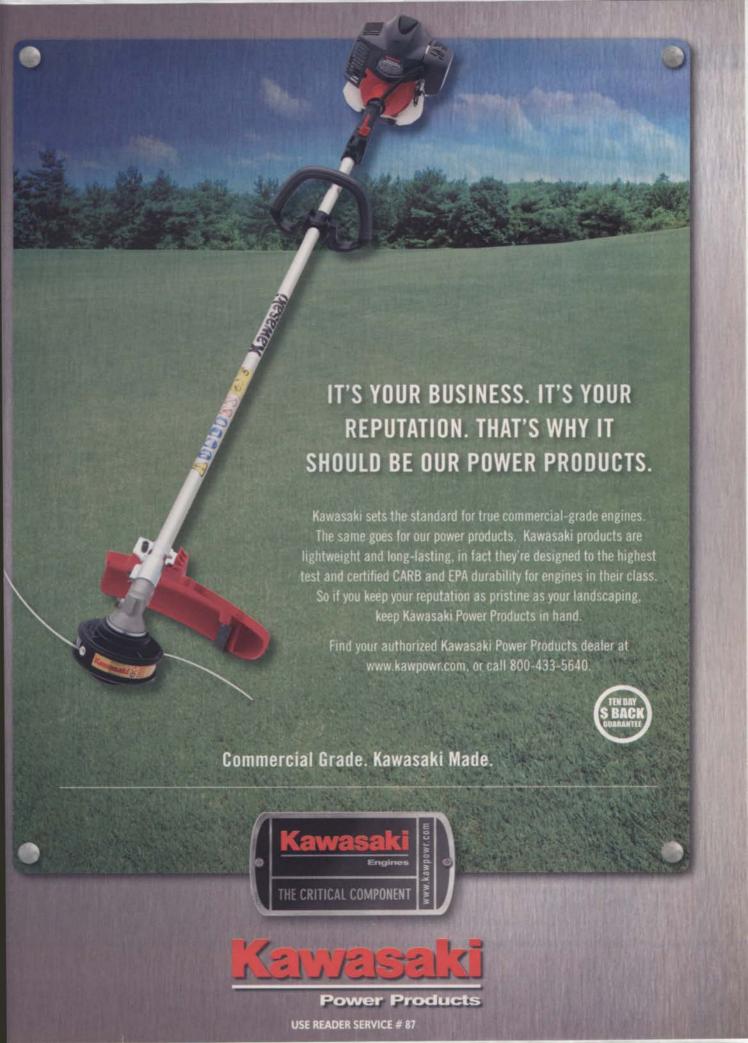
In addition, Images of Green is diligent about adjusting its costs every spring based on market conditions, fuel costs, labor rates and other overhead considerations.

Sample pricing: Bowen's sample Florida property included mowing 5,000 square feet of turf, 200 linear feet of hard edging, plus line trimming and power blowing the yard. For a one-time job like this, Images of Green would charge \$69.

AVERAGE MOWING PRICES

Although contractors typically include various other considerations in their residential maintenance prices, per-hour mowing prices are a good, across-the-board way to compare maintenance prices nationwide. The following chart, extracted from Lawn & Landscape's 2006 State of the Industry research report, shows average mowing prices broken down regionally and for companies with less than \$200,000 in revenue and more than \$200,000 in revenue.

Region			Company Revenue		
Nationwide	East/Mid- west	South/ Southeast	West/ Southwest	Less than \$200,000	More than \$200,000
\$43.7/hour	\$44.5/hour	\$44.8/hour	\$39.6/hour	\$37.5/hour	\$46.8/hour



The Good Side of Grubs

Grub control can be a profitable add-on service.

large portion of a client's lawn turns a pale green color, becomes brittle and eventually dies. The first culprit that comes to mind – grubs. Various conditions, such as the weather and a lawn's sun/shade ratio, can impact grub damage. As a result, the best treatment is preventive and, if done correctly, can keep a client's lawn great looking and virtually grub-free.

"The No. 1 thing we do is encourage our customers to invest in preventive applications, which is the best method of control when it comes to grubs," says Paul Wagner, owner of Masters Green, Walled Lake, Mich. "It is still possible to get rid of grubs once they infest a lawn, but the damage is done. With prevention, the service is nearly 100 percent effective."

continued on page 124, sidebar on page 122



by emily mullins | assistant editor

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tree invaders

Insects invade trees as well as turf, creating additional problems for some lawn care operators. The worst part is many of these pests are new to the North American ecosystem, making them difficult, if not nearly impossible, to control. "We are a global economy now," says Nate Dodds, president of J.J. Mauget, Acadia, Calif. "This opens up the opportunity to bring in hitchhikers in the form of new foreign pests that have never been here before. It's almost impossible to stop it."

Many of these hitchhikers are wood-boring insects that feed on a trees cambium layer, disrupting its vascular flow. "Wood-boring insects live and breed inside of

the tree," says Roger Webb, owner of Tree Tech, Morriston, Fla. "The boring and tunneling action disrupts vascular water flow, damaging and eventually killing the tree."

Dodds and Webb discuss five insects that, if left unchecked, will cause permanent damage to the nation's indigenous tree population.

Emerald Ash Borer – The wood-boring insect's larvae feed on the cambium layer of a tree, cutting off its water supply until it dies. To date, the insect has killed more than 20 million ash trees throughout Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Maryland, Wisconsin and lower parts of Canada, calling for desperate action.

For example, a Michigan county has declared a clear-cut policy of all ash trees to halt the insect's spread. "It's a favorite species among many people and is great loss for ornamental landscapes," Webb says.

Asian Longhorn Beetle – Outbreaks of this wood-boring insect have been detected in the Long Island, N.Y., New Jersey and metropolitan Chicago areas. It has no known natural enemies in the U.S., Webb says, and it's very difficult to detect and treat. Quarantines around infested areas should prevent accidental spreading, and

all infested trees are being destroyed. "This insect is not as much of an economic threat because it's under quarantine," Dodds says. "Hot spots are being taken care of as they emerge."

Mountain Pine Beetle – This insect invades conifers in the country's western region. The trees are particularly vulnerable during droughts. There is no chemical control for the beetle. However, governmental agencies control breakouts by clear cutting hot spots and thinning the tree population. "They're basically trying to take away the insect's habitat," Webb says. The southern

pine beetle is an insect that causes similar problems in the south.

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid - This insect sucks plant juice/sap from the needles of Hemlock trees from New England to the Carolinas. The end result is needle death and ultimately the tree's demise. "The insect is one of the leading natural causes of Hemlock death," Webb says. "If the problem remains unchecked, Hemlocks will be depleted from the ecosystem and the woolly adelgid will either adapt to another tree or die off." The insects produce a white, waxy cover-

ing to shield themselves from

the environment, making chemical control very difficult.

Bark Beetle – Currently a forest problem, there is potential for bark beetles to overlap into landscape settings. Warmer winter temperatures are causing these insects to migrate from the Rockies into northern climates. "Northern areas are seeing heavier infestations than ever before," Dobbs says. No systemic chemicals effectively kill the larva, and the best way to treat it is to spray the trees with a protectant that kills adult insects as they chew through the tree bark to lay eggs.



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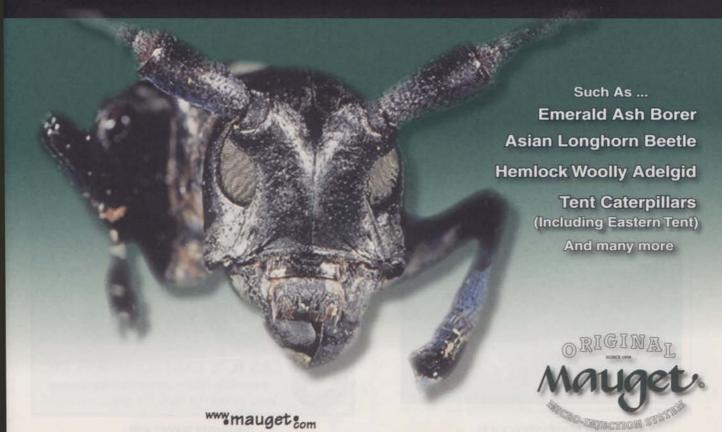
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continued from page 120

AN EASY ADD-ON. According to Lawn & Landscape research, 40 percent of LCOs offer insect control services. In 2006, 41 percent of LCOs invested in insecticides, spending an average of \$2,953, and 37 percent plan to purchase these products this year.

Wagner began offering grub control as an add-on, preventive service six years ago. Today, more than 35 percent of Wagner's primarily residential clients receive the service.

"I couldn't imagine our business without it," he says, adding it makes up about 8 percent of his total revenue.

Little was required to add the service. Wagner already had the necessary equipment and his employees already had the proper training. He switched the fertilizer he used for general applications to a product impregnated with a grub control ingredient.

Both services appear on one bill.

SPREADING THE WORD. In Michigan, where grubs are a wide-spread

problem, many of Wagner's clients already knew about the damage these pests can cause and were receptive to the idea of prevention. It was then the duty of Wagner and his crew to further inform them of the service and what it entails.

During the service's initial promotion, Wagner and his crew handed out literature at the time of each client's regular application explaining the benefits of grub control. A representative from the company would then follow up with a phone call further explaining the procedure and answering any questions the client may have. Wagner focuses more heavily on promoting the service in March and April, when people are "thinking spring" and eager to get their lawns in good shape to enjoy them in the coming months. During this time, information is added into the company's newsletter distributed to all of its clients at every job. "As a percentage, our marketing costs for printing newsletters and inserts are very minor," Wagner says. In 2007, he anticipates spending \$6,500 on direct mail pieces and another \$6,000 on additional sales costs like commissions and phone use.

Today, Wagner's business performs about 6,500 grub control applications per year. The sector of his business has grown a steady 10 percent each year. He plans to grow the sector another 10 percent in 2007 by increasing marketing efforts with more inserts and pamphlets in addition to sending e-mail alerts. "We've made a very conscious effort to get all of our customer's e-mail addresses," he says. "Many of our clients choose to pay their bills online, which has been a helpful way to collect them."

These marketing efforts are sure to pay off. Because labor is already included and the switch to a different granular fertilizer had little financial impact on his business, the service has an 80 percent gross profit margin, Wagner says. After factoring in about 17 percent



USE READER SERVICE #91



for product cost, he charges \$12 per 1,000 square feet, or about \$120 for an average 10,000 square-foot job, a price comparable to the competition.

EFFECTIVE APPLICATIONS. For effective grub control, the optimal application window is late May to early July, Wagner says – any earlier and the insects are not yet a threat, any later the damage has already begun. "One of the biggest mistakes LCOs make is missing this optimal widow," he says. "We don't vary from that window and we have 99.99 percent control."

Another way LCOs can control grubs is to maintain records and maps of when and where pest problems have occurred, says Rick Brandenburg, professor of entomology, North Carolina State University. "Many pests tend to occur in the same places they find favorable year after year," he says. "Keeping this on record helps LCOs know where to look first when spring rolls around."

Another strategy is tracking weather forecasts, Brandenburg says, noting grubs like wet conditions. "Avoid basing everything you do on what happened last year," he says. "Insects are cold-blooded and are controlled solely by the weather, which can change drastically from year to year."

"Insects tend to like warm, wet conditions," adds David Ross, technical manager, Syngenta, Greensboro, N.C. "The mild winter we've been having in many parts of the country could lead to higher insect populations this spring, but it's tough to tell."

Nate Royalty, product development manager for insecticides, Bayer Environmental Science, Research Triangle Park, N.C., also predicts a heavy grub and insect population this year. "It has been very wet throughout the fall and winter, and temperatures this winter



have been incredibly warm," he explains. "Cold winter temperatures typically kill off many overwintering insects, but this natural mortality has not occurred this winter. The national mosquito populations will also be hideous

this year for the same reasons."

Because of the varying conditions, most lawn care operators agree that preventive treatments are best. As Wagner says, "We added grub and insect control services because it's much better to prevent a problem than to treat a problem later."

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For more background on grubs, as well as an update on insecticide product advancements, visit the March Online Extras section.





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construction equipment



Skid-steer attachments increase productivity and strengthen the bottom line.

ames Holt has never met a skid-steer attachment he didn't like.

Holt's company, All Around Town of the Davenport/Quad Cities areas of Iowa, maintains the grounds of three hospitals through exclusive contracts. The hospitals' modern campus-like settings, complete with patios, retaining walls and heavy snowfall, necessitates that Holt have

myriad attachments, all at the ready for their site-specific tasks.

Craig Wendt, though, likes to keep it simple. "Our primary attachments are obviously the bucket, pallet forks and we also use the planer bars for grading," says the co-owner of Valley Landscaping in Fargo, N.D., "We pretty much do just about everything from the installation of sod, trees and

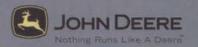
shrubs to basically everything else on new construction."

Most contractors see the value in skid-steer attachments. According to Lawn & Landscape's 2006 State of the Industry research, more than 10 percent of readers bought skid-steer attachments last year, while more than 15 percent intend to buy them in the next 12 months. The average reader spends \$6,800 annually on attachments. But not all contractors can afford every attachment on the market. So it pays to shop smart, says Rob Otterson, market segmentation manager for West Fargo, N.D.-based Bobcat. "Almost every landscaper can use a combination bucket and pallet forks on landscape construction jobs," he says. "They also might find several uses for a soil conditioner, which can be used to clear rock, unwanted weeds, existing turf and create a final grade in preparation for landscaping, planting seed or laying sod."

The combination bucket, for example, increases a contractor's versatility by giving him five functions – doze, dig, dump, grapple and grade – in a single attachment. With

continued on page 132, sidebar on page 130

by mark phillips | associate editor

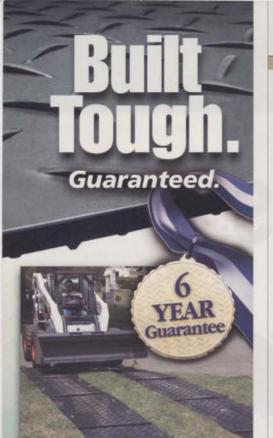


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construction equipment

get to work

Not all skid-steer attachments are created equal, but many can be used for a common purpose. Lawn & Landscape quizzed the experts and came up with numerous tasks and the attachments that can be used to accomplish them.

Tree removal: digger, bucket, brush saw, stump grinder

Tree planting: auger, digger, tree spade, bucket

Soil grading: bucket, combination bucket, dozer blade, box blade, grader, laser-guided box blade, laser-guided grader, landplane, soil conditioner

Transporting rock/stone/hardscape materials: bucket, combination bucket, pallet forks, dumping hopper, grapple, utility forks

Moving dirt from a site to a truck:

bucket, combination bucket, dumping hopper

Digging irrigation/fence posts: auger, trencher, vibratory plow, boring unit

Here are tasks that can be accomplished, according to the attachment:

Augers: planting trees and installing fence

Backhoes: installing ponds, irrigation and drain tile

Industrial grapple: area cleanup or placing boulders

Landscape rakes: preparing soil for seed, sod or removing materials

Pallet fork: carrying pallets of sod and supplies weighing 2,000 pounds or more

Snowblowers: good opportunity for off-season profits

Soil conditioners: lot clearing, grading and soil prep for seed or sod

Sweepers: cleaning streets/sidewalks near work area

Tiller: loosening soil for planting or removing weeds

Tree spade: tree planting and transplanting

Trenchers: installing irrigation line

Vibratory plow: installing drainage or irrigation lines



hoto: Bobc





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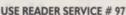
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USE READER SERVICE #96







USE READER SERVICE #98

construction

continued from page 128

the combination bucket, contractors can complete many of their day-today tasks, such as cutting an edge along a back wall, grading, ripping out brush and backfilling, Otterson says, adding it may be the only attachment a contractor needs to get started in the landscaping industry.

Pallet forks are also versatile attachments. With a pallet fork attachment, a contractor can easily unload and carry palletized materials, such as sod and paving stone. "This attachment saves time and backbreaking labor because it eliminates the materials from having to be transported by hand," Otterson says. The time and labor saved with attachments such as pallet forks and combination buckets means increased productivity and profitability.

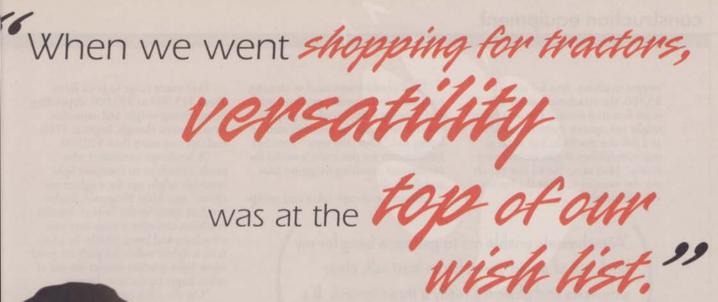
THE RIGHT COMBINATION. The correct assortment of attachments can solve contractors' problems and save them time. "Landscapers can choose the attachments they need to take them from start to finish on a job site, from grading and prepping an area to installing irrigation and laying sod," Otterson says.

For example, Holt's hospital clients present him with many on-site challenges. "They're constantly asking for landscaping, such as adding patios, transplanting trees and retaining walls," he says. "I have six guys who stay very busy five days a week.'

And contractors can use attachments to reverse what Mother Nature might bring. "Landscapers working in a wet environment during the spring and early summer months might find they're sidelined waiting for standing water on job sites to dry out," Otterson says. "But with a soil conditioner attachment, they can turn over and even out the soil so that it dries and they can start work.'

Likewise, a sweeper attachment and bucket have become an invaluable combination for Holt. One minute, his crews can clean curbs of dirt, sand and other debris. After a quick exchange for a bucket, crews can dump debris into a truck. "It's really convenient for me," he says. "I can go from the sweeper to hooking up the bucket unit and start dumping again into our dump truck."

Buying the sweeper attachment was an easy decision. He compared the attachment's costs against buying and maintaining a full-size streets-







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weeper machine. And for about \$3,500, the attachment made the most financial sense. "The attachment might not operate quite as quickly as a full-size machine, but as far as maneuverability, it gets around very nicely," Holt says. "And I can switch out the sweeper unit for the bucket very efficiently."

"Soil conditioners excel at clearing rock, unwanted weeds, existing turf and creating a final grade in preparation for landscaping, planting seed or laying sod," Otterson says. "Trencher attachments are particularly useful for contractors installing irrigation lines and drain tile."

Augers, landscape rakes and sweep-

Skid-steers range in price from about \$15,000 to \$50,000, depending on operating weight and capacities. Attachments, though, begin at \$700 and can cost more than \$10,000.

"A landscape contractor who needs a machine to transport light materials might opt for a lighter machine," says Mike Fitzgerald, loader product specialist for Bobcat. Smaller machines can offer a more compact wheelbase and lower profile. In addition, a tighter radius lift path are good when tight quarters restrict the use of other, larger equipment, he says.

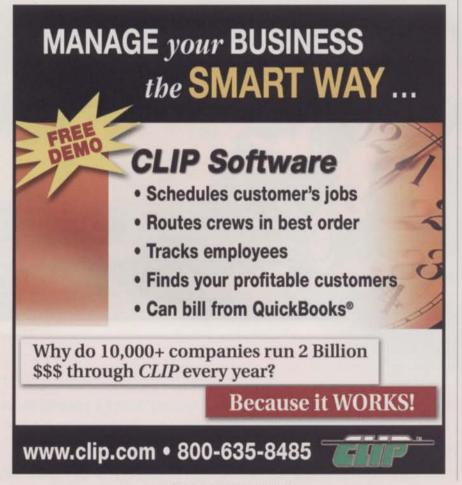
"On the other hand, large-frame skid-steer loaders are designed for handling heavy palletized materials and operating attachments that require more hydraulic flow."

The attachments used will dictate the amount of auxiliary hydraulic flow needed from the loader. "A customer who needs enhanced performance with attachments such as a stump grinder, trencher, chipper

"Attachments enable me to get more bang for my buck out of a skid-steer. It can load salt, clear sidewalks and plow. It's really a three-in-one. It's super convenient." – James Holt

BEYOND THE BASICS. Beyond buckets and pallet forks, five other attachments stand out as the most popular with landscape contractors: augers, trenchers, landscape rakes, sweeper buckets and soil conditioners.

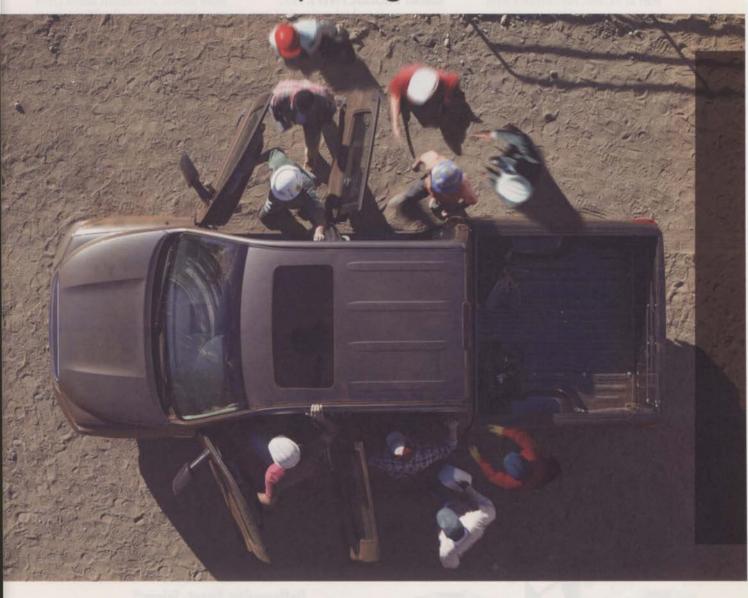
ers have been used in the industry for many years as productive attachment. Augers efficiently dig holes for planting trees, shrubs and installing fence posts. For removing small rocks or stones, landscape rakes are ideal.







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or snowblower, may need a highflow machine," Fitzgerald says. Most attachments with a primary or single hydraulic function, such as an auger, start at \$1,400. Attachments with

John Deere

multiple hydraulic functions, such as soil conditioners or landscape rakes, start at \$5,300.

GREAT PRODUCTIVITY. Holt

found other practical uses for his skid-steer.

"Instead of going out and buying a truck and a \$5,000 snow plow, I have the investment already made in the skid-steer," he says. "I went out and bought a \$3,000 snow plow attachment."

During winter, Holt keeps a salt pile and three different attachments onhand. "The skid-steer is always on-hand, whether we're using the plow to clear sidewalks or moving rocks," he says. "We have a salt truck on-hand as well. If the salt truck runs out, we just undo that snow

plow in a matter of seconds, hook our bucket back up, put some salt in the truck, then go back and put the snowplow back on." The addition on a snow blower attachment allows crews to easily clear sidewalks. "I'm getting more bang for my buck with the skidsteer. It can load salt, clear sidewalks and plow. It's really a three-in-one," he says. "It's super convenient with these attachments."

Contractors should research all of the attachment possibilities out there, Otterson says.

'Many of these can be used on different types and brands of carriers further increasing their utilization," he says. "The contractor who researches and is aware of these additions will be presented with more opportunities to grow his business."

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Learn about the advantages of renting attachments in the March Online Extras section.

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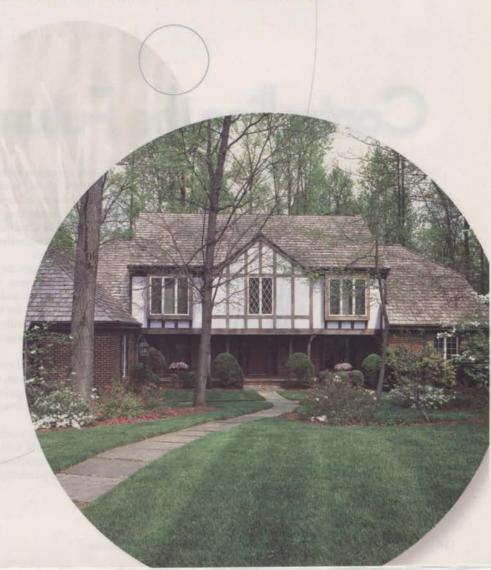
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Advancements in irrigation controllers continue to improve efficiency and water consciousness.



by emily mullins | assistant editor

Controlling the Future

hen it comes to irrigation system controllers, the smarter the better. These "brains" behind the operation are perhaps the most important component of an irrigation system because they determine when and how much water should be directed to certain areas. Properly installing the correct controllers can save you and your clients time and money.

Most of today's controllers aim to use less water, an appealing feature as water conservation becomes a more pressing issue each year. Water-use regulations, enforced throughout the country on both the state and local levels, demand that irrigation contractors get "smart." But the benefits for using efficient controllers extend beyond water conservation. Irrigating turf with the correct amount of water at the appropriate times can prevent plant disease, insect infestations and flooding, to name a few.

Irrigation controllers have advanced and evolved over the years, giving irrigation contractors many options. Factors like region, soil, plant type and area size all impact which controller is best for each irrigation situation. By being educated on the variety of controllers available, contractors can help promote efficient irrigation in a relatively simple way.

"There is a wide variety of controller products available for contractors," says Jeff Kremicki, product manager of controllers and sensors for Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. "It's important for contractors to fully understand the capabilities of the controller product they are purchasing and to know what the controller can do."

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UNIT IMPROVEMENTS. Controller development has changed over the years, keeping pace with technology advancements around the world, says Brian Ries, marketing and product manager for the Toro Co., Riverside, Calif. "We've gone from controllers that are set based on mechanical switches to controllers that are programmed by a computer," Ries says. "And from controllers that are programmed manually to those that can automatically adjust runtimes based on weather changes and water needs of specific landscapes."

Controller development over the past decade can be divided into three key areas, Ries says. The first area, modular controllers, came in the late 1990s and allowed irrigation systems to be expanded on an as-needed basis by installing expansion modules, which allows an irrigation system to easily increase or decrease its number of stations without disassembling the entire system.

"Modular controllers are one of the biggest innovations in controller design," Kremicki says. "The ability to customize the size of the irrigation system means a contractor may only need to carry one controller to handle a variety of jobs, eliminating his inventory investment."

The second area of controller development came with computerized controllers. First geared toward golf courses and large commercial systems, they have since advanced to include the management of residential systems, Ries says.

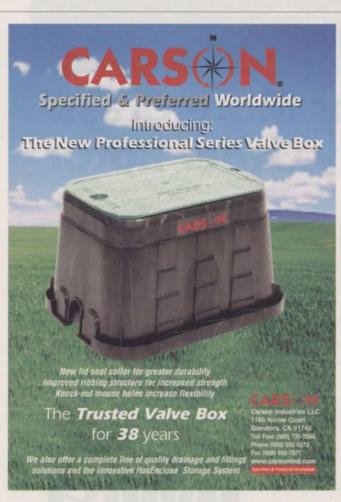
The third, and perhaps most efficient, area of controller advancement is the "smart" controller, which waters turf based on an individual station's information, such as plant type, root depth, soil type and micro climates. These units automatically adjust runtimes based on real-time evapotranspiration data, such as temperature, wind speed, solar radiation and relative humidity, Ries says.

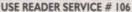
"Smart controllers focus on the critical need to effectively manage resources," he says. "They're designed with a level of intelligence that enables them to adjust runtimes or cancel irrigation based on a landscape's everchanging needs."

FEATURED FEATURES. The different types of irrigation controllers range from single-station controllers that attach to a single valve to large-scale central control systems that manage thousands of stations. These units range in price from \$50 to several thousand dollars, depending on the unit's features.

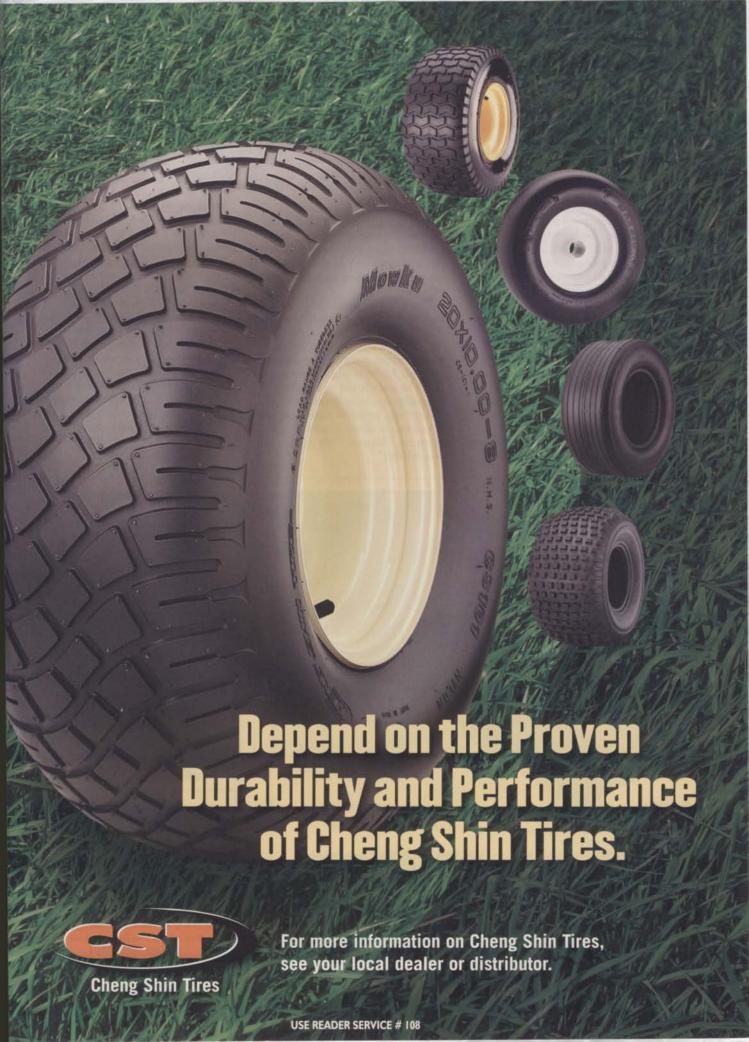
There are quite a few specific features that irrigation contractors should look for when purchasing a controller, manufacturers say. "Each controller type has its advantages," Kremicki says.

One feature is seasonal adjustment, which allows contractors to adjust the runtime of all zones in









response to weather changes. "This feature allows contractors to easily adjust watering runtimes from 10 to 150 percent by simply pressing a button on the controller," Kremicki says.

Most controllers on the market include surge and short-circuit protection features, which guard the unit from electrical problems and lightening. "Lightening is the No. 1 enemy of irrigation controllers," says Gene Johnson, technical service specialist and export sales manager for Weathermatic, Dallas. "This protection feature is usually included in the unit's warranty at no extra cost for two years. The amount of protection provided by the warranty is usually in proportion to the price range and intended use of the controller."

Another useful feature is the independent watering program with multiple start times. This feature caters to landscapes with different plant varieties and ensures each plant receives the appropriate amount of



water. The non-volatile memory feature stores a system's program indefinitely, acting as insurance against problems like power outages. Controllers also come remote-control ready to allow contractors to manage a system off site.

Many controllers can be upgraded to computerized or "smart" systems. The installation of a smart controller can result in average water bill savings of 30 percent, Kremicki says, and promote healthier plant growth.

"The installation of a smart controller results in dramatic water bill savings, healthier plants and the conservation of our precious natural resources," he says. "What more can you ask for?" CONTROLLER CON-CERNS. Controller advancements help contractors irrigate more efficiently, and it is up to the industry as a whole to utilize these high-tech

advancements.

"The water industry is demanding products that will irrigate more intelligently," Johnson says. "In order to preserve the irrigation industry as we know it, members of the industry have to accept the responsibility of finding ways to conserve water."

According to Lawn & Landscape research, 35 percent of contractors purchased irrigation controllers in 2006, spending an average of \$11,234, and 30 percent of contractors plan to purchase controllers in 2007. In 2006, 30 percent of contractors offered irrigation installation services and 12 percent plan to offer irrigation as a new service this year.

Many issues need to be addressed,

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however, before contractors choose and install an irrigation controller, Johnson says. Will the unit be installed indoors or outdoors? How large is the area to be irrigated? How many zones will be necessary? Who will be operating the controller – is it easy enough for the homeowner to learn to use properly? What types of plants are found throughout the client's lawn?

Bob Dobson, owner of Middletown Sprinkler Co., Port Monmouth, N.J., has been installing irrigation systems for 38 years. Before installing anything, Dobson creates a design of the client's lawn, making sure to indicate sunny and shady areas, plant types, soil types and inclines. "By doing this on paper first, we can design irrigation systems that apply water more uniformly throughout a client's lawn and irrigate different zones separately to ensure proper pressure at each control valve," Dobson says.

Since starting his business in 1968, Dobson has installed systems with some sort of water conservation feature. "Our very first system had rain sensors and we've made sure to include them on every system since then," he says. Today's controllers have more water-saving features, which Dobson says are important to the future of the irrigation industry. "The new generation of controllers has features like flow sensing, which is crucial for water conservation. Even the most basic of the modern controllers have water-budget features that allow operators to easily increase or decrease an irrigation schedule."

About a year ago, Dobson started offering select clients the option of upgrading to smart controllers and now offers all customers installing a new system the option of smart controllers in lieu of regular units. As a marketing strategy, they not only stress to clients that smart controllers can save more water, but also save them money.

"There is a certain number of

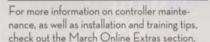
clientele that the only thing driving them is the bottom line," Dobson says. "But there are those who are interested in saving money in the long run."

Dobson and his crews have at least two meetings with each client where they discuss the new irrigation system and how to use it efficiently.

"We try to get the client to associate their system with the weather," Dobson says. "For example, if we have a very dry summer we tell them they'll need to irrigate throughout the whole season, but if it's very rainy then they won't. If we can make the client aware of the differences, they can see that it's important to make adjustments to their controllers." III

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irrigation alternatives

These days, everything is wireless – computers, music players, video games – how about irrigation systems? "Handheld remotes give a contractor the ability to operate an irrigation system at a distance without having to enter a client's house or garage," says Brian Ries, marketing and product manager, The Toro Co., Riverside, Calif.

When using remotes, a contractor will typically have a handheld transmitter that communicates commands to a radio receiver attached to the irrigation system controller. These allow one person to perform a job that usually requires two or more people, Ries says.

In terms of price, standard short-range remotes for homeowners cost a few hundred dollars and professional-grade units cost around \$700, Ries says. High-end commercial two-way radio devices with remote capability can range from \$1,000 to \$1,500.

Battery-operated controllers are another irrigation alternative. These units consist of the control module installed directly into the valve box and a handheld programming unit, both battery-powered, say Ziggy Korona, product manager for commercial controllers, and Don Clark, senior product manager for Rain Bird, San Diego. These controllers can irrigate areas where standard power is unavailable.

Prices of battery-operated controllers vary based on the system's number of stations. According to Jeff Kremicki, product manager of controllers and sensors, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif., costs range from \$135 for single-station units to \$200 for four-station units.

"The technology and design improvements have made it possible to produce alternative-powered controllers that are dependable," says Rick Heenan, national sales manager, commercial division, DIG Corp., Vista, Calif.



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by emily mullins | assistant editor

The Ins

and Outs

of Edging



Edgers are the perfect tools to give lawns a crisp, clean look.

risp, clean edges are the finishing touches of a good landscaping job. Without them, beautiful turf and weed-free beds don't look as neat and professional. Thankfully, a variety of edgers are available to land-scape contractors to keep a client's lawn on the straight and narrow. Different edgers are better for different tasks, so contractors must be aware of what their machine can accomplish before edging. But with the right model and the proper upkeep, edgers are the best tools for keeping lawns looking neat.

THE BASICS. Edgers were introduced in the mid-1980s as multi-purpose handheld tool. By the early 1990s, the machines appeared as dedicated units with one purpose: to create deep, neat edges between sidewalks, beside curbs and driveways and on the edges of grass lines and flower beds.

"When you're at the store picking out an edger, it's probably a good idea to pass by the multi-purpose machines," says Jay Larson, marketing manager for Shindaiwa's North American division, Tualatin, Ore. "The performance and versatility you gain with a dedicated unit will be worth the effort and the price."

The machine comes in two main types, stick and walk-behind, and both have their advantages and disadvantages. Stick, or handheld, edgers are powered by 1 to 1.2 horsepower engines attached to a shaft, says Chris Nordling, Shindaiwa lawn edger product manager. Walk-behind, or wheeled, edgers are powered by bigger

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handheld equipment

engines with between 2.5 to 5 horsepower and run with three or four wheels placed on the ground.

Handhelds are light and easy to maneuver, weighing between 13 and 15 pounds, and can fit into tight, compact areas. They're ideal for short, quick jobs, such as upkeep and maintenance, and they are not always best at making the first edge on new lawns or that first important edge in the spring.

Walk-behinds can run for longer periods of time, making them ideal for jobs a mile or longer, like highways and large commercial properties. They are better suited for creating edges in new lawns or edging through winter buildup to make spring's first cut. However, because of their size and weight, they are more awkward to transport and maneuver and require a larger



expert edging

Think of edging like playing baseball: Keep your eyes on the area you wish to edge, rather than the blade, and smoothly move toward it until making contact. "This technique works wonders," says Jay Larson, marketing manager for Shindaiwa's North American division, Tualatin, Ore. A contractor need to know how his machine handles before he expects expert results. So how do you achieve that perfect cut?

Tipping the edger forward is a good way to achieve crisp corners, especially in a tight areas. For the straightest lines, contractors should move smoothly and steadily, and avoid using a string trimmer to get the job done. "When you trim a lawn or flower bed with a string trimmer, it is easy to end up with cut lines that look more zigzag than straight," Larson says. "Plus, because a trimmer sweep is pretty wide, you can hack plants that you shouldn't and have trouble arcing around any kind of smooth corner."

Another tip is to edge curbs and sidewalks with a walkbehind edger each spring to freshly recut the previous year's groove. "It is extra work," Larson says. "But you'll save stress on your stick edger's engine, and it's only a once-a-year job."

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vehicle to haul them around.

Stick edgers are more popular in the landscape industry, and experienced a market growth of 66 percent from 2002 to 2006, says Bruce Gosen, product manager, Echo, Lake Zurich, Ill.

Tommy Tanaka, marketing manager for RedMax, Lawrenceville, Ga., agrees, adding stick edger sales have doubled in the past five years.

"Stick edgers are more maneuverable and easier to use," he says. "Contractors can pull it out of the truck and use it, which saves time. Walk-behinds can be heavy and awkward and require more manpower to operate."

PURCHASING POWER. When purchasing a stick edger, there are a few factors to consider, and machine weight is one to keep in mind. Contractors want a machine that is light enough to use without tiring their arms, but sturdy enough to be used

on thick weeds or near a sidewalk,

Larson says. In terms of horsepower, he recommends a machine with around 1 to 1.2 horsepower – any less is too little to be effective and any more is unnecessary for what the machine is intended to do.

Besides weight and power, blade adjustment is another important edger features because different tasks require different cutting depths.

"One of the most common mistakes contractors make when using an edger is not setting the appropriate height adjustment to provide a nice, deep cut for a particular job," Gosen says. "This can result in having to do the job over again or having to maintain it sooner than they would have if the blade height would have been set correctly."

Edging too deeply bogs down the engine because it's harder on the gear case and drive train, Nordling says. "And you also run the risk of hitting an irrigation line or sprinkler," he says. "But if your edge is too shallow,

you won't get a sharp enough cut."

And edging more than two inches deep increases the chance of hitting the concrete. "Striking a solid object causes the most stress to an edger and should be avoided," Nordling says.

Contractors should seek machines equipped with deflectors that keep debris from building up and clogging the machine. "Debris guards are like mud flaps on a truck," Larson says. "And they definitely help." Deflectors add \$15 to an edger's price, but it's a feature most models are becoming equipped with, Nordling says.

The blade is another important edger feature to consider. Without a strong, sharp blade, neat edges are difficult to obtain.

"Stout, stiff steel is what you want in a blade," Larson says, adding tool steel with a little bit of give to it is considered the best. "Nothing else will hold up to running through sod and dirt, scraping against concrete and hitting pebbles," he says.

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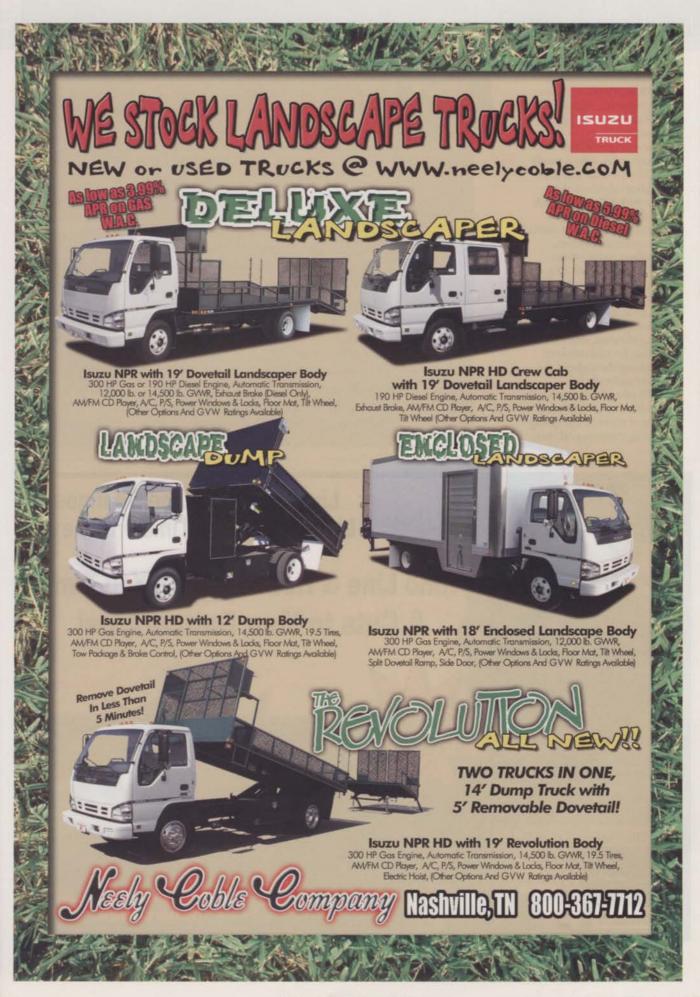




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EDGER ACTION. A contractor's geographic region will dictate the kind of edger he uses and when.

For example, in the southern states, where weeds are thicker, denser and grow throughout the year, may need a walk-behind or stick edger that will withstand year-round use to keep weeds under control. However, in northern states, where weeds go dormant during the winter, a walk-behind is best suited for creating the first edge in the spring. Likewise, a stick edger, or in some cases a string trimmer, may be sufficient for maintenance and upkeep throughout the summer and early fall.

"We often find contractors in northern states will use a dedicated edger in the spring for spring cleanup, and then



forseeable future

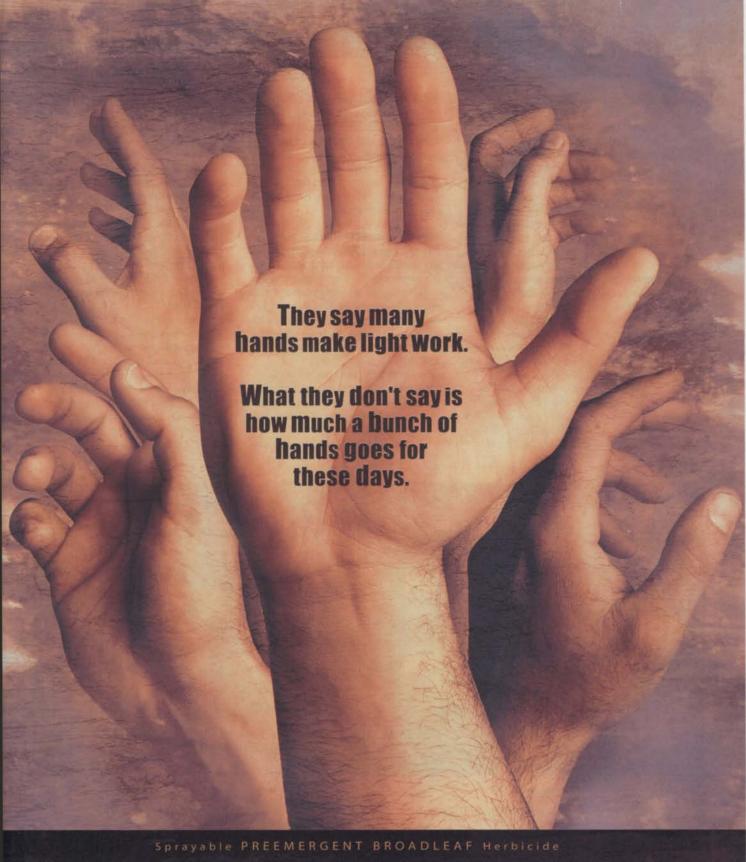
Not a whole lot has changed about edgers since their introduction, says Bruce Gosen product manager, Echo, Lake Zurich, III. The machines have become more powerful, some now come with curved or straight shafts and most are equipped with debris guards. But other than that, the machine and its use have stayed relatively consistent. "The machine is what it is," Gosen says. "Edgers have just been improved to do their jobs better over the years."

For the future, manufacturers plan to focus on reduction, says Marv Mathwig, product manager for power tools, STIHL, Virginia Beach, Va. "We want to reduce vibration, exhaust emissions and weight," he says. "We're also working to improve fuel efficiency."

Other future improvements edger manufacturers say they will strive for include refining blade design, increasing engine power and improving durability, all while maintaining the machine's ability to make a lawn look crisp and clean. "We're always looking for ways to speed up the edging process and generally make it easier on contractors," Gosen says. "But an edger is a product that doesn't change much. It is what it is."



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Trademark of Dow AgroSciences LLC Always read and follow label directions. try to get away with using a string trimmer for weekly maintenance, Gosen says. "In the south, where grass and weeds are heavier, contractors primarily use edgers for everything - our biggest market is in the Florida area."

Nearly all landscape contractors in southern states use some kind of edger, compared to about 50 percent of contractors in northern states who use string trimmers or other equipment to perform an edger's job, Tanaka says.

It's important for contractors to remember that edgers are made for edging, and they're not designed to troubleshoot other jobs.

'Edgers are not sod-cutters, leaf mulchers or roto-hoes," Larson says. "What they do well is put a neat edge on your lawn. Use them for other jobs and you won't like the results."

Edgers come in a wide range of prices, making it feasible for most contractors own more than one. Stick edgers can cost from \$200 to \$500 and wheeled edgers can run from

\$400 to \$900, Gosen says.

Tanaka recommends any contractors that offers lawn maintenance have at least one machine in use and one for backup.

However, with proper upkeep, edgers can last five to six years, or 1,000 hours, before they need replacing, Nordling says.

MINOR MAINTENANCE. How an edger is maintained during the growing season is just as important as how it's maintained before winter storage.

During the growing season, let the edger warm up for a few minutes before starting a job. At day's end, and once the machine has been allowed to cool down, hose off the blade and the debris guard after to clear abrasive debris. This is a good time for contractors to thoroughly inspect the blade for cracks or nicks that may have occurred during use and replace damaged or dull blades.

Larson suggests greasing the gear

case every 50 hours, and to consult the owner's manual to determine how greasing should be done.

"Make sure to remove the old grease first, rather than just add to it," he says. "Too much grease will make the gears run hot by entering the shaft and overloading the engine.

To winterize the machine, clean the blade and other mechanical parts and spray them with an oil coating to prevent rusting, Larson says. Clean the engine cylinder fins, the air filter and the muffler. Cover and store in a dry place away from moisture and severe cold.

The most important thing to do when winterizing an edger is to either add gas stabilizer to the fuel tank or to drain out all of the fuel to prevent clogging of the carburetor.

Lastly, before restarting the machine in the spring, Larson suggests contractors install a new spark plug, changing the fuel filter and re-greasing the gear case. II



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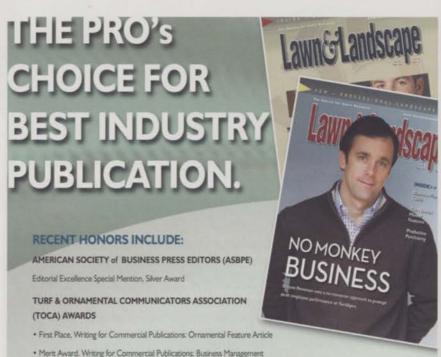
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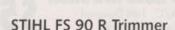
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- Includes an 8-inch cutting blade
- · Designed for a 3-inch cutting depth
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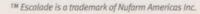


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by emily mullins | assistant editor



SPREADER STANDARDS

Great-looking turf requires an even fertilizer application. That is where the right spreader makes all the difference.

len Robert, owner of The Lawn Co., Shrewsury, Mass., is one lawn care operator who understands the importance of a productive spreader. After using walk-behind spreaders for 20 years, Robert invested in riding spreaders two years ago. The decision proved to be a sound one. Robert owns 15 and has plans to purchase more. "They're low maintenance when it comes to repairs and they make the work so much easier on my crews," he says.

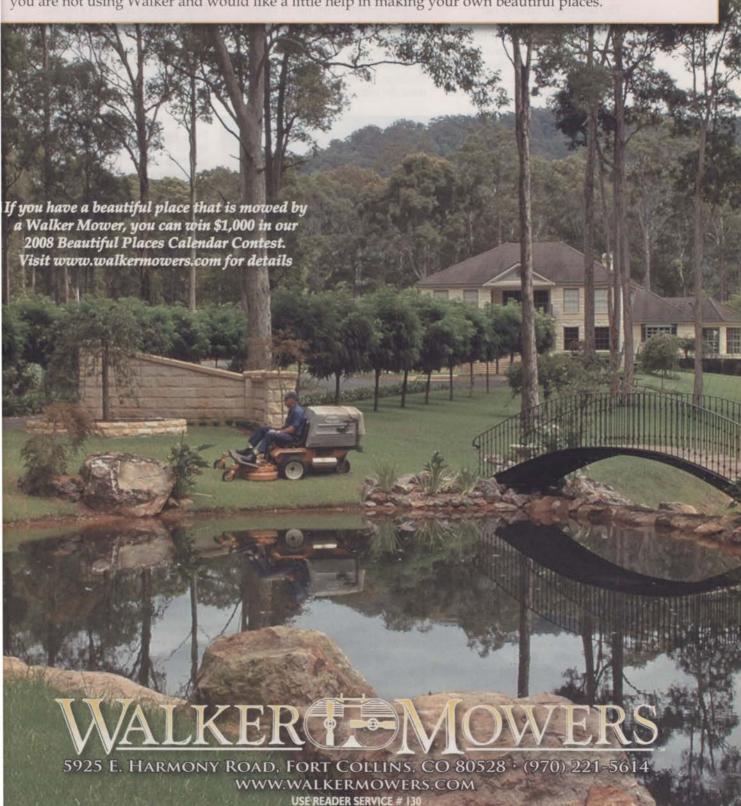
Productivity increased significantly. With a riding spreader, technicians can complete 18 to 20 lawns in the amount of time it took them to complete 12 to 13 lawns with a walk-behind, Robert says. "The best part is my employees are not huffing and puffing when they're done and they want to come back to work the next day – that's really important," Robert says.

Throughout the spreader's evolution, the machine has helped lawn care companies reduce labor costs, decrease operator fatigue and increase business productivity, all while producing green, even turf.

"Spreader advancements have really taken the physical aspect out of the job," says Ted Shackelford, president of C&S Turf Care Equipment, Canton, Ohio. "Lawn care companies no longer need someone in the physical condition of a high school football player to apply fertilizer, which means they have a larger labor base to choose from."

Beautiful Places

At Walker Manufacturing this is how we think about what we do--we don't make lawn mowers, we make beautiful places. That thought has inspired us for nearly 30 years on our quest to design and build the best possible machine to make a beautiful place. And the Walker is made for landscape contractors who have the same thought--we don't "mow grass", we make beautiful places. Ask to see a Walker demonstration if you are not using Walker and would like a little help in making your own beautiful places.



Every professional lawn care company faces difficulty in finding and retaining quality lawn technicians, says Tom Jessen, president of PermaGreen Supreme, Valparaiso, Ind. "Powered spreader/sprayers reduce operator fatigue and allow older employees to turn out the required amount of work," he says.

The landscape industry has traditionally been a "young man's business," Jessen says, with prime candidates being men in their 20s. "When technicians enter their 30s and early 40s, they begin to reach the end of useful employment in terms of

decessors, they were small, compact and ideal for urban properties.

"A combination unit saves labor by doing two jobs in only one trip over a lawn," he says. "They are also smaller and less expensive than truckmounted sprayers, which have 400- to 600-gallon tanks and cost between \$10,000 and \$15,000."

The growth in the use of combination units has expanded steadily, a trend that will likely continue, Jessen says. "The relatively inexpensive combination machines are replacing the large, costly spray trucks that were once the industry standard," he says.

crews spending more time on a lawn than necessary.

The amount of operator fatigue that results from pushing a drop spreader throughout an eight to 10 hour work day is also a downfall of this type of machine. "A lot of upper body strength is needed and it really wore my guys out when we used them," Robert says. "It's a lot less work on a technician when he doesn't have to push a machine all day."

Drop spreaders ensure a more accurate application because the material is distributed right where it needs to go. However this direct drop leaves little room for error, which makes it difficult to achieve an even distribution. Too much or too little material in one area leaves a blotchy, inconsistent pattern. "If an operator does not make a half-width edging pass around the boarders, this can result in only a half-rate application of product in those areas," Jessen says.

Rotary spreaders are the most popular among LCOs. These machines have a propeller that throws material in a fan-shaped pattern, allowing contractors to apply more material farther, faster and more evenly. Rotary spreaders also have the ability to spread a variety of materials, such as seeds, fertilizer and mulch, with different consistencies. "Rotary spreaders allow you to cover more ground quicker, and at the same time are less likely to cause streaking,' Shackelford says. "They can also apply material with larger particle sizes better than drop spreaders, making them great for combination applications of fertilizer and weed control."

PRODUCT PRICES. The variety of spreaders available means that most lawn care companies can afford one of these machines. According to Jessen and Shackelford, basic walk-behind drop spreaders cost around \$100 to \$150, commercial-grade rotary push spreaders range from \$350 to \$450, self-propelled rotary spreaders can cost between \$700 and \$800, while riding spreader-sprayer combinations can cost anywhere from \$6,000 to \$10,000. "All lawn care companies have access to equipment they can justify a need for and afford," Shackelford says. "When a company can no longer keep up with their workload using a backpack sprayer and a rotary walk-behind they have the option to



"Lawn care companies

no longer need someone

in the physical condition

of a high school football player

to apply fertilizer – they have

a larger labor base to choose

from." – Ted Shackelford

manual labor because they can't meet daily productivity quotas," he says.

Riding spreader/sprayers allow employees to be productive once they become older. "I hired a great technician in his mid-30s who had 15 years of experience at another company," Jessen says. "The work became too demanding, but because of our riding units, he was able to treat lawns for another 12 years with us."

Motorized walk-behind and riding spreaders emerged in the early 1980s, and motorized riding spreader/sprayer units appeared soon after. These time-saving machines were not only multifunctional, but, unlike their pre"In addition to their convenience, emerging environmental concerns and preference for granular fertilizer contributes to this trend."

spreader selections. There are two main types of spreaders: drop and rotary. Drop spreaders are usually 2 to 3 feet long and 1 foot deep and ride close to the ground, dropping material in an area approximately the width of a sidewalk directly from the bottom. Manufacturers say drop spreaders are not very popular in today's industry because their large size can make them more challenging to use and transport and their slower speeds can result in

upgrade to a motorized machine."

According to Lawn & Landscape research, 30 percent of LCOs purchased one or more spreaders in 2006 spending an average of \$991. According to the research, 20 percent of LCOs plan to purchase one or more units in 2007. Shackelford and Jessen believe future sales of spreaders will increase due to both demand and the availability of better products.

"The recent housing boom that we experienced created another kind of labor issue because lawn care businesses were picking up more accounts," Shackelford says. "Businesses needed to get work done and did it with mechanized equipment instead of larger crews."

"Now that we have radically improved a sprayer design to fit a push spreader, we expect that the percentage of push spreader/sprayers will increase dramatically in the next few years," Jessen says.

Once a company invests in a spreader, minimal maintenance is necessary to keep it in working condition year after year. Solid spreader maintenance begins with proper daily cleaning and lubrication of the moving parts, Jessen says.

Other maintenance includes engine upkeep and regular oil and air filter changes. "With preventative maintenance, a spreader should last a long time," Shackelford says.

Robert requires general routine maintenance of his spreaders including gearbox and engine upkeep, necessary belt changes and general cleaning and lubrication, all of which is done in-house. "These machines require bare, basic maintenance," he says. "There aren't a lot of moving parts, which results in less need for repair."

Shackelford also advises LCOs to drain a spreader's fuel tank before storing it for winter to prevent the fuel from clogging carburetors and fuel lines. "Forgetting to winterize the machine is probably the biggest problem LCOs have," he says. "But if this is done, the machine should fire up right away come spring."

MACHINE MISTAKES. Running the machine at improper speeds is a primary way an LCO can misuse a spreader. Spreaders are meant to run at 3 to 4 mph, and anything faster or slower distorts the application with streaking and inconsistent patterns, Shackelford says. "Uneven coverage and distorted patterns can occur when LCOs try to use a spreader too quickly," he says. "This is common for LCOs under time constraints and pressure caused by factors like missed work or uncooperative weather."

While riding spreaders are best at maintaining a proper speed, most walk-behinds also have a gearing system that allows the propeller to turn at a designated pace. Regardless, LCOs should follow the manufacturer's speed recommendations no matter what type of machine they operate.

"Riding spreader/sprayers apply material more accurately than walk-behinds because they can maintain a steady ground speed throughout the day," Jessen says. "Riding units also travel faster than a person can walk and can improve production by 50 percent or more."

Another mistake LCOs make is purchasing a spreader too large or too small to suit their needs. If the majority of a lawn care business' clients are 2,000 to 3,000 square foot properties, a riding spreader would be an inappropriate investment. Similarly, if a company serves mostly half-acre or larger commercial properties, a motorized walk-behind might not be the best bet.

In addition, an LCO must also ensure they have a way to transport the equipment they purchase. "Many require a trailer or a larger vehicle to transport it from site to site," Shackelford says.

www.lawnandlandscape.com

For a sneak peak at spreader advancements expected in the future, visit the March Online Extras section.



USE READER SERVICE # 131

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compiled by heather wood | web editor

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- C&S Turf Care Equipment 800/872-7050 www.csturfequip.com

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- Features a molded hopper base with stainless steel gate controls, fan and vibrating agitator
- Large polyethylene hopper holds 120 pounds
- Electronic speed control adjusts fan speed for accurate spread widths from 5 to 24 feet
- Model 503 has a foot-operated gate for mid-mount ZTRs while model 504 has a push-pull cable for walk-behinds and utility vehicles
- JRCO 800/966-8442
 www.jrcoinc.com

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- · Includes a durable polyethylene hopper
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- · High wheel design adds to the maneuverability
- Rate adjustment mechanism helps to provide precise flow control
- Deflector kit is optional
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 www.lesco.com

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169

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- · Features super-duty transmission
- · No electrical, hydraulic or boom systems are included
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SOLO Chest-Mounted Spreader

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- Coverage is uniform because built-in agitator allows the material to drop evenly into the impeller
- Includes simple, fingertip controls that adjust direction and volume of the dispersed material
- SOLO 757/245-4228, www.solousa.com

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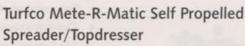




SpreadEx LG375 Spreader

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- · Adjustable deflector allows for spread pattern manipulation
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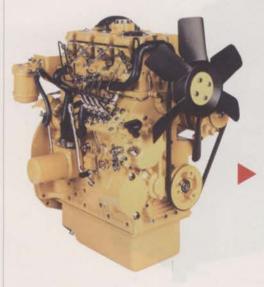
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- Available in naturally aspirated, turbocharged and turbocharged aftercooled configurations
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 www.honda-engines.com

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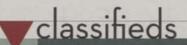
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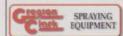
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t happens to nearly every landscape contractor. An irate individual calls your office and complains that you or your maintenance crew, while working at a nearby residential or commercial property, dirtied the finish on his or her car. Now, the vehicle's owner wants you to deal with the problem, which can be very costly.

Operating in the wet Pacific Northwest, Pacific Landscape Management has, on occasion, splattered cars with grass and mud while mowing or edging a client's property. Maintaining landscaping around parked vehicles is a Catch-22 situation for landscape contractors. If we stay clear, some of the landscape work or clean-up doesn't get done and the client is unhappy. On the other hand, if we get too close to a parked vehicle, we run the risk of possibly splattering debris on it or even damaging the finish.

At first, we believed it was too difficult for us to be proactive in these situations since the owner is usually not around his or her vehicle at the time of the incident. Likewise, our tight schedule forces us to leave the job site before the car's owner returns.

While it's easy to instruct, train and warn workers to "be careful," the truth is the closer we get, the more risk we are bound to take. In addition to training our employees to be more aware and careful we believe that proactive communication can also help in these situations.

In most cases we offered to have the individual's vehicle washed, but by that point the person was agitated because he or she had to call us. And many times that individual wanted more than a car wash and demanded an expensive detail job or body work and paint.

However, we devised a solution that benefits both our landscape firm and the vehicle's owner

During winter 2004-05 Ron Knesal, a partner and vice president, developed a simple and effective tool that serves as a solution to avoid the bad feelings and





When surrounding vehicles are affected by their work, Pacific Landscape Management utilizes an apology envelope containing a car-wash certificate to diffuse any angry feelings and rectify the situation. Photos: Pacific Landscape Management

liability associated with these types of complaints. When surrounding vehicles are affected by our work, we now have the means to take responsibility and apologize, thereby diffusing any angry feelings and rectifying the situation.

To deal with this, Knesal created car wash notes, a sort of apology envelope that includes a car wash certificate, our business card and a note that states:

"We apologize for any inconvenience but during our work today, we got debris on your car. Please accept this car wash coupon as our apology. If a simple car wash does not satisfy you, please contact the supervisor listed on the enclosed card."

Our workers place the envelopes under the vehicle's windshield wipers when we accidentally splatter a car with lawn refuse so the owner immediately receives the apology, even if the crew is no longer on site.

Other than the \$5 for the carwash coupon, there are no other costs associated with offering this service. With 20 crews in the field, we estimate that over the course of the year we may hand out about 25 to 30 car wash cards for a total cost of only \$125 to \$150. That's a lot cheaper than the cost for a single professional vehicle detailing.

Since introducing this policy, we receive very few irate calls anymore, and to my knowledge, no one has ever rejected an apology envelope. Our workers distribute the cards fairly often, and we receive very few complaint calls any more. The car wash notes have nearly eliminated people calling our offices demanding a new paint-job or professional detailing and, instead, accept the \$5 car wash certificates. We've even had a few people call to thank us for the car wash.

We don't generally consider this as a "positive" branding or marketing measure by our firm, since workers leave the apology envelope on a car of someone who is not directly our commercial client, but rather one of their tenants or customers. Instead, this does prevent us from inadvertently sending a negative message about our company to the community. Maintaining a professional image is easier if people in the community are not complaining about you. To date, though, I am not aware whether these packages have generated any new clients for us.

We try to train our crews to be courteous and responsible. This is an example of how powerful taking responsibility is in reducing problems.

- Bob Grover



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