

January 2008

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Noon Turf Care, Hudson, Mass.

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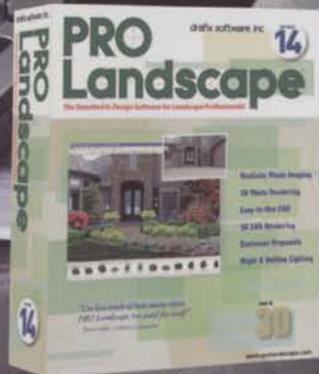


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# january 2008

A GIE MEDIA PUBLICATION • VOLUME 29 NUMBER 1

## COVER STORY

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## Sales 2.0

Selling lawn care online? Noon Turf Care proves it's possible.

## BUSINESS

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A company Web site can act as a portal to a new client base – just make sure the site gives the potential customers a positive impression.

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Red tape or not, government contracts can be a great line of business for landscape companies. Here are the basics.

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Two-wire irrigation is a time-saving alternative, particularly for contractors with big jobs to do.

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Getting the most out of your mowing operations means taking a smart approach.

### 72 Trim Away

String trimmers offer high-power in a lightweight package.



"We're trying to harness technology to do something better."

— Chris Noon, Noon Turf Care

Chris and Matt Noon | Noon Turf Care, Hudson, Mass. | Cover photo by: Stephen Faust



## PESTICIDES/FERTILIZERS

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2008 brings a number of challenges for lawn care operators, from uncertain weather conditions to a push for greener solutions.

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Business software is an essential component for a well-run landscape operation, but is that upgraded program you're considering turn-key or turn-off?

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The Daily Resource for Landscape Contractors | [lawnandlandscape.com](http://lawnandlandscape.com)



If you missed the International Irrigation Show in December or just want to learn more about the products and education at the event, log onto [lawnandlandscape.com](http://lawnandlandscape.com) to see what you missed.

## FIVE TOP WEB STORIES

### 1. H-2B Remains in Political Deadlock, Fly-in Attendees Say

Even after the "emergency" Save Small Business Fly-In, H-2B supporters were uncertain about the fate of the returning-worker exemption.

### 2. Agrium Acquires UAP Holding Corp.

Agrium agreed to pay \$2.6 billion.

### 3. Housing Recovery To Begin in 2008

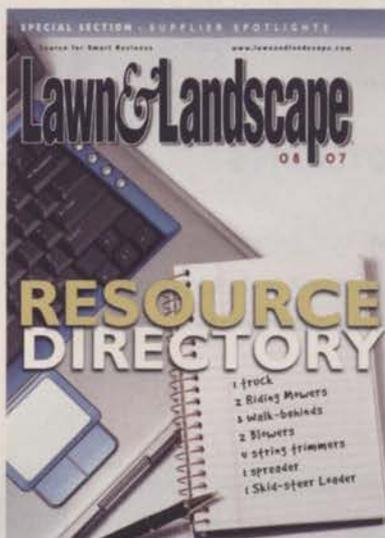
The National Association of Home Builders predicts a housing upswing.

### 4. New Irrigation Association Head

Douglas York was inaugurated at the International Irrigation Show.

### 5. Landscape Contractors in Florida Get Leaf Blowers Sound-Checked

Voluntary tests help leaf blower users comply with the city of Palm Beach's noise ordinance.



## YOUR INDUSTRY RESOURCE

The latest Lawn & Landscape Industry Resource Directory is available online in an easy-to-search format. Visit [lawnandlandscape.com](http://lawnandlandscape.com) and click the "Resource Directory" box midway down the right side of the home page. There you'll find information for all your business needs.



## GREEN SIDE UP

Green industry consultant Ed Laflamme's guide to management, "Green Side Up" is available in the *Lawn & Landscape* book store. Visit [lawnandlandscape.com/store](http://lawnandlandscape.com/store) to order a copy.

## The Month Ahead | [lawnandlandscape.com](http://lawnandlandscape.com)

### INDUSTRY BUZZ

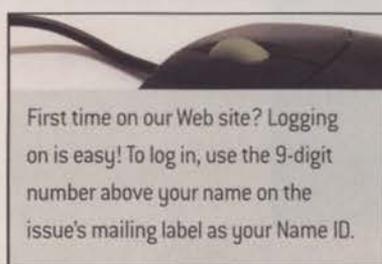
Log on Jan. 14 as an industry professional tackles the latest issues and shares secrets to managing lawn and landscape companies.

### ONLINE EXTRA

See this month's Tool Kit feature about uniforms, then read online about renting them at the bottom of the home page under "current issue."

### WEB CAST

Scroll your mouse to the top right corner of our home page and "peel back" the corner to access Real Green's webcast, "How to Grow Your Business."



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## Ring in a New Year

**Happy New Year.** With the New Year we debut a newly designed magazine. Our design and editorial team worked together to bring you a cleaner look that more effectively conveys the depth of content that monthly keeps you on top of events, trends and opportunities in the professional lawn and landscape marketplace.

Don't worry. We're still providing you with the same top-notch business management articles you rely on to run your businesses efficiently and profitably. In fact, we've expanded the breadth of this coverage by providing you with more innovative ideas to grow your residential and commercial businesses along with governmental and HOA properties.

We've organized *Lawn & Landscape's* various sections with this in mind. In this issue, you'll find input from our readers in our letters to the editor page. We're always eager to receive input from our 80,000 subscribers. Don't hesitate to send in your thoughts and opinions. We'll print as many of them as we can in future issues. Next, you'll find industry news, events and trends. We highlight stories and key statistics that impact your business and accurately reflect the ever-changing nature of the landscape industry.

Our feature section follows the news and leads off with the issue's cover story, easily the most identifiable characteristic of our magazine. This is anything but a cookie-cutter industry and it's our goal to profile companies of all revenue sizes, varying service niches and across all geographic regions including seasonal vs. year-round operations.

We profile those companies who have created a successful template for their landscape business. We don't highlight only the "big" companies; rather it's our goal to provide proven, real-world successful business strategies that you can incorporate into your businesses.

We've also included a section in the back of the magazine to serve as a business tool kit. Within this section, you'll receive expertise from industry veterans and exclusive *Lawn & Landscape* columnists Marty Grunder, Jim Huston and Bill Arman. These contributors have all worked the service side of the business and bring real-life experience with regard to sales and marketing, business operations and labor – the lifeblood of our industry. Along with our popular "How We Do It" and "Business Opportunities" sections, we'll include a monthly "Took Kit" page that features an essential tool to make your business better.

It's certainly a lot of content to include in print. There's never room for it all, so to get the full picture, you need to log on to [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) to receive all of our issue extras, business forms, MSDS labels and to enjoy a dialogue with your peers on our message boards.

We're excited about 2008 and the continued growth of the lawn and landscape industry. Please share with me your thoughts about our new look or any subject you're interested in reading about at [ccode@gie.net](mailto:ccode@gie.net). Make it a great year. **LL**

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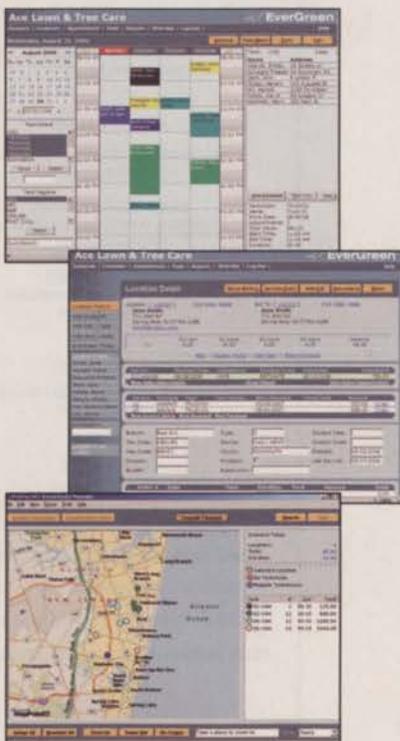
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# letters to the editor

Readers can forward their letters via the Letters to the Editor button at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) or directly to Editor Cindy Code at [cocode@gie.net](mailto:cocode@gie.net).



## Dear Editor:

I look forward to your magazine every month. The November issue is the best issue I have ever read. You covered so many topics, and they were so well written and so detailed. My hats off to you. All of your issues are good, but this one especially stands out. I just wanted to say thank you.

*Dina Thweni  
Trim Cut Landscaping  
Warren, Mich.*

## Dear Editor,

I own a medium-sized, Georgia-based landscape company and read your magazine monthly. The November issue was especially interesting as it "hit home" to a very similar situation. The article, "My Employee Stole Nearly \$500,000" brought chills up my back. I had a situation in 2005 where I had two employees embezzle nearly \$100,000 within five months. Fortunately, we caught it quickly, as it would have ruined our company.

I have heard more and more stories in the past two years of embezzlement in small- to medium-sized companies. It seems every time I mention it to another business owner, they too have their own horror story. Business owners need to be made aware of the dangers of bookkeepers, managers and family members working within a family-owned business. A business owner can never take his eye off the ball.

*Dave Henderson  
President & CEO  
Associated Environmental Landscape  
Alpharetta, Ga.*

## Dear Editor,

I read with interest your September cover story, "Can an Industry Marketing Campaign Survive?" It makes some great points. Afterward, I started looking around for a word or two that, when dropped at the kitchen table, everyone would know. I found it: carbon footprint.

Well, our GREEN INDUSTRY is the solution to the carbon footprint. As your article states: "If people realized that a growing patch of lawn can produce enough oxygen for a family of four and realized we're improving living conditions, that would go along with all the hype Al Gore is pushing."

Our antidote to the carbon footprint is the oxygen footprint ([www.oxygenfootprint.org](http://www.oxygenfootprint.org)). I share this spark with you in hopes that something will catch fire and give our industry the recognition it deserves.

*Steve Cissel  
CEO and Founder  
10-20 Media, Inc.  
Woodbine, Md.*

## Dear Editor,

Your magazine has always been the leader in our industry in my opinion. I finished reading the October issue and I wanted you to know that every page was chocked full of good articles. I forwarded it to key associates in our company. Kudos to you and your team!

*Frank Mariani  
CEO  
Mariani Landscape  
Lake Bluff, Ill.*



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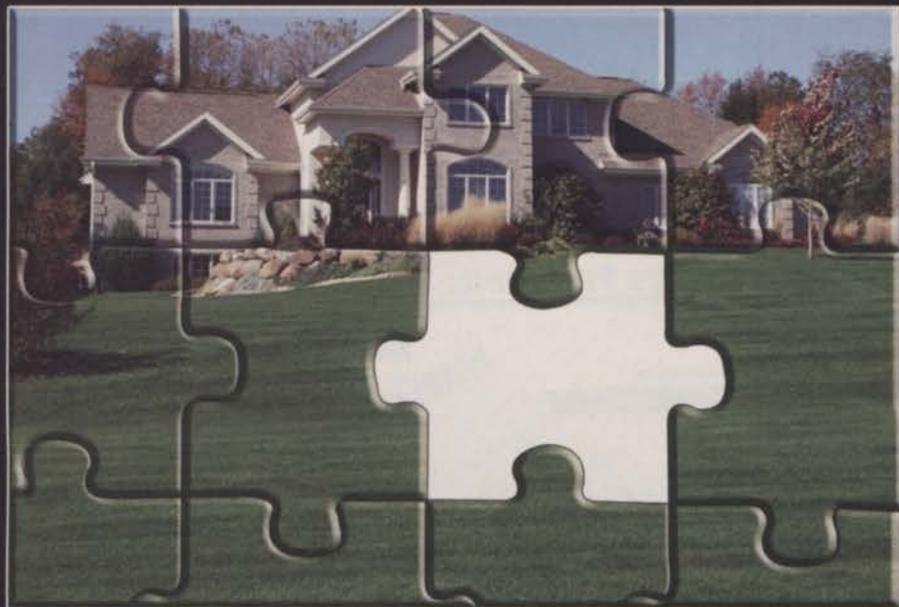
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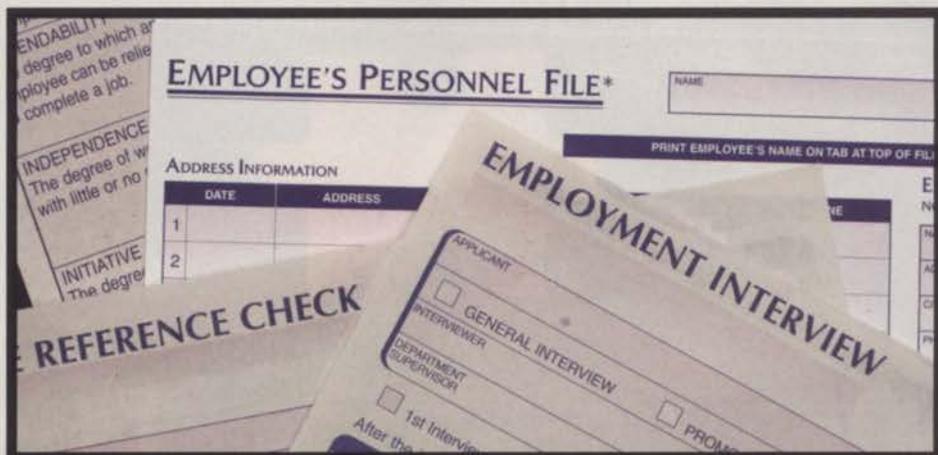
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# NEW I-9 FORM RELEASED

**U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS)** made changes to its Employment Eligibility Verification Form (I-9) as part of its ongoing work to reduce the number of documents used to confirm identity and worker eligibility. The Form I-9 with a revision date of June 5, 2007, is the only version of the form that is valid for use. All employers are required to complete a Form I-9 for each employee hired in the United States.

Key changes include the removal of five documents for proof of both identity and employment eligibility because they lack sufficient features to deter counterfeiting, tampering and fraud. They



include: Certificate of U.S. Citizenship (Form N-560 or N-570); Certificate of Naturalization (Form N-550 or N-570); Alien Registration Receipt Card (Form I-151); the unexpired Reentry Permit (Form I-327); and the unexpired Refugee Travel Document (Form I-571). Additionally, the most

recent version of the Employment Authorization Document (Form I-766) was added to "List A" of the "List of Acceptable Documents" on the revised form. The revised list now includes: a U.S. passport (unexpired or expired); a Permanent Resident Card (Form I-551); an unexpired

foreign passport with a temporary I-551 stamp; an unexpired Employment Authorization Document that contains a photograph (Form I-766, I-688, I-688A, or I-688B); and an unexpired foreign passport with an unexpired Arrival-Departure Record (Form I-94)

*continued on page 14*

## NO-MATCH LETTERS

### DHS TO SURVEY SMALL BUSINESSES

**THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY** will revise its "no-match" letter rule, created to crack-down on employers who hire illegal immigrants, and will conduct a small business survey in the process.

DHS's agreement to revise the rule comes as a response to Federal Judge

Charles Breyer's Oct. 10 decision to indefinitely suspend DHS's no-match rule, which says an employer must fire a worker whose social security information can't be resolved within 90 days of the employer's receiving a letter from the Social Security Administration indicating the employ-

ee's identity doesn't match the agency's records.

Trade groups took DHS to court over the issue, saying the rules over-burdened businesses and the error-ridden Social Security database to be used for verification could cause

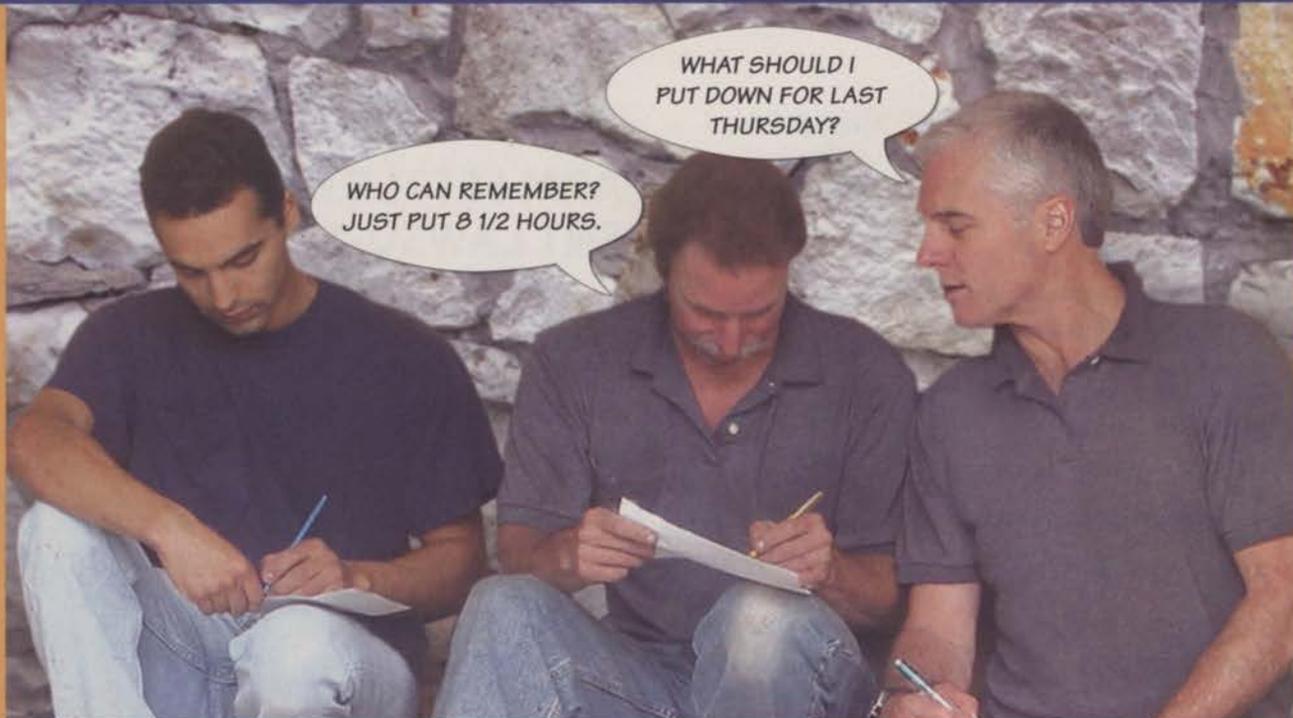
citizens to lose their jobs. Breyer gave DHS until March 24 to get small business owners' input and rewrite the rule.

*— Marisa Palmieri*



Photo (left): istockphoto.com | Photo (above): Dreamstime.com

# HOW MUCH IS THIS CONVERSATION COSTING YOU?



**WHY DEAL WITH THIS?**

**WHEN YOU CAN HAVE THIS.**

Employee Time Card

Name: **DAVID B.** Dates: **11-15**

Day:	Start:	Lunch:	End:	Jobsite:	Activity:	Hours:
Monday	7	1/2	3:30	Brentwood	Gen	8
Tuesday	7	1/2	3:30	"	"	8
Wednesday	7	1/2	4	"	"	8 1/2
Thursday	7	1/2	4	Crestview	"	8 1/2
Friday	7	1/2	4	"	"	8 1/2

Employee Signature: *David B.* Total Hours: **41 1/2**

Employee Report

Burns, David Date Range: 2/11/2008 through 2/15/2008

Day	Date	Jobsite	Start	Stop	Cost Code	Hours	Total
Mon	2/11	Brentwood	7:08 AM	12:05 PM	Irrigation	4:57	7:38 hours
			12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Irrigation	2:41	
Tue	2/12	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:55	7:35 hours
			12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Irrigation	2:40	
Wed	2/13	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Irrigation	4:50	7:53 hours
			12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Irrigation	3:03	
Thu	2/14	Crestview	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Planting	5:02	7:58 hours
			12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Planting	2:56	
Fri	2/15	Crestview	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Planting	4:54	7:49 hours
			12:44 PM	3:39 PM	Planting	2:55	

Signature: *David B.* Burns, David **Total 38:53 hours**

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**EXAKTIME**  
INNOVATION AT WORK

continued from page 12

for non-immigrant aliens authorized to work for a specific employer.

Both the revised form and the "Handbook for Employers, Instructions for Completing the Form I-9" are available online at [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) or by calling 800/375-5283.

— Marisa Palmieri

## EDUCATION

### DEVELOP ACCOUNT MANAGERS

**INDUSTRY VETERANS** Bruce Wilson and Tom Oyler have created an educational opportunity focused on fool-proof methods of developing world-class account managers.

Beginning this month, the Wilson-Oyler Group Success Series seminar sessions will provide the educational content to develop top-of-class account managers. The Wilson-Oyler skill development processes are based on real-life scenarios and have led to a development platform that allows landscape companies to grow revenues and retain long-term clients.

Seminar cities include Atlanta, Dallas, Chicago, Baltimore, Columbus, Denver and Orlando and dates include Jan. 10 and 14, Feb. 7 and 21, March 6 and 20 and April 3. The series is presented by Husqvarna and the media sponsor is *Lawn & Landscape*. For a registration form, go to [www.wilson-oyler.com](http://www.wilson-oyler.com)

## CHEMICAL

### BAYER, NUFARM SETTLE PATENT INFRINGEMENT LAWSUIT

**BAYER CROPSCIENCE AND NUFARM AMERICAS** reached a settlement in a lawsuit Bayer filed for infringement on its patent for the pesticide imidacloprid on fertilizer.

The settlement grants Nufarm and its partners freedom to work with Bayer's patented imidacloprid on fertilizer technology, including the ability to commercialize products incorporating the patented technology. Nufarm acknowledged that Bayer's patent is valid and enforceable, according to company officials. Other terms of the settlement are confidential.

The crux of the lawsuit

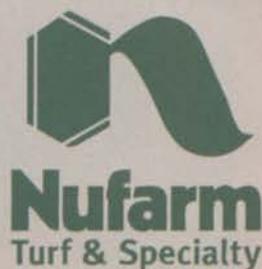
centered around Nufarm's use of adhesives in the form of sticks, plates, tablets or granules in its combination imidacloprid product. Both Bayer and Nufarm will continue to market combination fertilizer products with imidacloprid to the lawn and landscape marketplace.

In other Nufarm news, the proposed acquisition of Nufarm by China National Chemical corporation and two private equity groups — The Blackstone Group and Fox Paine Management III — is off. The group said it was not able to finalize its proposal prior to the expiration of the exclusivity period. No extension is planned.

— Cindy Code



Bayer Environmental Science



## CONTRACTOR NEWS

### OREGON CERTIFIES FIRST ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE COMPANY

**ALONG WITH BECOMING CERTIFIED LANDSCAPE TECHNICIANS AND CERTIFIED LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS**, landscape companies in Oregon now have the option of becoming environmentally certified. Salem, Ore.-based DeSantis Landscapes was certified as the state's first commercial ecological landscape contractor by the Portland Regional Pollution Prevention Outreach Team. The organization, made up of environmental experts from eight Portland-area agencies, recognizes landscape design, installation and maintenance contractors that "reach the highest standards in minimizing environmental impact."

"About four years ago we made a serious commitment to be a leader in sustainable

continued on page 18

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USE READER SERVICE # 16

## inside the industry

*continued from page 14*

landscapes and thought getting certified was a perfect way to prove we met the criteria," said Dean DeSantis, president.

DeSantis Landscapes met requirements in six categories: business practices, site design, installation, site maintenance, vehicles and equipment, and materials handling. The company already fulfilled many of the application's requirements, such as biodiesel usage in trucks and equipment, utilization of four-cycle technology in handheld equipment, implementing erosion control programs on design/build projects and minimizing pesticide use. The entire certification process took four months.

DeSantis said environmental certification will become more commonplace as landscape companies around the country look for ways to lessen their impact. "Everyone is realizing the earth is in trouble and we all have to do what we can to protect it," he said.

The certification has established the company as a leader in environmental consciousness, and its clients appreciate its extra efforts to be green, DeSantis said. "To be the first in anything distinguishes your business," he said. "We don't just say we're a green company, we have someone behind us saying we're the real deal."

— Emily Mullins

## LOCAL RESTRICTIONS

### LEAF BLOWER BAN USED ON 'HEART RATE'

**CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS IN CAMBRIDGE, MASS.**, are considering an ordinance that would partially ban leaf blowers, not based on hearing loss, but the possibility of raising the heart rates of passersby, the *Boston Globe* reports.

Jo Solet, a Harvard Medical School researcher who studies the effects of noise on the body, tells the newspaper decibel levels emitted from leaf blowers are to blame for raising heart rates. However, most studies on leaf blowers have shown that the bulk of leaf blowers on the market produce decibel levels comparable to normal conversation (60 to 70 decibels). A telephone dial tone is about 80 decibels.

"There's tension between cleaning up our parks and noise in residential neighborhoods," Henrietta Davis, a city councilwoman, tells the *Globe*. "I think we need to draw the line that says we shouldn't have to put up with the noise and what's being put into the air." Should the ordinance pass, commercial use of leaf blowers within 150 feet of residential areas would be illegal, the *Globe* reports.

Dana Gallup, owner of Cambridge-based Gallup Landscape Co., says banning leaf blowers, even partially, will slow how quickly his crews can perform work. "The ban ranks somewhere between ridiculous and absurd. If you move into a city, you come to expect noise. What's next? Will they outlaw trucks and jackhammers because they're too loud and dirty?"

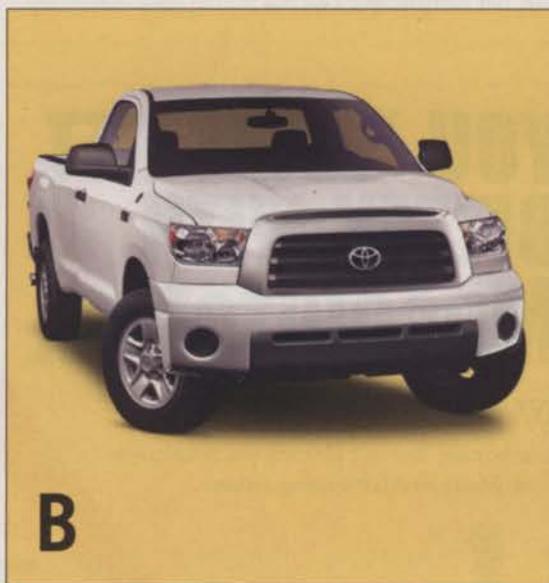
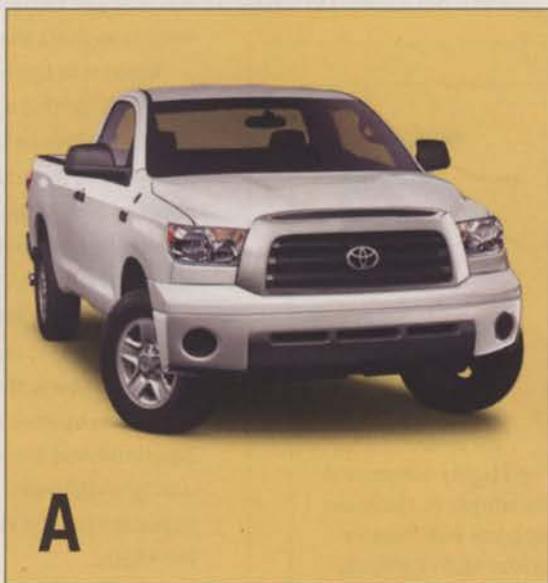
Other cities in the U.S. are dealing with new leaf blower bans. Yonkers, N.Y., has come under fire recently because though the city banned all use of blowers during the summer, city workers are exempt from the ban.

— Mark A. Phillips

## BUSINESS SOLUTIONS QUIZ #2

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CONTRACTOR NEWS

## ORDINANCE VIOLATES CONTRACTOR'S RIGHTS, JUDGE SAYS

A MASSACHUSETTS LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR'S CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS were violated by a city ordinance that banned trucks in his neighborhood, the *Eagle-Tribune* newspaper reports.

Judge Thomas Murtagh ruled that a law prohibiting commercial vehicles weighing more than 3 tons on certain streets in Haverhill, Mass., "likely discriminates arbitrarily" against Leonard Russo, owner of Russo's Earth Care, the newspaper says. Russo had taken the city to court, saying the law would put him out of business. The ruling means Russo can continue to operate the business from his neighborhood, but a city lawyer says the zoning rules eventually

will force him out. The address of Russo's business is also his home address.

"This is a good lesson for the city," Joel Rosen, Russo's attorney, told the *Eagle-Tribune*. "You cannot discriminate. You cannot put a good person out of business just because the

neighbors don't like him."

Russo tells *Lawn & Landscape* he's getting a raw deal, especially since he's contributed a lot to the city. "I've donated a lot of time taking care of the Korean War Memorial in town," he says. "I put in two ball fields here in the city." Russo argues that his business should be allowed to operate in his neighborhood because it was "grandfathered in". His father started the business in the 1950s.

— Mark A. Phillips



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Log onto [lawnand-landscape.com](http://lawnand-landscape.com) in between issues for the latest industry news, including updates on the H-2B situation, as well as valuable online content to help your landscape business grow and achieve greater success.

USE READER SERVICE # 18



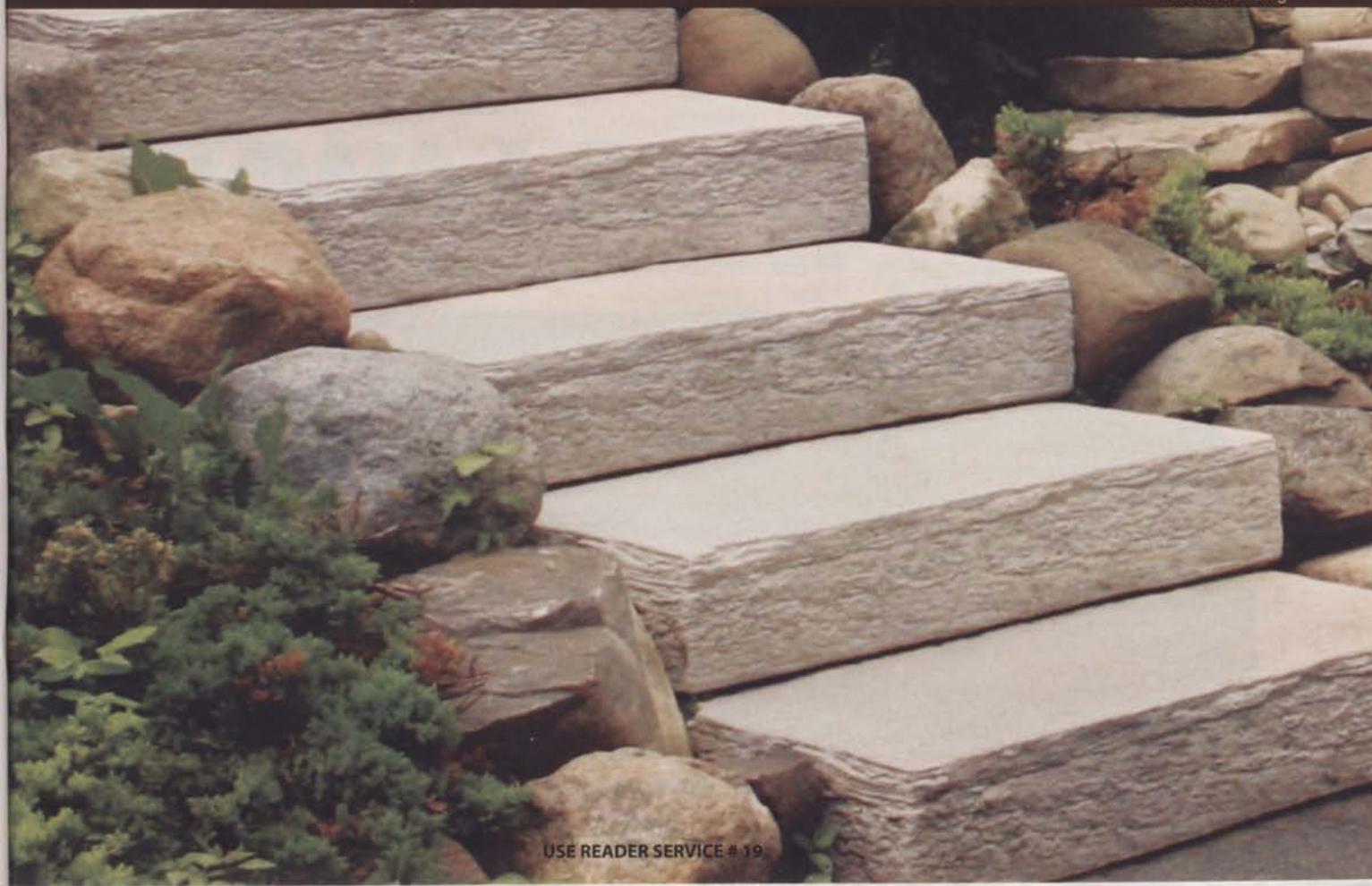
Bob is building an outdoor staircase. He can use either (A) natural stone, which weighs approximately 390 pounds each, requiring heavy machinery and extra crew members to move and position the slabs or (B) RockStep,<sup>™</sup> a reinforced concrete product\* that looks like natural stone but weighs just 80 pounds, so no extra labor or machinery is required. Which material will allow Bob to save both time and money?

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## ENGLISH TO SPANISH PHRASES

**ENGLISH:** We need to plant these flowers.

**SPANISH:** Debemos plantar estas flores. (deh-BEH-mohs plahn-TAHR EHS-tahs FLOWH-rehs.)

**ENGLISH:** We need to plant these shrubs.

**SPANISH:** Debemos plantar estos arbustos. (deh-BEH-mohs plahn-TAHR EHS-tohs ahr-BOOS-tohs.)

**ENGLISH:** We need to fertilize all the shrubs in this yard.

**SPANISH:** Debemos fertilizar todos los arbustos en este jardín.  
(deh-BEH-mohs fehr-tee-lee-SAHR ToH-dohs lohS ahr-BOOS-tohs ehn EHS-teh hahr-DEEN.)

**ENGLISH:** We need to add peat moss to the bed.

**SPANISH:** Debemos agregar musgo de turba al cantero.  
(deh-BEH-mohs ah-greh-GAHR MOOS-goh deh TOOR-bah ahl kahn-TEH-roh.)

**ENGLISH:** We need to water well with root stimulator after we plant.

**SPANISH:** Debemos regar bien con el estimulador de raíces después de plantar.  
(deh-BEH-mohs rreh-GAHR kohn ehl ehs-tee-moo-lah-DOOR deh rrah-EE-sehs dehs-poo-EHS deh plahn-TAHR)

*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 is publishing 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](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/store) or contact the Lawn & Landscape Book Department at 800/456-0707. Got a phrase you need translating? E-mail it to Managing Editor Mike Zawacki at [mzawacki@gie.net](mailto:mzawacki@gie.net).*



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# Drought:

## Lack of Rain Devastates Georgia

A survey by the Georgia Center for Urban Agriculture shows just how severely the recent drought in Georgia affected the green industry.

Of 1,500 businesses surveyed, the drought's bite on the green industry in Georgia was pegged at an average of \$2.58 million in reduced revenue, on average, per company. That amounts to about 43 percent less in revenue in 2007 over 2006. Respondents from businesses included irrigation; wholesale nursery, greenhouse and sod production; landscape; turf installation and maintenance; wholesale, rewholesale and garden retail sales; and golf courses. On average, Georgia green industry firms reported laying off six workers. Firms estimated a total of 11 workers were to be laid off at the end of 2007.

— Source: Georgia Center for Urban Agriculture



## \$2 million

The amount of revenue Steve Pattie estimates he'll lose if he's unable to get visas for 30 seasonal workers through the government's H-2B program. The president of The Pattie Group, a landscape design/build and maintenance company in Novelty, Ohio, fears the ripple effect of the H-2B crisis will hit other industries as well.

— Source: Lawn & Landscape magazine



## 21 million

The number of gallons of water Nelson Peltz, the corporate titan, used at his 13-acre Palm Beach, Fla., home in a 12-month period. That works out to 57,000 gallons per day. The average southern Florida home consumes about 54,000 per year.

— Source: The Wall Street Journal

## \$341 billion

A study by Management Information Systems says the American green industry is worth \$341 billion and encompasses 5.3 million jobs.

— Source: Management Information Systems



It's uncanny. From the moment you shake Lenny's hand, you quickly realize that when it comes to Exmark mowers, the guy knows his stuff. If there's ever a question, he's your man. Electrical, hydraulic,

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## Meet Lenny Mangnall, mower encyclopedia.

simple maintenance, cut quality, you name it, he's all over it. Intense obsession? Or incredibly thorough job training? It's a little bit of both. Which explains why he's earned his place as an Exmark customer service representative.

Lenny first got his feet wet as a welder on the factory floor. It was his introduction to Exmark's

other departments to make certain every mower built lives up to his standards. Yep, his standards. One of his responsibilities is to look at a new mower through the eyes of the technician. You can bet if it's not easy to maintain, it won't make the cut. It's part quality control and part pursuit of perfection. During the off-season, he's on the road conducting service schools

Lenny answers your call, you know you're in good hands. As he likes to put it, he knows a thing or two about mowers. He's modest that way. Clearly he also knows a thing or two about you and your needs.

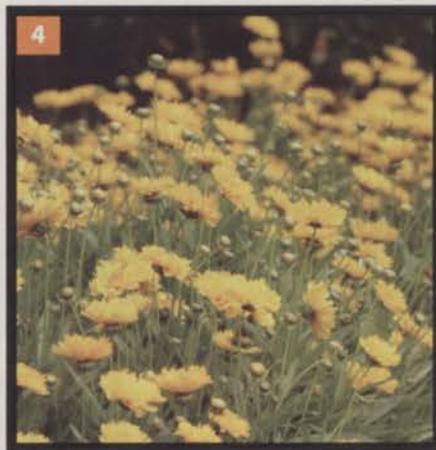
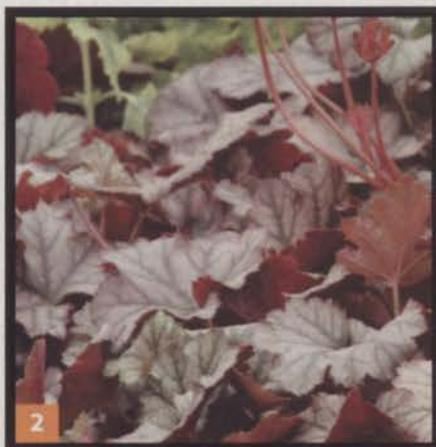
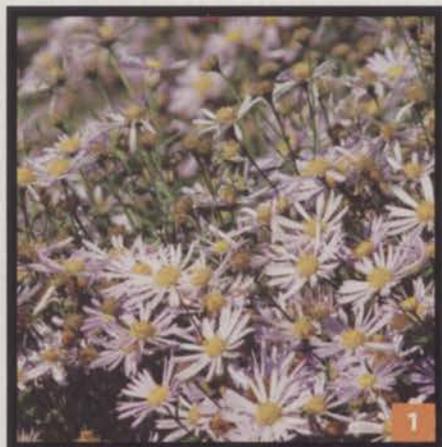
**There's a story behind every mower.**



*To read more about Lenny and the other Exmark employees who make the Lazer Z the best mowers on the field, visit [exmark.com/stories](http://exmark.com/stories).*



# Going Native



**Native plant material protects landscapes from drought, pests and disease.**

**LANDSCAPE** contractors around the country are thinking twice about the plant material they use and embracing the benefits of native landscapes. "There's no question natural landscapes are a growing trend," says Larry Weaner, founder of Larry Weaner Landscape Design Associates, a Glenside, Pa.-based firm that specializes in natural landscapes. "Over the last five, six, seven years there has

been a dramatic increase in the interest in and understanding of them."

Factors like water and pesticide restrictions have required contractors to install plants tolerant of drought, pests and disease, and homeowners are re-embracing the aesthetic of natural, low-maintenance landscapes, Weaner says. Above are four native plants contractors can incorporate in their natural landscapes.

## 1. NORTHEAST

**Variety:** 'Jim Crockett' Boltonia  
**Species:** *Boltonia asteroides* var. *latisquama*

**USDA Zones:** 4 to 9

**Plant Type:** Perennial

- Grows 18 to 24 inches tall
- Requires full sun
- Has green foliage and lavender blooms with yellow centers
- A compact plant great for small areas and containers

## 2. NORTHWEST

**Variety:** Harvest Series  
**Species:** *Heuchera*

**USDA Zones:** 4 to 9

**Plant Type:** Perennial

- Grows 6 to 12 inches tall, spreads 12 to 16 inches wide
- Requires partial sun
- Available in burgundy-bronze (pictured), greenish-silver and chartreuse
- Thrives in autumn's shorter days and cooler temperatures

## 3. SOUTHEAST

**Variety:** Luna Series Hibiscus

**Species:** *Hibiscus moscheutos*

**USDA Zones:** 5

**Plant Type:** Perennial

- Grows 2 to 3 feet tall, spreads 2 feet wide
- Requires full sun
- Available in blush, pink swirl, red, rose and white
- Heat and drought tolerant

## 4. SOUTHWEST

**Variety:** 'Early Sunrise' Coreopsis

**Species:** *Coreopsis grandiflora*

**USDA Zones:** 4 to 9

**Plant Type:** Perennial

- Grows 24 inches tall, spreads 22 to 24 inches wide
- Requires full sun
- Produces golden yellow, semi-double flowers
- A tough variety great for parks and landscapes



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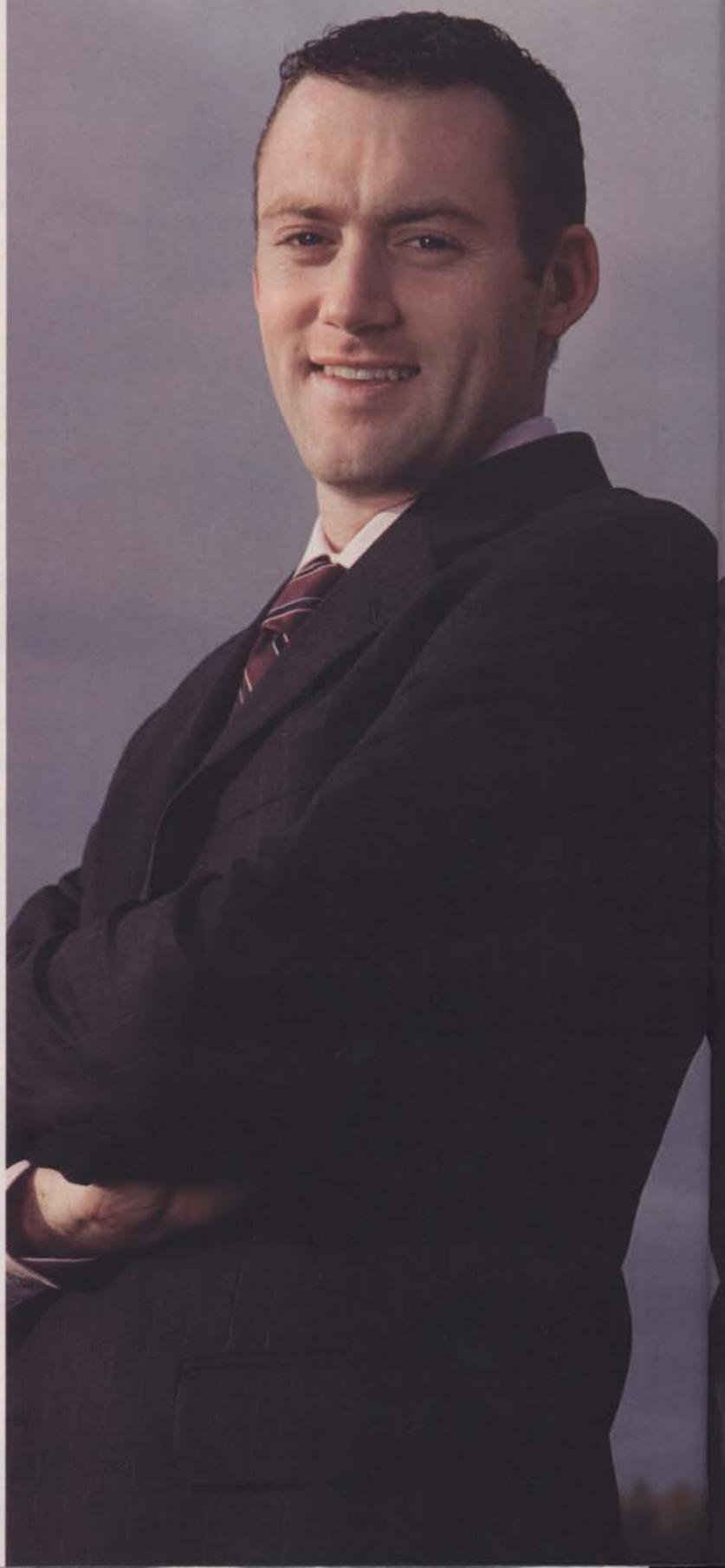
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USE READER SERVICE # 23

# 2010 Sales





## Selling lawn care online?

Noon Turf Care proves it's possible.

BY MARISA PALMIERI/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**PURCHASING AIRLINE TICKETS.** Paying bills. Ordering prescriptions. Considering 73 percent of American adults use the Internet, all of these daily tasks are increasingly taking place on the Web. Why not add "buying lawn care" to the list?

That's what Matt and Chris Noon, brothers and partners at Hudson, Mass.-based Noon Turf Care, thought. Over the last two years they've invested heavily to refine their company's online quoting and sales mechanism to do what all businesses would like to do: lower the cost of a sale.

A decade ago, people would have thought it was odd to buy airline tickets online, Matt Noon says. Now that's the primary way to book flights. "I think it's funny when you have to go out and meet someone to give them a lawn care estimate," he says.

Matt and Chris Noon  
Noon Turf Care, Hudson, Mass.  
Photos: Stephen Faust

# permagreen Gives Back

We're raising \$150,000 to help orphans in a small East African village so they can have food, water, clothing, medicine and education. PermaGreen is pledging \$75,000, plus we will add 50¢ to every dollar you donate\*. Together, we can make a huge impact! Donate online at [permagreen.com](http://permagreen.com) or [CaringPlaceMinistries.org](http://CaringPlaceMinistries.org) or by phone.

\*up to the \$150,000 goal



Aaron T. Jessen, Director of Marketing & Sales at PermaGreen, and his wife, Kendra, have founded a grassroots, 501(c)(3) non-profit, Christian organization called CaringPlace Ministries International to help HIV/AIDS affected and infected orphans in Bugonzi Village, near Masaka Town in the East African country of Uganda. CaringPlace absorbed a struggling orphanage in this poor village, which serves as a home and drop-in facility for 75 children.

Aaron & Kendra have already raised enough money to conduct HIV testing, install a 10,000-Liter fresh water tank, build a more adequate latrine and expand the children's diet to include meat and more fruits and vegetables. But the need is still great!

The children currently sleep 3 or 4 to a bed, and the only means for cooking is an open fire, which is difficult to maintain during Uganda's 9-month-long rainy season. The facilities have no electricity and there is no transportation to the nearby town. And there are hundreds of children in the area who still need a home and the chance for a bright future. CaringPlace needs your help to provide these children with the basics of survival!

Robert Luwalira, the native Ugandan that founded the orphanage, is the Director of Operations in Bugonzi. He provides proper management over the activities on the ground and ensures that every dollar is spent for the benefit of the children.

## We need your donations to make this project a success!

\$50 provides a child with food, water, medicine, education and housing for a month

\$100 can buy chickens or goats and pay for mattresses and mosquito nets

\$500 can pay a teacher's salary for an entire year

\$1,000 helps with operating costs for a month or can go toward building dormitories, buying a vehicle, building a kitchen, installing electricity or many other major improvements

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"It's nice, but it's not efficient. With rising overhead and increased competition, we need to figure out more cost-effective ways of doing business."

The Noons believe a better business model is exactly what they've created with their Web site's quote-producing function. "We're trying to harness technology to do something better," Chris Noon says.

The early adopters of Web buying have been professionals in dual-income households who want to get on their Blackberrys or laptops at the office and have their lawn care taken care of for the year, Matt Noon says. Though he concedes it will take some time for most clients to get used to buying lawn care online, the company's 33 percent growth from 2006 to 2007 and 70 percent projected growth for 2008 prove that customers just may be ready for Lawn Care 2.0.

**HOW IT WORKS.** A client visits Noon Turf Care's [www.smartlawn.com](http://www.smartlawn.com), enters his or her address and other details, and the proprietary program



**"If you're not creating processes that make it easier on the customer, you're not giving good service."**

*— Matt Noon, Noon Turf Care*

generates an instant lawn care quote based on property size.

Next, if the customer accepts the quote, a technician goes out the next day to conduct a diagnosis and make the first application. Noon Turf Care employs one technician who's dedicated to doing first applications and service calls within 24 hours of

requests. "When you sell a new customer, the last thing you want to do is provide them with that service two weeks later — there's no trust built that way," Matt Noon says. "Our 24-hour turnaround technician who gets new customers activated with their first treatments and retains customers is a vital asset for us."

A prospect who declines an online quote receives a follow-up e-mail with an estimate. In addition, Noon Turf Care's system kicks declined quote leads over to its telemarketing center, where follow-up calls are made to prospects who may prefer to receive formal estimates. "A lot of people will get their quote, but they'll need a little



## Noon Turf Care

**PARTNERS:** Matt and Chris Noon

**HEADQUARTERS:** Hudson, Mass.

**INCORPORATED:** 2001

**EMPLOYEES:** 10 year-round, 30 seasonal

**SERVICE BREAKDOWN:**

80% Chemical lawn care

20% Maintenance

**CLIENT BREAKDOWN:**

90% Residential

5% Commercial

5% Commercial residential

**REVENUE:**

2007.....\$2 million (projected in December)

2006.....\$1.5 million

2005.....\$1.2 million

2004.....\$1 million

**CONTACT INFO:**

3 Brent Drive

Hudson, MA 01749

978/562-1707

[www.noonturfcare.com](http://www.noonturfcare.com)

[matt@noonlandscape.com](mailto:matt@noonlandscape.com)

further assistance to get activated," says Chris Noon, adding that some consumers are more comfortable talking to a live voice.

The company's flexibility to give quotes the "old way" if requested is part of the system's success right now as customers warm up to the idea of buying lawn care online.

**DEVELOPMENT.** To get the custom electronic quote feature up and running two years ago, the Noons made significant financial and labor investments. They spent countless

hours of their time and an estimated \$150,000 on the system and expect a return on investment in two years. They weren't aware of any turn-key quoting systems on the market, so they developed the concept themselves and subcontracted a full-time programmer for one year to execute the technological end. Most of the system was built in-house by connecting the Noon's customer database with a satellite service called Microsoft Virtual Earth.

So far they're satisfied with the site's success in driving down their

cost per sale. It costs \$20 to acquire a new customer over the Internet, compared to \$100 with direct mail and \$50 with telemarketing.

The Noons were a bit worried during the first year when online sales weren't rolling in like the they had hoped. "We were getting hits, but people were backing out because they didn't trust where the price was coming from," Chris Noon says. In early 2007, they added a feature that displays a satellite image of the client's property. "When we added that, it built some trust with the client so more people are actually activating online rather than just getting the quote," he says. He estimates adding the satellite image has improved the rate of

customers who purchase online by 60 percent.

In addition to driving down the number of phone calls coming into the office and weeding out "tire-kickers," this feature has taken Matt Noon completely out of the sales process, allowing him to spend more time hiring and training front-line employees. He has an interview scheduled every day, whether he needs a new technician or not. "If you have more time to find better people and invest in training, it propels you years ahead of what you'd be doing if you had to spend the time to sell," Matt Noon says.

Some people might argue it's unfavorable to take the face-to-face component out of the sale, but Matt

Noon disagrees. "We've found that lawn care is more of a commodity-based service," he says. "And I don't mean commodity in a negative way. There's less hands-on customer service required than with landscape management of an entire property or installation services. With lawn care, if you're not creating processes that make it easier on the customer, you're not giving good service."

**UPSELLING ON THE WEB.** In addition to introducing the electronic quote service for new customers in 2006, the Noons added an up-sell mechanism to their online arsenal this year. They created a separate URL, [www.mysmartlawn.com](http://www.mysmartlawn.com), for existing customers to

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USE READER SERVICE # 25

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USE READER SERVICE # 26

## cover story

purchase technician-recommended extras like grub control, core aeration and lime applications. Every invoice they send encourages customers to log on to their accounts for instant add-on service quotes.

The company also drives existing clients to [www.mysmartlawn.com](http://www.mysmartlawn.com) with "constant contact" e-mail reminders that go out once a month to a list of customers who've indicated they'd like to receive e-mail offers. "That's crucial in terms of convenience to the customer," Chris Noon says.

These initiatives plus telemarketing to current clients are responsible for increasing the average customer's annual spend by about 30 percent over the last few years, Chris Noon says.

## Catering to Web-Savvy Clients

In addition to providing instant electronic quotes, Noon Turf Care offers customers the means to pay their bills or ask quick questions online.

Noon accepts credit card payments via PayPal, an online secure payment service owned by eBay. PayPal, which costs the company about \$100 per month, charges 2 percent to 3 percent per month plus 30 cents per transaction. On average, it's less than the company pays to process credit cards directly.

Another way Noon makes life easier for clients is the live chat tool online. Powered by a service called Boldchat, this feature lets customers talk to Noon Turf Care's office manager without having to call or send an e-mail. Live chat, which costs Noon Turf Care about \$40 per month, is ideal for clients who just need to relay brief information to the company, like "We're working on our driveway, can you come after Wednesday?" or "How long should we stay off the lawn?"

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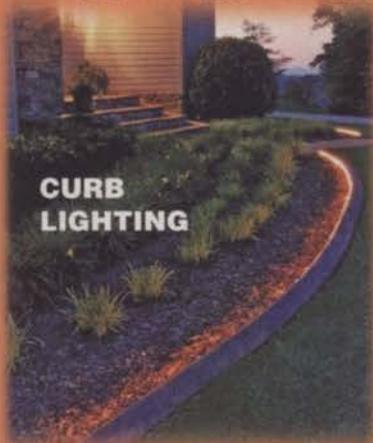
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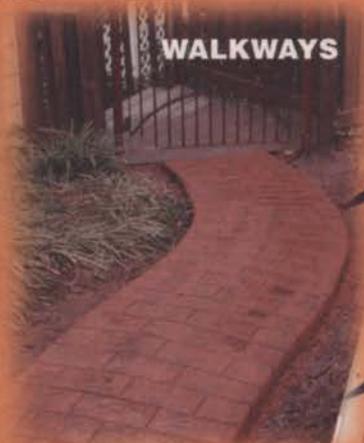
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USE READER SERVICE # 28



## cover story

**CALL CENTER CUES.** Noon Turf Care's telemarketing strategy spurs more sales and catches customer service issues before they become problems.

Its 2-year-old call center employs five telemarketers during the season to call on existing customers and 10 during January and February to drum up business for the spring. The call center includes 10 workstations, each with a computer and telephone wired to an automated dialing system.

Today Noon Turf Care's call center is a sophisticated set-up, but it wasn't always. The company's telemarketing efforts began by making follow-up calls in the evenings to clients who received estimates earlier that day.

The advent of the federal Do-Not-

## Promoting Pre-payment

April is cash-flow crunch time for Noon Turf Care. Payroll must go out, but payments are just starting to roll in. As a result Matt and Chris Noon have learned to be vigilant about collections. The company leaves invoices for every service rendered, sends monthly statements and makes a "casual" collections phone call after 30 days. If a client hasn't paid within 90 days, their account goes on credit hold until the issue is resolved.

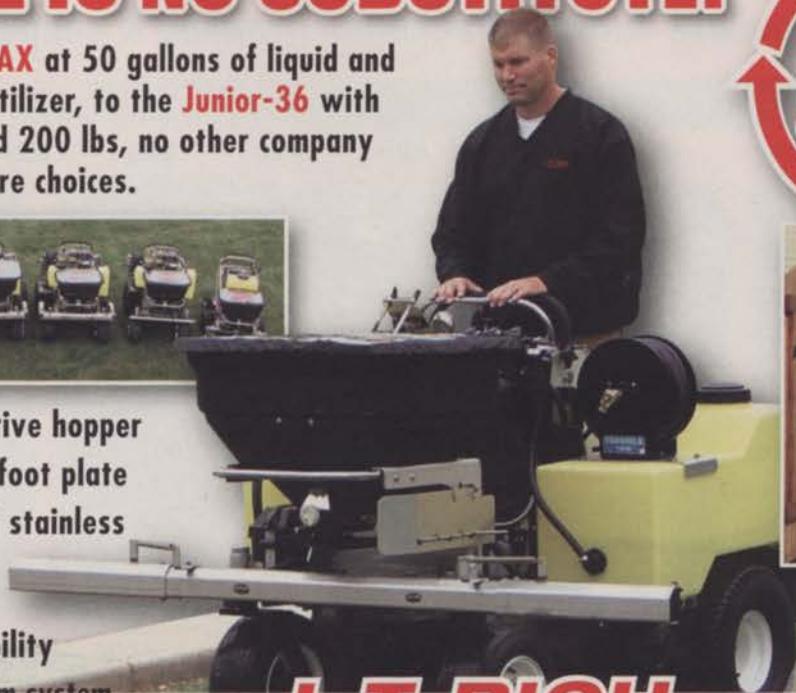
To finance the first month's payroll, Noon Turf Care offers an incentive to customers who prepay. Letters offering a 7 percent discount go out in November, prompting 20 to 25 percent of customers to prepay for the next year. Depending on the size of the account, the discount ranges from about \$45 (for a lawn care-only customer) to \$350 for a full-service client who gets mowing, lawn care, spring and fall cleanups and other extras. "For a traditional full-service account, that \$350 discount is like a free spring cleanup," Chris Noon says. "It's definitely enough to entice them to prepay."

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## cover story

Call list has turned a lot of companies away from telemarketing, but not Noon Turf Care. "I wasn't in telemarketing before [the Do-Not-Call list], so I don't really know what it's like before vs. after," Chris Noon says, adding the

company "makes do" by calling more ZIP codes than it would if it didn't have to cleanse lists with Do-Not-Call data.

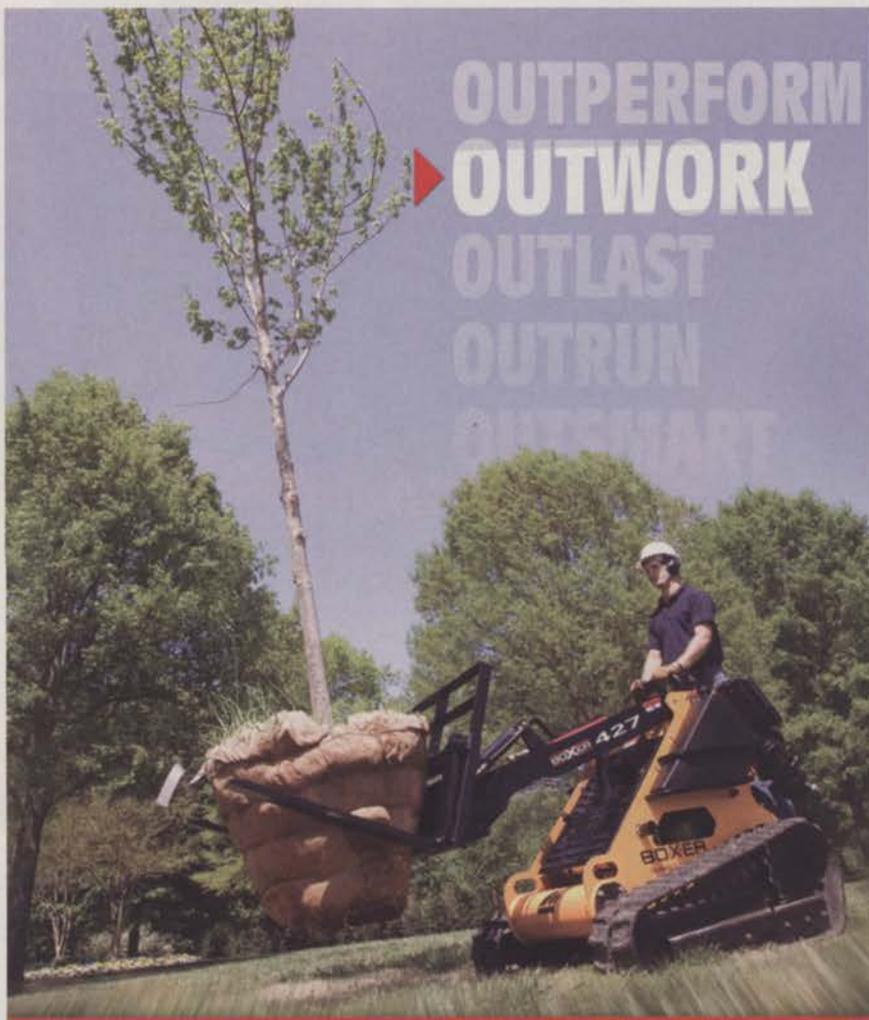
Noon Turf Care buys lists from several marketing firms for 10 to 15 cents per record. "There are all different

kinds of ways to pull the lists, so we'll pull by income, or by people with a house and two cars," Chris Noon says, adding that block leading, or targeting the neighbors of current clients to improve route density, is another effective list-development method.

When Noon's telemarketers call existing customers during the season, their main goal is upselling services, but they also ask how customers' lawns look and how technicians are doing. Any concerns are logged and routed as service calls for the next day. As a result, the company has registered an 8 percent improvement in its cancellation rate. "These customers are floored - they can't believe we're contacting them," Matt Noon says. "Not only are they going to purchase more from us, but we're stopping a complaint before it exists."

Working in concert with the Web site, Noon Turf Care's call center has helped drive sales and improve customer relations. In the future, Matt and Chris Noon see the technology of both systems improving - especially the features of existing customer site [www.mysmartlawn.com](http://www.mysmartlawn.com). Ideally the site will grow to mimic the functions of financial services sites, allowing customers to fully manage all aspects of their accounts - including purchasing, payments and customer service.

The Noons will continue to look outside the industry to research their online initiatives because they believe it's the future. "Anyone who's tracking leads knows that traditional monster phone books don't connect customers anymore," Chris Noon says. "Customers are looking online." LL



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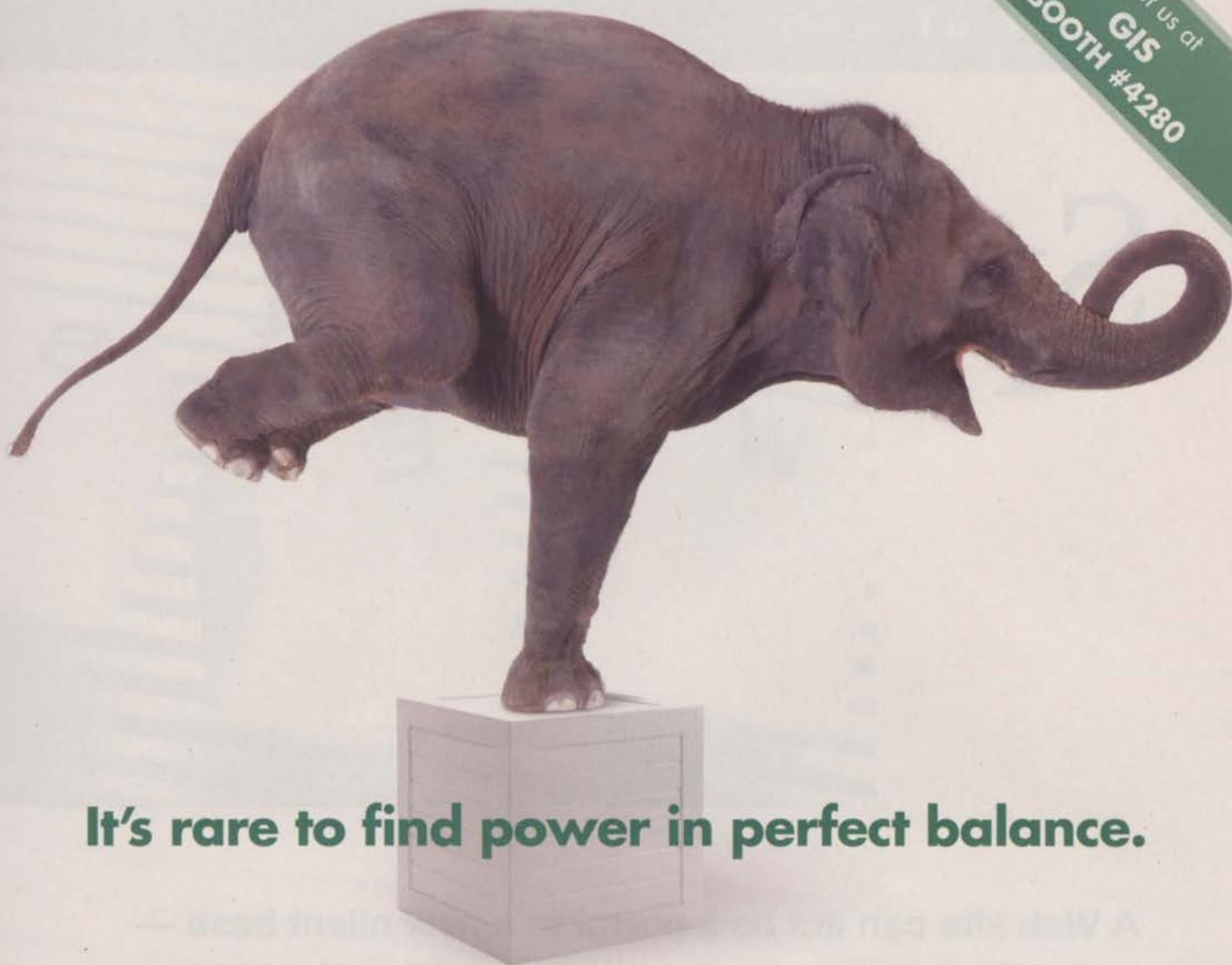
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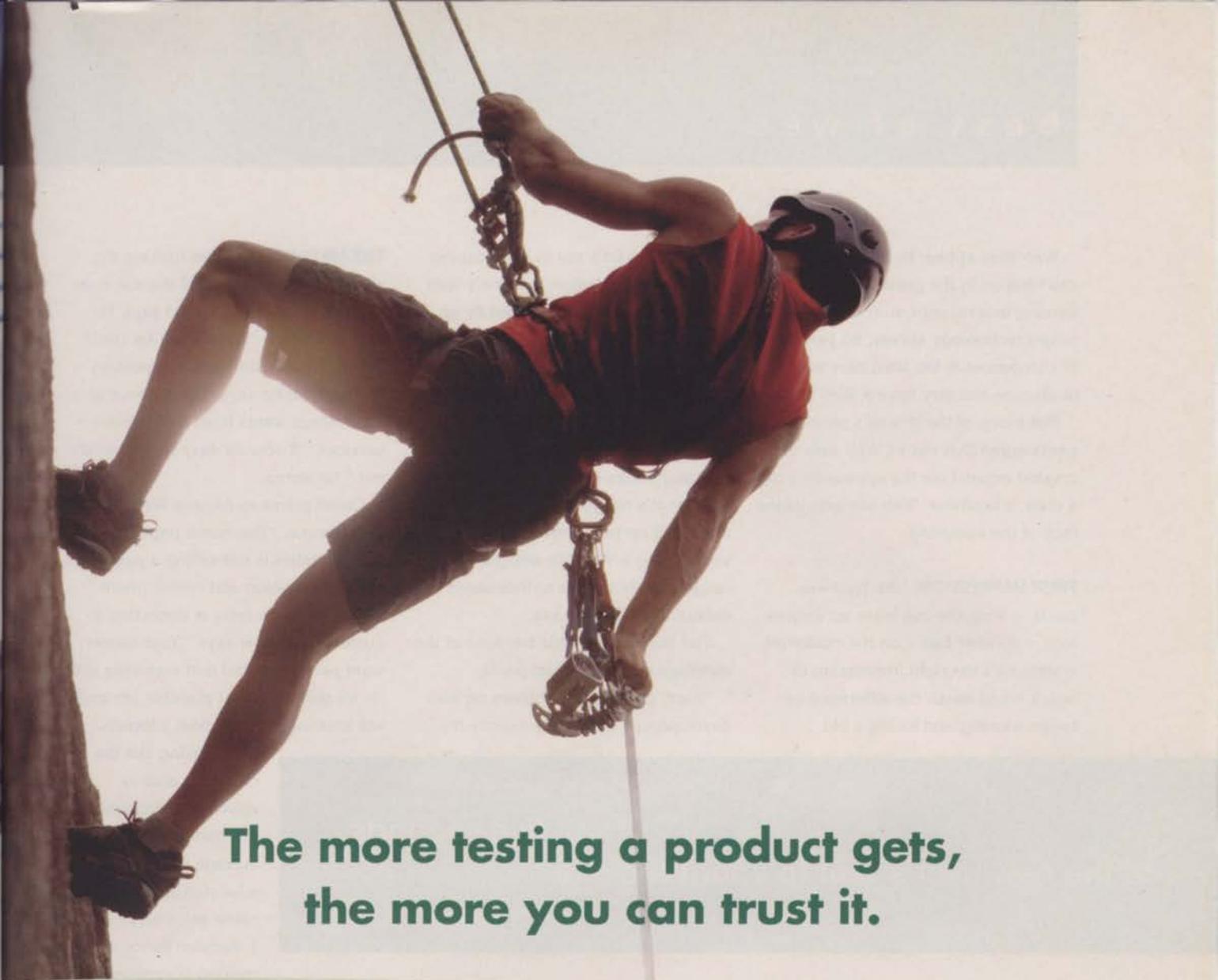
# Spinning a

A close-up photograph of three white computer keyboard keys: 'W', 'E', and 'B'. The keys are arranged in a row on a keyboard with a blue and white striped background. The 'W' key is on the left, 'E' is in the middle, and 'B' is on the right. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the keys.

**A Web site can act as a portal to a new client base —** just make sure the site gives the potential customers a positive impression.

**Andrew Aksar can't remember the last time he opened a phone book,** and he suspects his customers are the same way. Aksar, president of Outdoor Finishes in Walkersville, Md., says his customers are increasingly getting information about his landscape business from the Web. In fact, about 85 percent of his jobs in 2007 came from his Web site, he says.

Aksar shared this on a recent discussion on the *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board in response to a question posted about the value of business Web sites. Bill Smallwood of WJ Smallwood Landscaping in Salem, N.H., started his business Web site this year and agrees with Aksar. "It has been a huge asset to us this year, drumming up quite a bit of new business," he says.



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Web sites appear to be quickly catching on in the green industry. According to a recent *Lawn & Landscape* technology survey, 66 percent of companies in the lawn care and landscape industry have a Web site.

But many of the thread's participants agree that not all Web sites are created equal. Like the appearance of a crew, a business' Web site acts as the face of the company.

**FIRST IMPRESSION.** Like business cards, a Web site can leave an impression – good or bad – on the customer, whether it's the right impression or not. It could mean the difference between winning and losing a bid.

professional, let's say in landscaping and landscape design, but one's Web site looks like it was designed by an amateur, the user will move on until it finds a professional design."

For those who have an eye for design, programs like Microsoft FrontPage can be useful in creating a site, and books exist to guide the user. But if that's not your forte, it's better to leave it up to a professional, Cissel says. Hiring a Web site designer can range from hundreds to thousands of dollars, Smallwood says.

The cost is justifiable because of the message it sends, Cissel posts.

"Sure, you can cut corners on Web development, but that is exactly the

**THE MESSAGE.** Besides making the site look sharp, it helps if the site calls out to the customer, Cissel says. He calls it WIFM – "What's in it for me?" Think like a customer when posting the content, he says. Think about what a customer wants from a contractor's services. "It sounds easy to do, but it's not," he warns.

Cissel points to Aksar's Web site as an example. "The home page for Outdoor Finishes is not selling a patio; it is selling relaxation and contentment."

The ability to relax is important to customers, Aksar says. "Your clients want peace of mind that someone will do for them the best possible job and will look out for their best interests."

Thinking like the customer also involves knowing who the customer is. The average Internet user is educated and doesn't name price as the No. 1 decision factor when making purchases,

according to Cissel. Buying over the Internet is a different experience for the customer, he says. "The Internet allows you to reach a buyer at the exact moment they are searching and it allows you to reach a buyer when they don't know about you."

Still, don't put all your business eggs in one virtual basket, Aksar warns landscape contractors, adding many people still don't have computers or access to the Internet. **LL**

"The professionalism of your business will be decided in the first five seconds of the new user's visit to your Web site"

— Steve Cissel, 10-20 Media

Aksar highlighted this point with a story about a meeting with a prospective customer. The customer showed Aksar a competitor's business card. The competitor made the business card himself, and the customer clearly was not impressed, commenting that the card looked homemade. "People perceive you by whatever you provide them with," he says.

The Internet might be a different medium, but the same concept holds true for landscape contractors.

"The professionalism of your business will be decided in the first five seconds of the new user's visit to your Web site," says Steve Cissel, CEO and founder of 10-20 Media in Woodbine, Md. "You have one chance at a first impression. If one claims to be a business

message you give to your Web prospects," he says.

Once it's designed, a Web site can be easy to maintain, some Message Board users post. Although, some contractors are split on whether to do the work in-house. According to the technology survey, 39 percent hire outside companies to maintain their sites, while 32 percent maintain it themselves. Another 14 percent have someone on staff keep the site updated while 11 percent have a family member keep the content current.

The possibilities for Web sites are endless. Check out other companies' sites for ideas and seek advice on the *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board, Smallwood says. "They helped me and can help you if you listen," he adds.



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As he established his fledgling mowing operation, one of Chad Stern's greatest mistakes was not accounting for his overall costs.

As the president of Mowing & More, based in Chevy Chase, Md., Stern thought he'd tracked his costs and had a handle on his profit structure. But as his company took off, nothing could have been further from the truth. "As my company grew, it really surprised me," Stern says. "Everything from payroll, to insurance to vehicle maintenance, it all adds up and eats into your bottom line."

Those and other issues gnaw and nibble away at a contractor's ability to realize a decent profit from his mowing operations. And in the worst-case scenario, this oversight can put a company out of business.

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Mowing is one of the base-line services contractors engage in when entering the landscape industry. On average, landscape contractors derive nearly 40 percent of their annual sales from lawn mowing and maintenance, according to recent *Lawn & Landscape* research. In addition, 30 percent indicated mowing/maintenance was their fastest-growing service in 2007, the research says.

So despite potentially debilitating business handicaps such as low-ball contractors, fuel costs and a shortage of skilled labor, there are ways contractors can control costs and strengthen their overall profit pictures.

**ROUTING.** Stern learned early on the importance of solid budgets in reveal-

accurately map an operational budget. However, a contractor can take a more judicious approach to moving from one property to another through solid routing practices.

Choose routes carefully to minimize travel, says Pete Schepis, vice president of The Greenwood Group, Chesterfield, Mo. "Chart your farthest client as your first stop and work your way back to your shop," Schepis says. "It's the golden rule of routing."

Along with solid routing, contractors need to be aware of the traffic patterns within their community, Schepis says. For example, crews rolling out prior to morning rush hour will get to job sites and out of stop-and-go traffic, which consumes time and fuel. Likewise, recalling crews prior to the



**"I'd rather lose a job than to underbid and not make a profit on it. If I'm not making a profit, than that job is just practice and we don't need any more practice."** — Pete Schepis, *The Greenwood Group*

ing a true cost and profit picture for his mowing operations.

"Budgets will reveal how much money you need to make and how much you can spend in a given year," he says. "Without them, it'd be very difficult to find success and make a profit in this business."

Fuel price is one budget item on every contractor's mind. The sporadic rise of fuel prices makes it difficult to

afternoon traffic rush achieves an additional cost savings.

In addition, Schepis assigns 98 percent of his crews to only cut grass. "Considering the cost for mowing equipment today, I don't believe in sending crews out to mow and then to stick around to do other maintenance work," he says. "If they're busy doing other things that a second maintenance crew could handle, than that



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USE READER SERVICE # 36

## m a i n t e n a n c e

expensive mower is sitting on a trailer and not making me money.”

While crew momentum is a solid mowing principle, Russell Hunt, owner of Total Lawn Care in Steubenville, Ohio, cautions contractors to not sacrifice job quality in lieu of improving time management and efficiency. “It’s true, you want to mow as efficiently as possible to improve profits,” he says. “But you also want to do whatever it takes to get the job done right.”

Hunt advises contractors to choose a market and stick with it. “You might get a call from a potential client who is a half-hour away,” he says. “And while the potential business is attractive, you have to decide whether it’s a smart thing to do. Stick to your guns about

what you’ve defined as your market and carefully consider whether you’re ready to expand into a new market.”

**COSTS AND CLIENTS.** Mowing is a cut-throat business. Clients – both residential and commercial – are too easily swayed by a low-cost bid sheet.

Mowing contractors focused on optimizing their profits need to be OK with being outbid by a low-cost contractor from time to time, Schepis says. “I’d rather lose a job than to underbid and not make a profit on it,” he says. “If I’m not making a profit, than that job is just practice and we don’t need any more practice.”

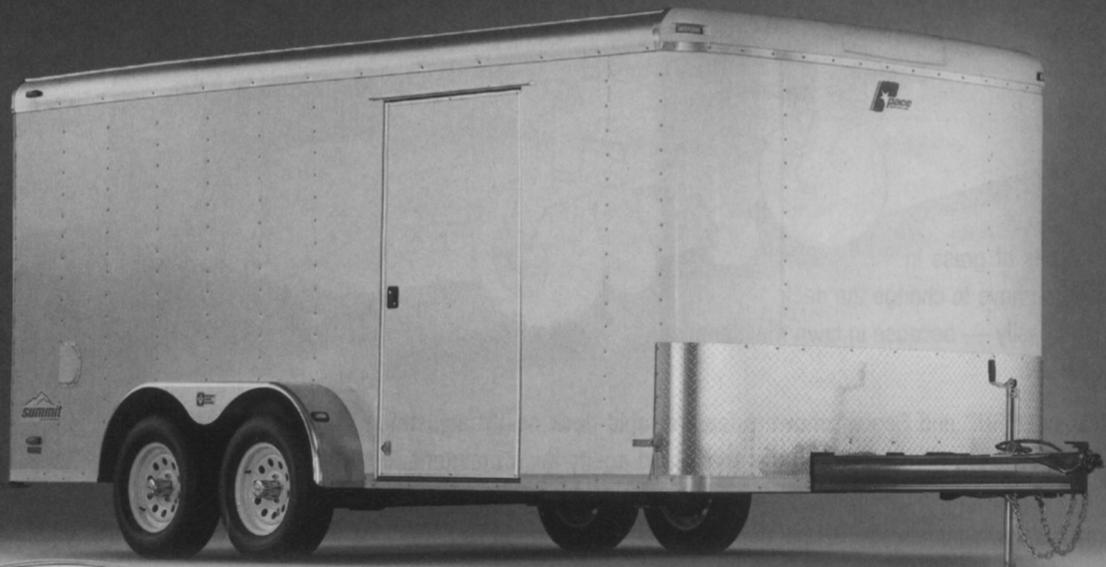
Profit is directly linked to a solid understanding of a mowing contrac-

tor’s overall cost structure, says Jim Huston, president of J.R. Huston Enterprises in Englewood, Colo., and an industry consultant. Huston suggests mowing contractors ensure all of their costs – including general and administrative overhead – are passed on to their clients. Also, he advises contractors to track their costs to identify gross margins on their mowing jobs. “Most contractors just don’t understand what costs are and how to cover all of them in their pricing methods,” Huston says.

Many contractors try to maintain a 15 percent profit margin when mowing, and any job that slips below 10 percent is a cause for close scrutiny.

“The new guys in the industry have

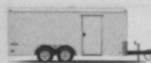
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USE READER SERVICE # 38

## m a i n t e n a n c e

no idea of where their costs are and they'll be more than happy to underbid you for a dollar," Schepis says. "I have no idea how they expect to make a profit, and most of them don't. You won't see them next season."

When bidding commercial work, one challenge is overcoming a property manager's expectation that a contractor will beat the price of the existing contract. Never base an estimate on what the other guy did. Schepis says. "Explain and educate the client that it's in their best interest to have you provide them a bid from a fresh perspective," he says. "Who knows how long they've used that original contract. It's very likely the property has changed over that time."

A fresh approach includes care-

fully and completely measuring the property. Schepis prefers to submit his proposal only after consulting with the crew chief who will do the work. "I base our pricing off of what our people tell us and what they'll need to do the job completely," he says.

Educating mowing crews on how to work efficiently is another important aspect in ensuring greater mowing profitability. For example, doing the job right the first time is an essential message to instill in mowing crews. Nothing saps profits faster than traveling back to redo a job that should have been done right the first time.

Another vital lesson involves client satisfaction. "Do what you need to do to keep your clients happy because it will cost you more money to replace

a client than to correct a problem to keep one satisfied," Hunt says.

**EQUIPMENT.** Most contractors say an investment in quality mowers pays back dividends in speed, efficiency and time management. "Not enough can be said about the benefits of a good piece of commercial-grade mowing equipment," Hunt says. "Don't be afraid to spend the money necessary to purchase a good quality machine."

Quality mowers not only ensure reliability, but also allow workers to operate at a profitable pace. At the very minimum, Hunt believes a mowing crew should be equipped with a zero-turn with the ability to bag and a walk-behind for hilly or steep areas. "Ten to 15 minutes and then on to the next property," he says. "If I have to spend an hour on each lawn then I'm going to lose money."

Use mowers that can handle clients' job sites, says Jimmy Eavenson, chief engineer at Cub Cadet Commercial in Valley City, Ohio. "Match the needs of the site with the correct equipment," he says. "For example, use the largest mower that will fit the job."

Schepis, for example, outfits crews with a 61-inch zero-turn and a 52-inch walk-behind for efficient mowing.

A preventive maintenance program also strengthens profitability, Eavenson says. "Ensure the equipment is properly set up and adjusted," he says. "Make sure it's lubricated, the mower deck is clean with sharpened blades and the unit is regularly serviced to keep filters and fluids clean."

In addition, educate crews on proper mower use. "Invest in training crews in equipment operation and safety," Eavenson says. "And enforce safety standards. Accidents harm workers and the company's bottom line. **LL**



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# Back to the Future

**2008 brings a number of challenges for lawn care operators,** from uncertain weather conditions to a push for greener solutions.

BY EMILY MULLINS/ASSISTANT EDITOR

**Another year has come and gone,** and 2008 lies ahead. With the coming months a seemingly clean slate, it is difficult for lawn care operators (LCOs) to consider conditions six months from now. But when much of their livelihood is based on factors out of their control – weather, labor shortages, fuel prices – it's important for LCOs to plan ahead and prepare for the unexpected.

A prevailing attitude to pest, disease and weed control in 2008 is the industry's desire to approach business in an environmentally responsible way. The green movement has influenced nearly every aspect of people's lives – from the cars



“I don’t know if it’s a response to Al Gore’s movie or just general awareness, **but we’ve hit a tipping point where being green is big.**”

— John Gachina, Gachina Landscape Management

we drive to the light bulbs we switch on – and LCOs, university researchers and manufacturers from around the country conclude it will continue to impact the lawn care industry.

**GOING GREEN.** More and more clients seek greener homes both inside and out, and LCOs and manufacturers are answering the call. “Environmental stewardship and pesticides aren’t often

associated with each other,” says Todd Mayhew, researcher for Valent, Phoenix, Ariz. “But an overall trend in the lawn care market is to deliver products that are environmentally benign as well as effective.”

John Gachina, owner of Gachina Landscape Management, Menlo Park, Calif., says his state’s progressive culture has embraced the green movement. While he still offers synthetic

products, Gachina is researching organic products as part of what he calls “bay-friendly landscaping,” which focuses on the health of the San Francisco Bay and its waterways. About a dozen of his clients request organic programs as part of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, a program run by the U.S. Green Building Council to encourage environmental consciousness

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## pesticides/fertilizers

in the building industry, and he predicts this number will continue to rise. "I don't know if it's a response to Al Gore's movie, 'An Inconvenient Truth,' or just general awareness, but we've hit a tipping point where being green is big," he says. "That's what people are talking about, so we're working hard to get the necessary information to be environmental stewards."

Chris Peppers, maintenance manager for Frontier Landscaping, Vancouver, Wash., says his company also is looking to reduce its chemical use by growing its integrated pest management (IPM) program and "monitoring, monitoring, monitoring" problems like white grubs and European crane fly. "We try to deal with problems cultur-

ally first and use chemicals as a last resort," he says.

Because drinking water in the Vancouver area comes from an underground aquifer, Peppers says it's the company's responsibility to exercise caution when using chemical products and stresses the importance of using them according to their labels. Like Gachina, Peppers is looking into the benefits of organic fertilizers and says it's necessary to educate customers about the products' differences. "You have to explain to your customers that their lawns won't look the same at first when using organics, but they will look great later," Peppers says. "Slow-release synthetic fertilizers and lots of rain have spoiled our Northwest

customers, they're used to very green lawns."

Even in the East and Midwest where the green movement has arguably been slower to catch on, more and more clients are requesting to have their lawns treated without synthetic pesticides, says David Shelter, urban landscape entomologist for The Ohio State University in Columbus. Legislation also is driving this trend. For example, Ohio law permits usage of four nicotinoids, a type of insecticide chemistry, while New York law permits just one, which can be used only by licensed technicians in specific places. "This kind of legislation is forcing contractors to use more organic materials," he says, adding insect-

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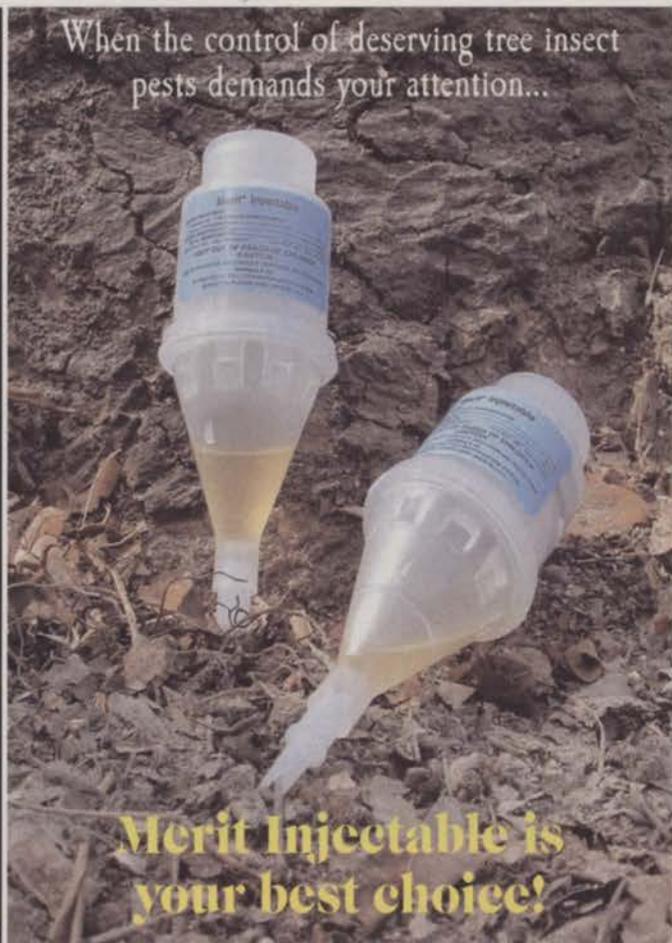
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## pesticides/fertilizers

ticial and miticidal soaps and oils are regaining popularity. "Landscape contractors have kind of forgotten how and when to use them, but when used correctly they're extremely effective."

While synthetic and organic products can be effective, installing and maintaining sustainable landscapes is another way to avoid pest, disease and weed problems, and Shelter expects this to be a growing trend in 2008. Shelter suggests contractors replace their clients' susceptible plant material with pest- and disease-tolerant plants. While it can cost 20 percent more to install tolerant plants, Shelter says they avoid future pest and disease problems. "Contractors should modify their landscapes in the short term for better

long-term performance," he says. "If contractors approach potential problems from the get-go, then homeowners don't have to immediately start spraying."

Lawn care companies are looking for a number of ways to be green. Paul Wagner, president of Masters Green, Walled Lake, Mich., says his company stopped putting its marketing materials and application notices in plastic bags and started doing all billing electronically. He includes tips in the company's monthly newsletter on how clients can reduce waste, and is also looking for a facility to recycle the company's used fertilizer bags.

"We're trying to do little things that show our clients we care about what

we do," Wagner says.

**UNPREDICTABLE PROBLEMS.** Warmer winters, lengthy droughts and periods of heavy rainfall throughout the country contribute to changes in typical pest, disease and weed populations. Peppers has witnessed above-average rainfall and more snow and ice in Vancouver over the past three to five years. This climate change places more pressure on plants and turf which provides a foothold for weeds, disease and insects. For example, pink snow mold, which previously plagued only golf courses, has recently become a problem in residential lawns. "Problems occur when more than one pressure – like drought and poor mow-

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ing practices – occur at once,” Poppers says. “Our strategy is to continue to identify and monitor problems and figure out the best treatments.”

Jason Kuhlemeier, marketing specialist for Bayer Environmental Sciences, Research Triangle Park, N.C., says contractors in the South should prepare for severe drought that he expects will continue into early 2008. “This will have a big influence on how much water contractors are able to use and when,” he says.

The water issue will undoubt-

plants and turf and manage problems as they come up.”

Because it takes experienced, qualified technicians to monitor problems and identify solutions, Shelter says the green industry’s labor crisis often prevents this from happening. “It takes time to gather the right people who have the confidence to identify problems and treatments,” he says. “Temporary or seasonal workers can’t always make those decisions accurately, and it’s difficult for the industry to retain the knowledgeable ones.”

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**“An overall trend in the lawn care market is to deliver products that are environmentally benign as well as effective.”** – *Todd Mayhew, Valent*

edly affect weed populations in 2008, Kuhlemeier says, as less water means weaker turf. However, areas that receive too much rainfall can have more weed issues because moist conditions allow weeds to flourish. “If Mother Nature cooperates and lawn care operators can create healthy turf, then weeds might not be a significant problem next year,” Kuhlemeier says.

The Midwest has experienced much warmer winter temperatures the past few years, which have allowed many cold-sensitive insects to thrive. Bagworms, never found north of Southern Ohio in the 1980s, now inhabit Northern Ohio and Southern Michigan. Calico scales and mimosa webworms, which used to be knocked out by below-zero temperatures, now “run rampant,” Shelter says. “With these new problems, lawn care operators need to be flexible and willing to stray from their old programs. They shouldn’t spray just to spray – clients should pay them to monitor their

**PRODUCTS AND PRICING.** Depending on region, contractors expect product and material costs to fluctuate throughout 2008. Duane McNair, operations manager for LMC Lawn Management Co. in Houston, says pre-winter ordering prices were comparable to last year’s. But because fertilizers are made of petroleum products, he expects prices to rise during the peak season in April and May.

The price of fertilizer has risen 10 to 20 percent in the Vancouver area due to the increased demand for urea for alternative fuels production, Poppers says. Product prices also have risen slightly in California, and will most likely continue to do so because of the large amount of energy it takes to produce them, Gachina says.

In Michigan, Wagner budgeted for a 17 percent increase in product prices, but wouldn’t be surprised if increases reach 20 percent. “It’s difficult to even get pricing information right now because they are going up so fast,” he

says. “But our distributors are projecting a real doom-and-gloom outlook.”

LCOs are right to expect product prices to rise, and the increase will be felt industrywide, not just in the lawn care market, Mayhew says. “Most raw materials are tied to the petroleum market, and the whole chemical industry is petroleum-based,” he says. “Prices will increase next year in all areas of the industry.”

Kuhlemeier agrees that contractors can expect product price increases in 2008. On the chemical side of things, increases should be a few percent, similar to that of inflation, he says. Because fertilizers are petroleum-based, the prices of these products will be more volatile.

However, LCOs and manufacturers say the continued emergence of generic lawn care products helps keep costs down. “Off-patent products have helped control the rising costs,” McNair says. “We try to make the best purchasing decisions for our customers by using products that work and come at a good value.”

Aside from weather, labor and the green movement, additional factors like invasions of new pests, resurgences of old pests and global trade will also impact the lawn care industry in 2008. How will the year pan out? Only time will tell. “The problem with predictions is that no one knows if they’ll be right,” Shelter says. “The most important thing for contractors to remember for the coming year is to be flexible.” **LL**



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# Two-Timing

Two-wire irrigation is a time-saving alternative,  
particularly for contractors with big jobs to do.

BY EMILY MULLINS/ASSISTANT EDITOR

**Scott Fay** prides himself on keeping up with everything new and innovative in the irrigation industry. So it was only natural for the president of Treasure Coast Irrigation and Landscape in Hobe Sound, Fla., to embrace two-wire irrigation when it was introduced in the late 1980s. "As soon as it was available on the market, we started learning it and installing it," he says. "Our mission statement identifies us as a go-to company for irrigation, so it's our goal to master every segment of irrigation technology."

Two-wire irrigation is one of the fastest-growing segments of the irrigation industry, says Bernie Malonson, product manager, Rain Bird, Tucson, Ariz. Benefits like simplified installation and lower installation costs make it an economical alternative to traditional irrigation. Like with any new product, it takes time and training to properly install two-wire irrigation. "Two-wire systems require a little more care during the installation process, but after contractors have done it once

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## irrigation

or twice they love it," says Malonson. "It just takes a little tweaking of the standard processes – like being in Europe and driving on the left-hand side of the road."

**WHAT IS TWO-WIRE?** In a nutshell, a two-wire irrigation system does the job of a standard irrigation system using only two wires. The two-wire path runs from the system's controller to each control valve located throughout a job site. A decoder is installed at each valve and programmed with its own unique address, or station number, to

irrigation is most cost effective on larger jobs. While decoders can be costly – \$100 to \$300 each depending on brand and size – money saved on less wire can add up, especially when working on large jobs. "Sometimes two-wire is cheaper to install and

and two-wire installations make up 15 percent of his company's business.

**THE GOOD AND BAD.** Unlike traditional irrigation systems, two-wire systems offer contractors flexibility. "With two-wire, the main line and the wire can



**"Two-wire systems require a little more care during the installation process, but once contractors have done it once or twice they love it. It just takes a little tweaking of the standard processes – like being in Europe and driving on the left-hand side of the road."** – Bernie Malonson, Rain Bird

which the controller sends operational commands. The two-wire path carries the power and the data necessary for the controller to communicate with each decoder. When the controller operates, it sends signals to the decoders that turn the valves on and off. "It's like an Internet system where everyone is running on a network," Malonson says. "Each valve has an address, and rather than running a separate wire out to everything, two wires are spliced and connected to each valve."

Two-wire systems are most often installed on sites with 20 valves or more, but they can just as easily run systems with as few as three valves. However, experts agree two-wire

sometimes it's more expensive," Fay says. "You can save money on wire, but you add the cost of the decoders."

Installation price depends on the system's size and the job site's layout and conditions, Fay says. "If you have a small system that has to run a long way, a two-wire system would be more cost effective," he explains. "But if you have a system with a lot of valves, the decoders add up."

Fay prices his two-wire installations similarly to his traditional irrigation installations, and considers the costs of material, labor, overhead and expenses, then factors in site conditions and desired profit. Most of Fay's two-wire clients are large commercial properties with more than 30 valves,

be laid out early in the project, and zones can be added whenever they need to be," Fay says. "If the architect wants to change the design and add things like annual beds that require different amounts of water, that's not a problem. With traditional systems, you have to know all of that ahead of time, but with two-wire, you're all set."

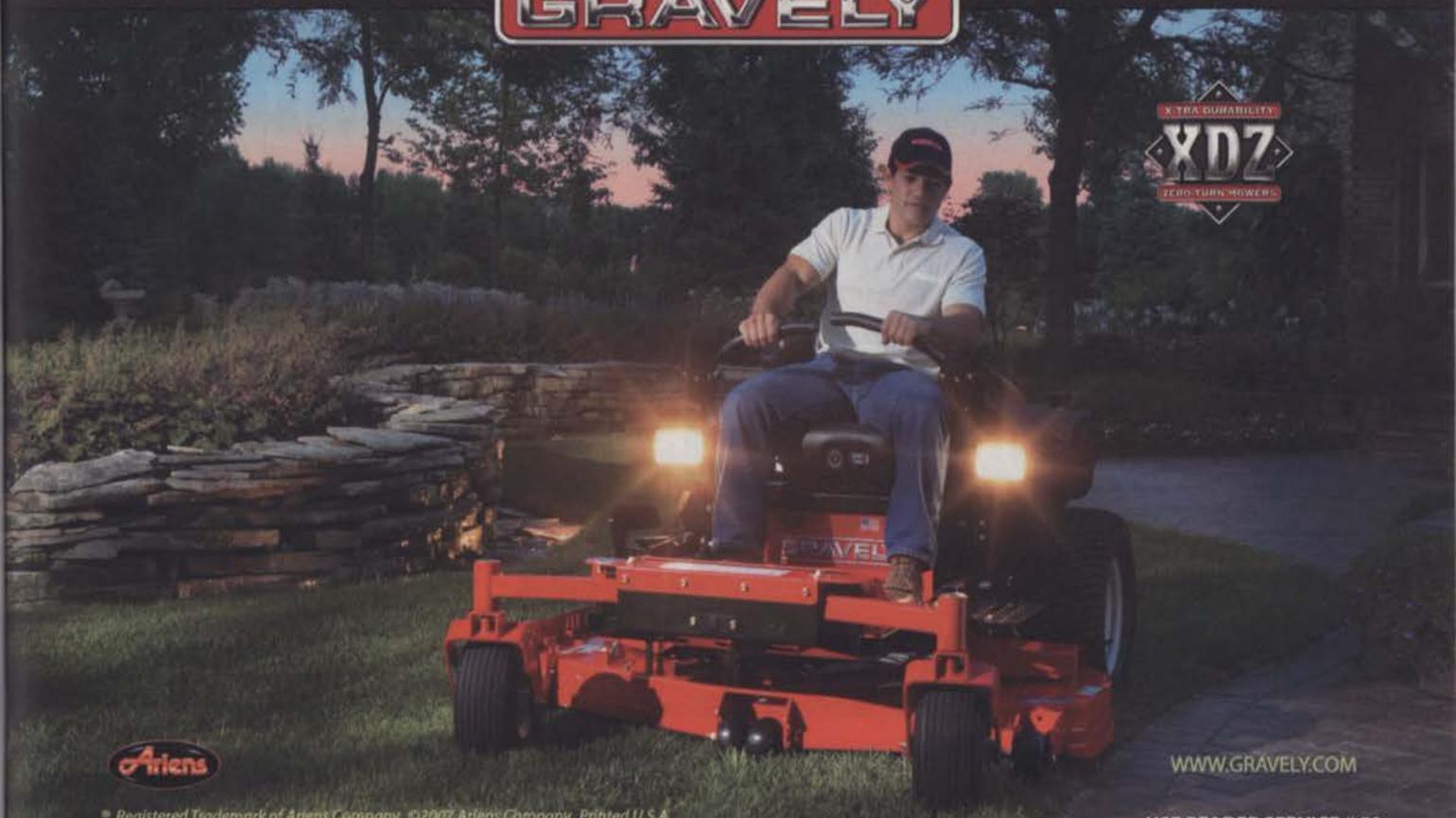
Malonson agrees. "In a perfect world, contractors think each site through as much as possible before installing an irrigation system, but things come up," he says. "If a housing development buys an adjacent piece of land and wants to irrigate it, a contractor simply needs to splice and add valves." As a result, the decision to install two-wire irrigation usually de-

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## irrigation

depends on a property's plans for future growth, Fay says. "Some clients, like commercial sites, plan to add on in a year or two so it makes sense to install a two-wire system," he says.

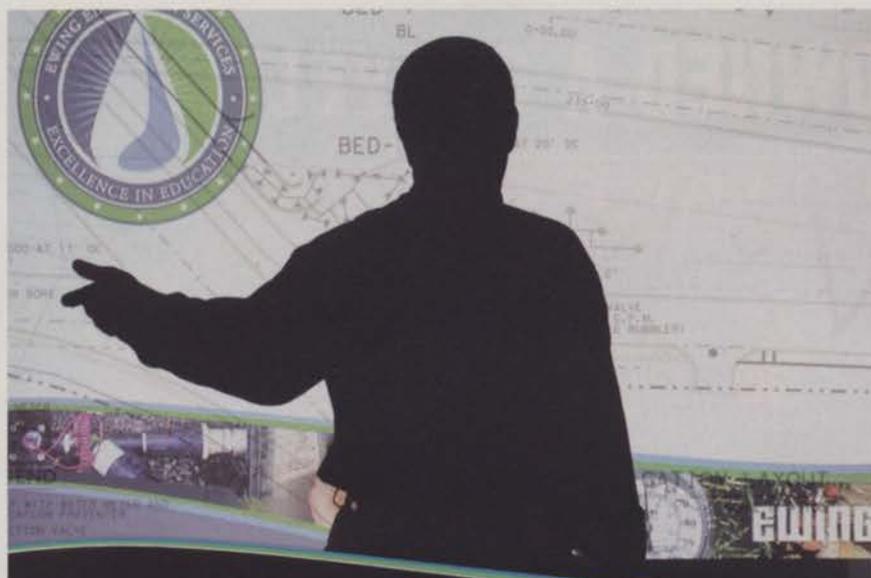
To add one or more valves, contractors simply splice the wires at the specified area and connect the valve. This splice-and-connect method drastically reduces the necessary amount of wire and is also less labor intensive. "If you have a football field and want to install a sprinkler every 10 yards, a traditional system would require thousands of feet of wire," Malonson says. "With a two-wire system, you'd run two wires up the middle of the field and splice it off every 10 yards. It definitely speeds up the installation process."

However, when it comes to maintenance, two-wire irrigation can slow things down. Because the systems run on just two wires, tracking them once they're installed can be a more technical process, Fay says. In a traditional irrigation system, a "hot wire" and a common wire run from the clock to every valve. With a two-wire system, every valve shares the same wire, making the wires and decoders more susceptible to damage. "With a two-wire system, every valve shares the same wire and, if done incorrectly, wire tracking can burn out a decoder," he explains.

Programming information for each decoder on a system also can be a difficult task, especially for non-English-

speaking laborers. Employee training is the only solution to this problem, Fay says, so he added a two-wire component to his company's 32-step irrigation training system, through which his employees participate in comprehensive hands-on and classroom training. The two-wire section takes about three hours and teaches his crews everything they need to know about installing and maintaining these systems.

Two-wire irrigation systems are also more susceptible to lightning damage than traditional systems, and Fay suggests contractors follow manufacturer recommendations for lightning protection, such as implementing surge and short-circuit protection features. Qual-



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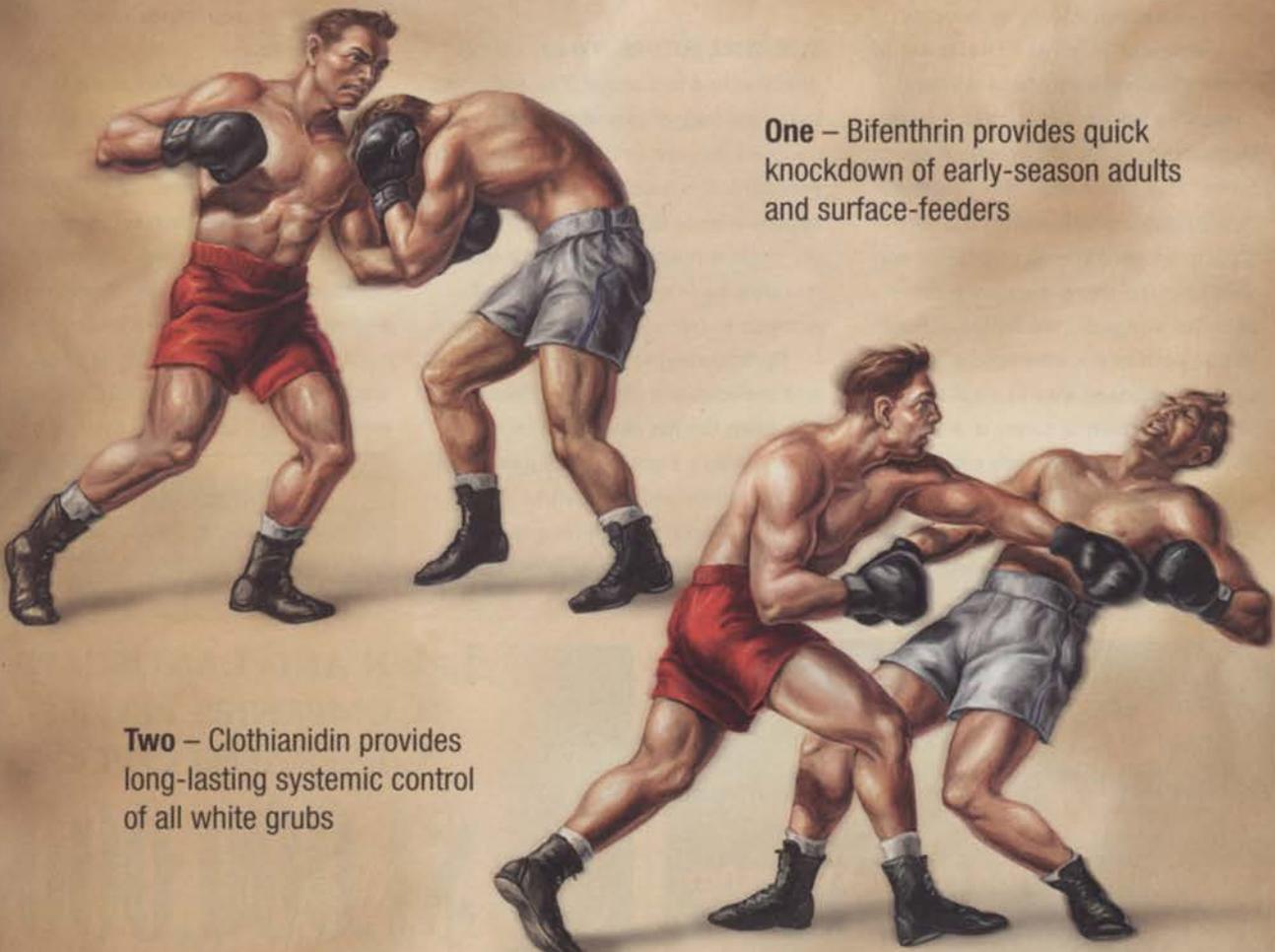
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ity wire connectors are also important when installing two-wire systems. "A two-wire system is only as good as its connections," he says. "That is not a place installers should cut corners. "Two-wire systems carry more voltage than standard 24-volt irrigation systems," Fay continues. "They operate in milliamps, which makes the wire path more sensitive to resistance and wetness. The more resistance there is in the wire path, the better chance of line-path or decoder failure." Any open or exposed wire in a splice can shut down multiple zones to a site, Fay says, adding this happens more often when contractors use "cheap" connectors, which are easily exposed to water and dirt. Quality connectors cost

about three times more than inexpensive options.

**TWO-WIRE FUTURE.** Already a standard method in Europe, Fay predicts the popularity of two-wire irrigation will continue to grow in the coming years, and attributes much of this growth to improvements in equipment. "All of the major irrigation equipment manufacturers have come up with good answers to two-wire systems," he says.

Participating in industry events and associations also helps contractors learn the ins and outs of two-wire. Most of Fay's knowledge of new irrigation products and techniques - like two-wire - comes from his yearly pilgrimage to the Irrigation Association's

International Irrigation Show. "I'm a big believer that contractors who want to stay up on new trends need to be there," he says.

Like any new product, contractor acceptance will fuel the future growth of two-wire irrigation. "When two-wire irrigation first appeared on the market there were a lot of contractors who rejected it because it was different, nontraditional," Fay says. "Installing and maintaining two-wire became a competitive advantage for us because we were able to offer our clients the newest thing." LL



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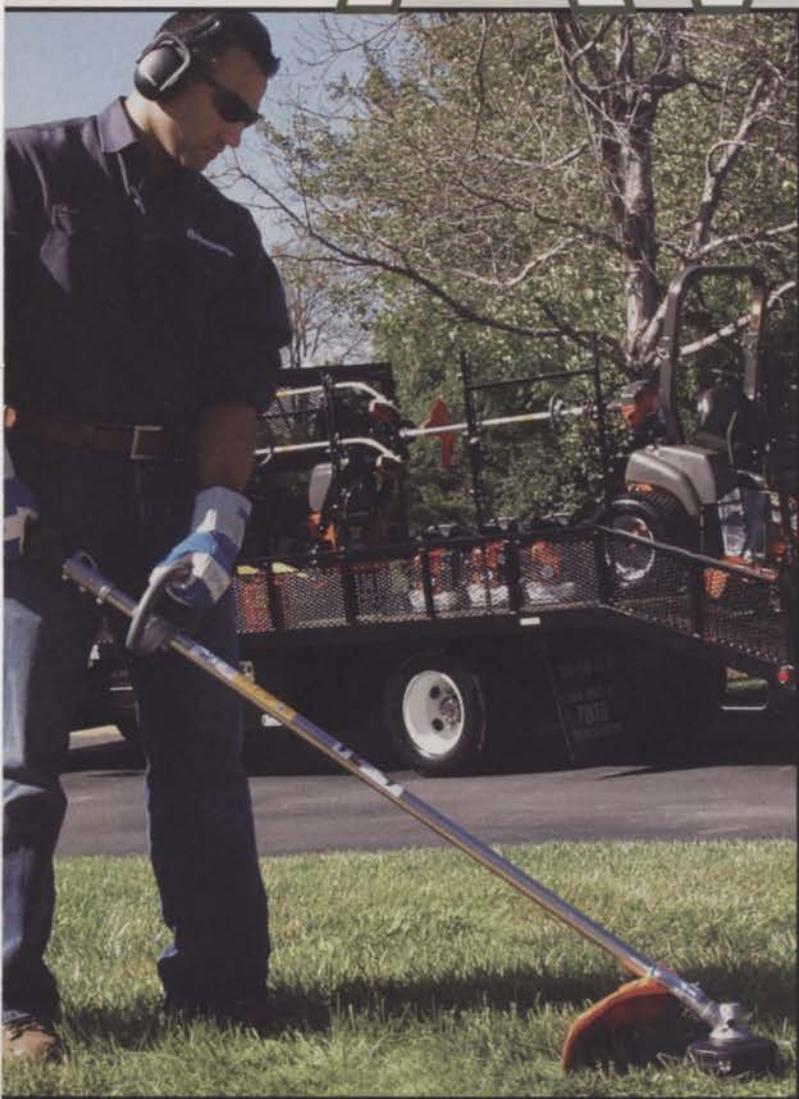
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BY MARK A. PHILLIPS/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

# Trim Away



**String trimmers offer high-power in a lightweight package.**

While there are no hard and fast rules to buying a string trimmer, there's certainly one aspect that comes close: Make sure it's still a joy to use at the end of a long day.

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Through advancements by manufacturers, string trimmers are becoming more comfortable to use with almost every new model. String trimmers have come a long way from their mostly electric brethren to become high-powered gasoline units that offer versatility through a wide range of cutting heads. Through

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increased power-to-weight ratios, improved ergonomics, and operator-friendly controls, landscape contractors are more comfortable than ever during trimming tasks.

String trimmers are ideal for a number of applications, including trimming around hard-to-get-to areas, walkway/sidewalk edging or areas where mowers aren't practical, such as steep terrain, ditches and small areas. Whether a trimmer employs anti-vibration technology, a 4-cycle or 2-cycle engine or an auto-feed line trimmer

head, landscape contractors should consider the weight of the machine and how it will feel holding it after several hours.

Contractors should look for trimmers with the fewest internal moving parts as possible, says Jeff Nesom, product manager at Charlotte, N.C.-based Husqvarna. While many trimmers are still lightweight, to meet current emissions regulations, today's models use technology that includes more internal moving parts. Those additional parts result in added weight and more maintenance, though string trimmers are likely to be the equipment needing the least maintenance.

**BUYING TIPS.** Landscape contractors must first assess the job at hand and determine the size of the project and the cutting attachments that will be needed before buying a trimmer.

Rak buys several of the same model trimmer. He's found over the years that this saves time, money and training. "We buy them in uniform so we don't have to buy different parts," he says. "If

I keep a box full of the same bump heads, employees will always get the right one, no matter what they pull out of the box. This uniformity makes a world of difference."

Sixto Juarez, of DeSantis Landscapes, Salem, Ore., echoes that sentiment. "It should be easy to change the string," he says. "There should be an easy way to show our crews how to change the heads so it takes them less time to do it in the field. Our crews used to spend a lot of time doing that." That was, until the company began buying the same model trimmers.

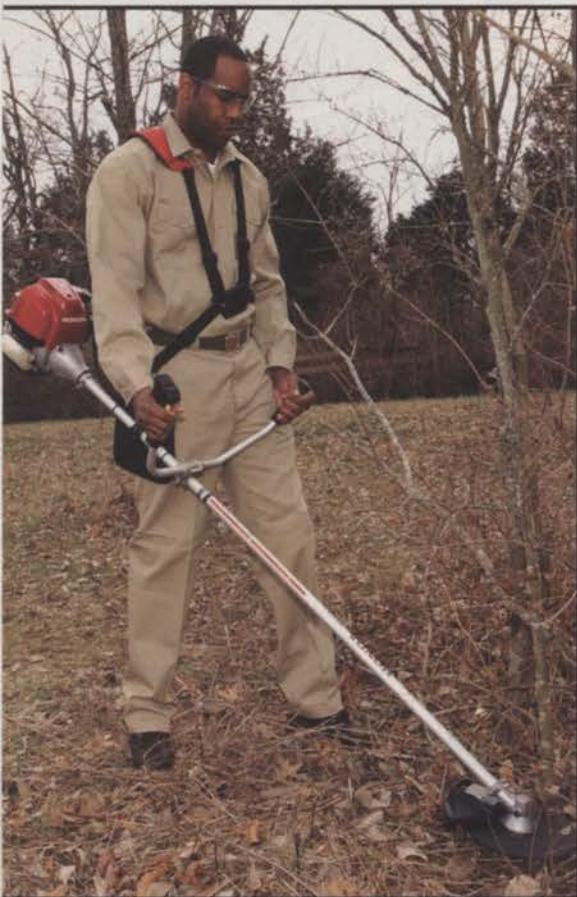
Trimmer discussions inevitably lead to choosing the right engine. But regardless of the engine size and horsepower, the unit overall should have a good power-to-weight ratio.

"When it comes to looking for the right engine for line trimmers, 2-cycle engines offer the best power-to-weight ratios and contain a fewer number of moving parts, requiring less maintenance," Nesom says. Contractors can experience excellent throttle response and good power on engines with 25-30cc (minimum 1.2-horsepower) engines. "We get as big an engine we can get in the lightest machine," Rak says. For large commercial properties with heavy applications, 30cc and greater (with a minimum 1.8-horsepower) are suggested.

Accessories such as harnesses go a long way to reducing operator fatigue by taking stress off the arms, Juarez says. "At the end of a long day, it can get very tiring," he says. "Without something like a harness, your arms can hurt quite a bit."

Like many products, operator comfort for string trimmers is evolving. "When trimmers first came out, there wasn't a major concern about weight," says Marv Mathwig, a product manager for Virginia Beach, Va.-based STIHL. "Now there is, so they're lighter. Units in the past vibrated a lot and there weren't anti-vibration components. The equipment has definitely gotten more fuel-efficient." Part of that fuel efficiency is derived from the development of new technologies to comply with emissions regulations.

Four-cycle and 2-cycle engines employ different technologies to comply with emissions standards. Two-cycle engines burn a fuel-oil mixture, while 4-cycles models use a separate oil reservoir. Four-cycles fire every other



Contractors should make sure a string trimmer is comfortable to use, even at the end of a long day. Photo: Honda



Kurt and Matt Bland  
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## "Our most effective cost-cutting measure was buying 58 new blowers."

Sometimes you have to spend money to save money. That's what Bland Landscaping did by replacing their entire fleet of blowers with 58 new STIHL BR 550's. "Our philosophy is to always do the right thing," Kurt says, "and that includes environmentally. We heard the fuel efficiency claims of the BR 550 and we ran our own tests. They were 40 percent more efficient than our other machines and we calculated we'd

save enough on gas to pay for the new blowers in less than two years." Fuel efficiency, low emissions – any other benefits, Matt? "The entire line of blowers is really powerful. And, my crews can work longer before refueling. We're doing more work, saving money and we're doing it clean."

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USE READER SERVICE # 58

revolution, which allows the engine to burn cleaner and at a lower temperature, while 2-cycles fire each revolution. "How much should the landscape contractor pay attention to that? Probably not much," Mathwig says. "I wouldn't make the decision to buy a trimmer just on 4-cycle or 2-cycle."

Along with advancements in other areas, string trimmers have become safer machines. All trimmers produced today are required to provide a deflector type of cutting shield that surrounds the cutting attachment, Nesom says. Cutting shields reduce the chance of rocks, trimmings and other projectiles from striking nearby property, people or pets. In addition,

chance of slipping."

Safety apparel should also include heavy-duty non-slip gloves and sturdy, snug-fitting clothing. Mathwig recommends operators read the user manual, even if they've used string trimmers in the past. The manual spells out details about safe operation that the user may not have thought about. For example, if the operator intends to use a cutting blade, a different deflector is more appropriate than the one used in conjunction with a string cutting head.

While string trimmers have become more technologically advanced and versatile, there are some applications they're not meant to tackle. String trimmers are not designed for brush

you'll probably want to start off by cleaning the air filter."

The carburetor is another component that may require occasional idle adjustment. And if the trimmer features a gear box for the cutting heads, a weekly check should ensure there's enough grease in the gearbox. And depending on usage, the engine's fuel filter will need to be replaced at least on an annual basis.

Rak uses a high-quality synthetic oil in his string trimmers, which he believes makes them last longer. Just as the maintenance requirements are subject to use and conditions, these factors will determine the lifespan of the equipment.

"Contractors can expect a trimmer that's subjected to constant work to still last more than a year," Mathwig says. "If these guys are taking care of the equipment by maintaining it, it could be replaced between two and five years." Trimmers should last long after the EPA's emissions durability and expected useful life rating has been met or exceeded. Experts say contractors should stay away from machines that display useful life ratings of 50 hours, because those are for consumer use.

"The lifespan of a commercial trimmer depends on the conditions in which the trimmer is operated and how much routine maintenance was performed on the unit," Nesom says.

Most contractors expect a commercial trimmer to last between 900 to 1,200 hours or more with proper care. Contractors can get a durable, commercial-grade string trimmer for a few hundred dollars. In many cases, people just want raw power. A contractor requiring more than 2 horsepower can expect to pay up to \$500. A trimmer in the 1.25-horsepower range will cost around \$300. **LL**

**"Our guys tend to gravitate toward the lighter machines. If an employee has a choice between a lighter, older machine or a newer, more powerful machine that might be heavier, they'll pick the lighter machine every time."** — Steve Rak Sr., Southwest Landscape Management

spark arrestors control the muffler output and reduce the potential for fires due to sparks. Interlocks on the throttle also prevent unintended throttle engagement. Heat protection that surrounds the muffler and engine housing reduces the chance of burns to the operator. Most manufacturers provide a simple on/off switch to shut down the engine in an emergency.

Operators are warned to wear protective clothing, including eye, ear and leg protection.

"Definitely a must is proper eye protection," Mathwig says. "We recommend a steel toe in a shoe or boot that has excellent traction to reduce the

cutting, heavy edging applications or hedge trimming.

**KEEPING THEM TRIMMING.** Maintenance requirements for string trimmers vary depending on workload and conditions. Extreme conditions may require a higher frequency of replacing normal maintenance items. Some 4-cycle products require regular oil changes and engine valve adjustments. "A common maintenance item is the air filter," Mathwig says. "If the engine starts to bog down or you notice you're not getting the performance you've gotten in the past, and you operate often in dusty conditions,

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technology

# Software Satisfaction

**Business software is an essential component for a well-run landscape operation, but is that upgraded program you're considering turn-key or turn-off?**

BY MIKE ZAWACKI/MANAGING EDITOR

**For the last three years**, Steve Wise has agonized over purchasing business software for his landscape company.

Wise's legacy system could no longer keep pace with the growth at Jamestown, Ohio-based Scapes. "The software I have now is pretty basic and is easy to work with," he says. "But it's not in-depth enough to track customer information and allow me to see how my business is performing."

In the landscape industry, business software includes everything from routing programs and design software to accounting and billing applications, as well as basic office programs such as word processing and spreadsheet management. Ideally, Wise has hoped to find an all-encompassing business software program,

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**"I can't stress strongly enough the fact that a contractor really needs to do his research. Often you're laying out a lot of money and you need to make sure you're getting your money's worth with your software purchase."**

— Eric Levine, GRA\$\$ Landscaper Billing

## 24/7 Help

Many business software developers provide their customers with support – either online or via an 800 number – 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

That may seem like a customer service bonus, but Eric Levine, president of Long Island, New York-based GRA\$\$ Landscaper Billing, warns that round-the-clock assistance may not be what it's cracked up to be for a landscape contractor in the middle of a software crisis.

"It's not so much a question of the number of hours the help desk is open," Levine says. "Rather, it's what kind of help will you get and what level of support is that developer going to offer you."

For example, will a contractor be speaking directly to the individual who wrote the software or someone who helped develop the program? Or will the person on the other end of the phone not be able to offer much assistance outside of installing the program?

and he wants a system that will interact with his design software. While he has done his due diligence, his three-year technical odyssey may have set his company back. "Business software is not cheap and I didn't want to invest \$10,000 in software to discover that I needed to invest another \$10,000 to get everything to work correctly," he says. "This has hamstrung my business a bit because I don't have a permanent system set up. The existing program I'm using is OK, but it doesn't reflect how well I can take care of my customer."

Making a smart business software purchasing decision does not have to be difficult. Like acquiring a mower or string trimmer, business software is another component of a landscape contractor's business tool kit, says Glenn Zior, vice president of operations at CLIP Software, Ijamsville, Md.

It's easy to see that to cut grass a contractor needs to buy a mower, Zior says. "However, you don't immediately see the dollars slowly slipping away from your company because of problems that some solid business software could solve," he says.

In recent years many landscape contractors have taken technology integration more seriously. According to recent *Lawn & Landscape* research, nearly 57 percent of contrac-

tors budget about \$5,000 annually for technology, which includes software purchases and upgrades. In addition, about 66 percent updated their business software – including design software, business software and accounting software – within the last year. Lastly, more than 77 percent categorized their technology investments – including software integration – as having made their business processes more effective, and nearly 70 percent believe those investments have paid for themselves.

**PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS.** Similar to buying a zero-turn mower or a skid-steer attachment, software requires thorough research before purchasing.

"I can't stress strongly enough the fact that a contractor really needs to do his research," says Eric Levine, president of GRA\$\$ Landscaper Billing in Long Island, N.Y. "Often you're laying out a lot of money and you need to make sure you're getting your money's worth with your software purchase."

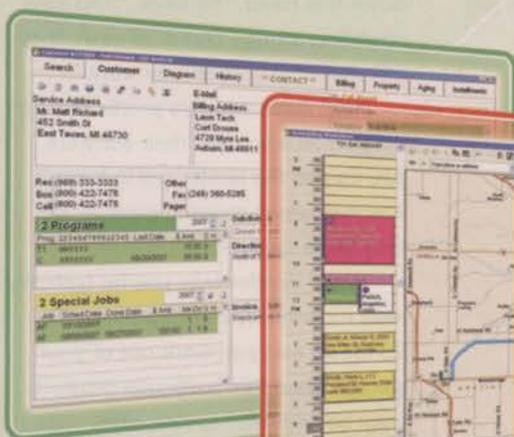
Along with product research, a landscape contractor needs to answer some specific questions. For example what problem is he troubleshooting with a particular piece of business software. Most software programs are developed to address a broad array



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of business issues, which is at times contrary to simply seeking one or two solutions.

"Technology is sometimes a solution looking for a problem," Levine says. "One of the most common complaints a contractor has is that he can't get the software to do exactly

what he wants it to do. He can't navigate through the various layers of functionality to get to the solution to the problem he originally bought the software for. If the program offers 18 different functions and you only need two, then it may be the wrong product for you."

Unfortunately, "blanket" software doesn't exist, Zior says. Instead, a contractor should seek flexibility. However, Zior cautions contractors to avoid the lure of custom-developed software. "I have seen companies go down this route," he says. "And after spending a huge chunk of cash, they still don't have what they want."

Next, have vendors profile the typical person who uses their software. Are they in the landscape industry? Are they small mowing guys or are they large design-build firms?

"If the vendor tells you he typically sells to landscape contractors with 23 crews and you work out of your garage, then this particular product may be overkill," Levine says.

In addition, Zior recommends inquiring about any ongoing fees for technical assistance or upgrades.

Another key is to test the software. Many developers will distribute a trial version or provide a potential client with limited access to the software for a real-world experience. "You don't really know what you're buying until you can use the program firsthand," Levine says.

During his research, Wise set his sights on a particular suite of business software. From what he read about the product, it seemed like a good fit. Then, he ran the demo.

"It wasn't until I started using the program that I realized how complicated it was," he says. "I knew it was going to take a lot of time going over the program with the support people to really begin to learn how I could use it with my landscape operation."

Zior reminds contractors a software program may reveal inadequacies in their established business practices. "Be willing to change some of your business procedures to best work with the software," he says. **LL**

## Software Selection

It's easy to get carried away when it comes to purchasing business software. Sometimes the "bells and whistles" of a particular suite of costly business software may seem like the answer to a lot of questions a contractor didn't know he had. Ultimately, though, will it be a smart purchase?

Here is a checklist of questions to consider to keep you on track as you conduct your due diligence.

- Have I identified the problems I'm trying to solve?
- Does this software solve these problems?
- Will I use the other functions?
- Is the learning curve to use this software within reason?
- Am I confident I can teach others within my company to use this software?
- Is the software within my budget?
- Are future upgrades available?
- Does the developer offer a support center?
- Is a less expensive alternative available?



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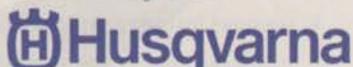
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- Exaktime – 888/788-8463

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## Real Green Systems Lawn & Pest Assistant III

[www.realgreen.com](http://www.realgreen.com)

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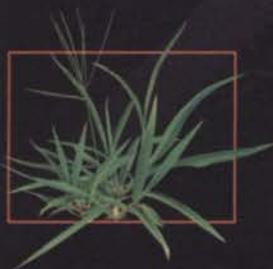


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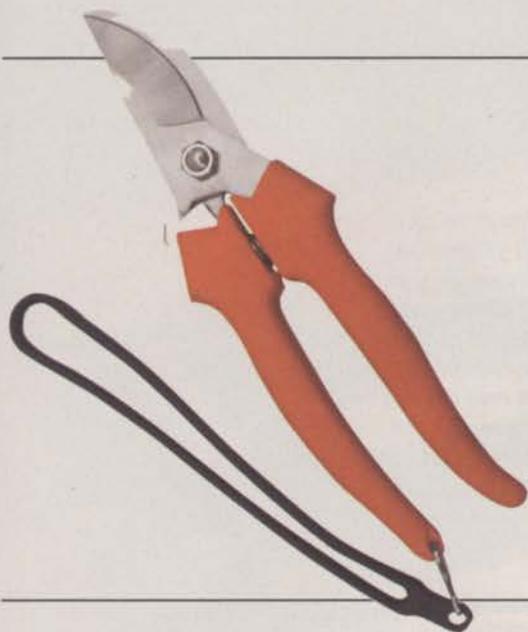
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[www.leatherman.com](http://www.leatherman.com)

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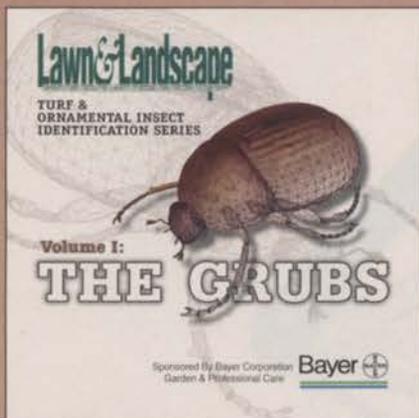
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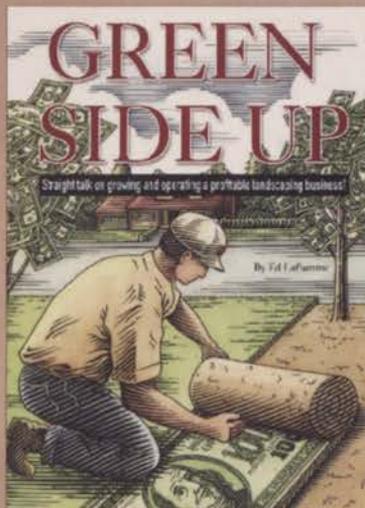


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David J. Shetlar, Ph.D., Technical Content  
Advisor & Project Photographer  
Cindy Code, Editor

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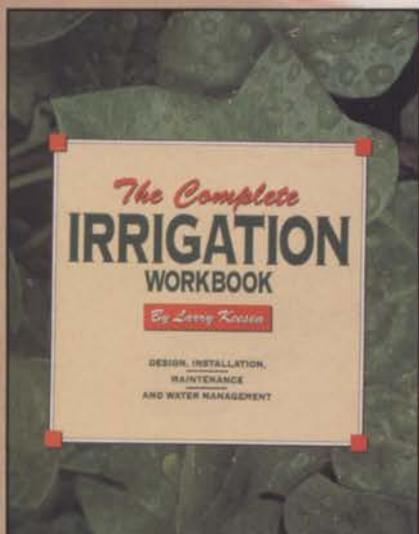
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improving your operations or acquiring and retaining new  
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chart a new course for your business.



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Larry Keesen  
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of more than 60 commonly encountered  
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## The Complete Irrigation Workbook- 5 for \$50.00

This workbook offers a comprehensive look at irrigation design, installation, maintenance and water management including practical hands-on techniques. Each chapter contains questions and answers which can be used to test your own knowledge or as in-house training tool for new and seasoned employees. Appendix includes detailed drawings of irrigation installations and tables and conversion data.



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# A Uniform Decision

**Uniforms are an inexpensive way for contractors to create a neat, professional image.**

**You only have one chance** to make a first impression, which is why many landscape contractors provide their employees with neat, professional uniforms.

"Contractors should think of their uniforms as advertising and their employees should wear them with pride," says Brian Garry, director of segment marketing, Cintas, Cincinnati.

Kelly Tohill, owner of Tohill Landscape Management, Atlanta, invested in uniforms as part of a marketing

in whatever they felt like wearing that day. Now everything is emblazoned with our name and colors and we arrive neat and clean-cut."

He requires his employees to wear a company-provided Tohill Landscape Management T-shirt, jeans and work boots. Tohill wears khaki pants and polo shirts or sweatshirts embroidered with the Tohill logo. The company's color scheme is orange, gray and green and is reflected in its trucks and business cards. "Contractors

should ensure their company's branding is consistent to add credibility and differentiate their business from a sea of others," Garry says.

**PAY UP.** Costs of uniforms vary and depend on factors like the number of employees, type of uniform and whether they're rented or purchased.

Tohill spends about \$200 a year on T-shirts for his three-man operation, and always has an extra supply of replacements.

According to 2007 *Lawn & Landscape* research, the average contractor spent \$1,829 on uniforms last year. Many contractors purchase their uniforms in bulk, Garry says. A set of

25 ball caps costs about \$8 per hat. Twenty-five shirts cost between \$16 and \$23 per shirt depending on style, such as a woven work shirt or a knit polo shirt. A set of 25 pairs of pants costs from \$18 to \$28 per pair. Also depending on style, work shoes can range from \$45 to \$85 a pair. Adding logos can cost \$25 to \$100, depending on the complexity of the logo and whether it's silkscreen or direct embroidery, Garry says.

**ROUGH AND TOUGH.** Uniforms are an easy and inexpensive way for owners to offer a valued service to their employees, Garry says. "Landscape work can be tough due to weather, heavy lifting and long hours," he says. "Employees don't want to wear out their personal clothes, so having their uniforms provided is often seen as a benefit to them."

Durability and functionality are important factors for contractors to consider when choosing their uniforms. "Depending on the jobs my crews are doing, a T-shirt might be ruined pretty quickly," Tohill says. "If they come to work wearing one that doesn't meet our professional standards, I'll give them a new one and the old one becomes a shop rag." **LL**



scheme his fourth year in business. Business tripled that year, and Tohill attributes much of that growth to his employees' new-found appearance. "When my crews began showing up to jobs looking professional we definitely started picking up more accounts," he says. "Before, my guys came to work

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## Don't Be Fooled By MORS

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The MORS method typically adds 10 percent to material costs in a bid, 25 percent to equipment costs, 5 percent

to subcontractor costs and a predetermined percent to field labor and burden. The percent applied to labor and burden ranges from 35 to 95 percent depending on budget and size.

**WHY MORS DOESN'T WORK.** Job A requires labor for one month. Its price should include a month of G&A overhead cost or \$10,000. However, MORS adds \$18,770 to the bid for G&A overhead. It overstates G&A overhead by almost \$9,000. Job B requires the entire field labor force for four months.

The G&A overhead costs should total \$40,000 but MORS adds \$39,080 to the bid to cover G&A overhead costs. It is close but it understates G&A overhead costs by almost \$1,000. This is pretty close but it still is not accurate.

**ANALYSIS.** I could show jobs where the MORS markups in bids are right on, too high or too low. The issue isn't the precise markup percentages used in MORS. The mathematical problem arises because we are multiplying the components of direct costs by percentages.



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# benchmarking

Methods like MORS make the mathematical mistake of calculating G&A overhead based on multiplying direct costs by percentages. It isn't accurate.

Another problem is the markups

added to material, equipment and subcontractor costs – 10, 25 and 5 percent, respectively. These have absolutely no mathematical justification. In the late 1980s I taught the MORS estimating

system in workshops all over North America. I know the MORS method pretty well and I can say no one has ever come forth with any mathematical justification for these percentages. LL

Job A (material-intense, one-month job)			
	Direct Costs	OVHD %	Markup
Materials (w/tax)	\$100,000	x 10%	= \$10,000
Labor w/burden	13,000	x 54%	= 7,020
Equip. w/rentals	7,000	x 25%	= 1,750
Subcontractors	0	x 5%	= 0
	\$120,000		\$18,770
Total direct costs			\$120,000
Total G&A overhead to recover on job			18,770
Break-even point (BEP)			138,770
Net profit markup (10%)			13,877
Price for job			\$152,647

Job B (labor-intense, four-month job)			
	Direct Costs	OVHD %	Markup
Materials (w/tax)	\$40,000	x 10%	= \$4,000
Labor w/burden	52,000	x 54%	= 28,080
Equip. w/rentals	28,000	x 25%	= 7,050
Subcontractors	0	x 5%	= 0
	\$120,000		\$39,080
Total direct costs			\$120,000
Total G&A overhead to recover on job			39,080
Break-even point (BEP)			159,080
Net profit markup (10%)			15,908
Price for job			\$174,988

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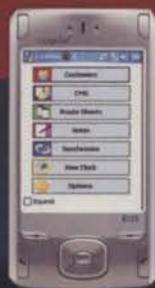
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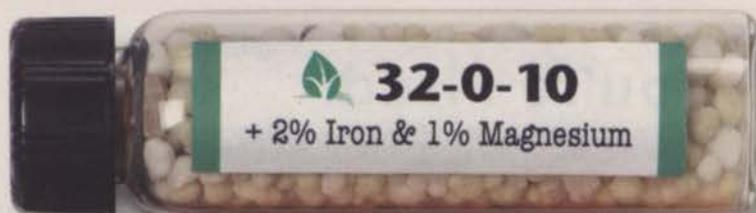
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## You're Fired!

**F**or a long time, I accepted the conventional wisdom that the customer is always right. Now, if he is a good customer, I still believe he is always right. After all, it costs a fortune to turn a prospect into a customer. So it only makes sense to keep clients so long as the relationship remains profitable, they are reasonable to work with and your team wants to work for them. But if you find yourself losing money or merely breaking even, or if the customer is so difficult that working for him is harming your company, then it might be time to fire the client. That's right, fire the client.

A few years ago, I had a client who

became a real problem. This lady was willing to make a considerable investment in landscaping to her very nice house, but she also believed she was the expert. She constantly second-guessed us and insisted we do things that we knew were horticulturally unwise.

While I understood my managers' concerns, initially I was reluctant to address the situation for fear of losing her \$30,000 a year in business. But it didn't take long to see this relationship in a much different light.

While inspecting the job site, I watched one of my best team leaders ring a large bell attached to a pole in her

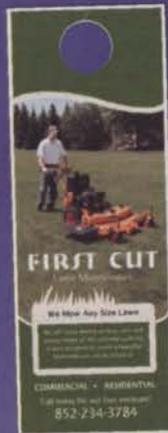
yard before preparing to leave. Dumbfounded I asked him about what I had witnessed and he explained that the client wanted him to ring the bell when they began and when they finished their work for the day. "She writes down the time," he told me. "I guess to make sure we're here." He confessed the practice was childish and insulting, but he believed we needed her business.

Well, not at that price.

The next day I told her that while we appreciated the business she had done with us, we weren't a good match for her anymore and it would be best if she found another landscape contractor.

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— Marty Grunder

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She thought I was kidding and didn't say much.

The next day this client's husband asked me why I had ended our business relationship. As a business man the husband told me he would never fire a client. But while I could sympathize with his panic and confusion, I maintained my resolve and stuck to my decision to end our business dealings.

To this day I'm still glad I fired them. Why, you might ask? As a business owner, I had a major epiphany that day. My team realized making money was important, but it had to be for the right reasons. We were neither passionate about, nor proud of, the work we did for this particular client. Telling her we could no longer work for her was very liberating. In addition, my team witnessed me take a stand on principle, and they understood I was not willing to sacrifice team morale or their dignity for a few extra dollars.

So as you examine your accounts for this year I want you to consider your client relationships.

Think about the overall characteristics you want in a landscape client and then seek out those people that fit this specific client profile.

Then, sit down with your team and ask them if there are any clients you should fire and why. Keep the discussion strictly professional – this isn't a laughing matter. Discuss problematic customers and analyze the impact they're having on your landscape operation's bottom-line.

Ultimately, if the bad qualities outweigh the good, then you'll know what to do. **LL**

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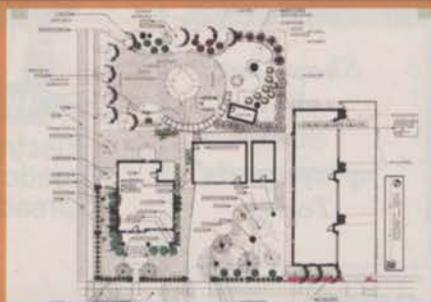
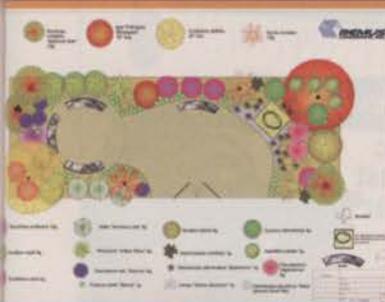
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- **CENTS Show**  
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Jan. 21-23, 2008 | Booth #6034
- **New England Grows**  
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Feb. 6-8, 2008 | Booth # 1818
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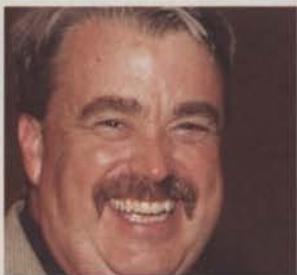
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it's about  
people

## Bill Arman

is a 32 year veteran of the landscape maintenance industry and is a founder of The Harvest Group, a national landscape business consultancy. He can be reached at 949/466-8837 or people@gie.net.



## Recruiting Right

**T**here are four fundamentals all companies should excel at to remain in business. Every organization must be profitable, consistently deliver service, attract, retain and grow the right customers and attract, retain and grow the right people.

Accomplish two of these and you'll do OK. Do three very well and you'll last for years. Now we could debate which one should happen first or their order, but to be successful an organization must excel at all four.

I would argue that without the ability to attract, retain and grow great people, the remaining three are irrelevant.

Recently, I conducted contractor workshops on creating recruiting programs and growing great people within the landscape industry. When I asked the audiences what their people needs were for the next year I was astonished at the number of managers, middle managers, foremen and workers being sought in this industry. What equally amazed me was how low the organizations rated their ability to retain and grow their existing people.

You can successfully develop recruiting and retention programs to secure the right people in the landscape industry. Take recruiting, for example. Over

the last 30 years I have used six steps to recruit the right people: taking stock of what you have, identifying needs, identifying targets, gathering tools, establishing best practices and seeking the source.

For starters, let's examine the first two steps – taking stock of what you have and identifying your needs.

**TAKING STOCK.** Inventorying who you already have is the first step. Start by drawing an organization chart of your business team, then go through and rate each person using a scale of ABC, just like in school. The highly ranked A's

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are your stars, so tell them you appreciate their contributions. Let the B's know what they need to do to become A's, and reinforce with the C's that it's time they step up their performance.

Next, note the recruiting source – Web site, referral, agency and so on – for each person and then write down the behaviors and skills that require development. Lastly, identify those individ-

**“What equally amazed me was how low the organizations rated their ability to retain and grow their existing people.”**

– Bill Arman

uals who can move up in your company.

This serves as your people plan and highlights your organizational strengths and weaknesses, where you've had past success in recruiting, developmental needs in the organization, who can advance forward and where you would be weakened if someone leaves in both the long and short term.

**IDENTIFY NEEDS.** Next, chart out your revenue growth over the next three years and then draw an organizational chart of what your landscape company will look like that coincides with each year of this projected growth.

These new charts will identify any needs and where your existing people will fill in any new spots created by growth.

Now compare your current organizational chart against those for each year and consider who could move up from your existing team to avoid dissension. Think about sequencing and prioritizing your needs and determine a revenue-to-positions-needed ratio.

This can seem overwhelming, especially if you target significant growth in the coming years. But rarely do organizations appreciate the time, energy and resources necessary to start and sustain a successful recruiting program.

By taking stock of the talent within your landscape organization and identifying your future people needs as they relate to projected growth, you've just completed the first step in the process of creating successful recruiting programs at your landscape business.

Next month we'll examine the next two steps in recruiting: identifying the target and gathering tools. **LL**

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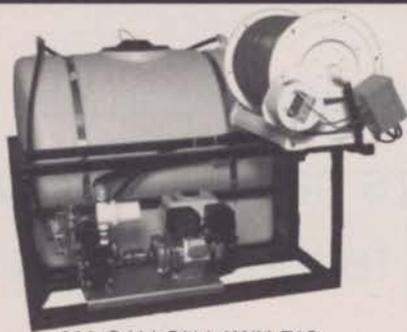
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Roger Mongeon, CEO  
THI / Weed Man USA

You don't win top trophies (or earn mega millions) by putting out minimal efforts. Allow me to explain my background and early beginnings. With a group of colleagues we studied business literature that persuaded us that our greatest chance of success was linked to buying a proven system as opposed to starting our own concept from scratch. Collectively, we had a lot of expertise in process engineering, construction design and build, marketing and sales. One such successful operation impressed me with a high rate of customer retention. We were convinced that the ability to benefit from the growth of equity in business was a huge upside.

Here's a small recap of what was learned: If you want to start a business and get it to the level where it's bringing you in \$1 million plus dollars a year, you'd better get ready for a hard ride of trials that precede rewards. If the route to success were easy you'd find the field pretty full. As I also stated, they don't hand out big trophies for minimal efforts.

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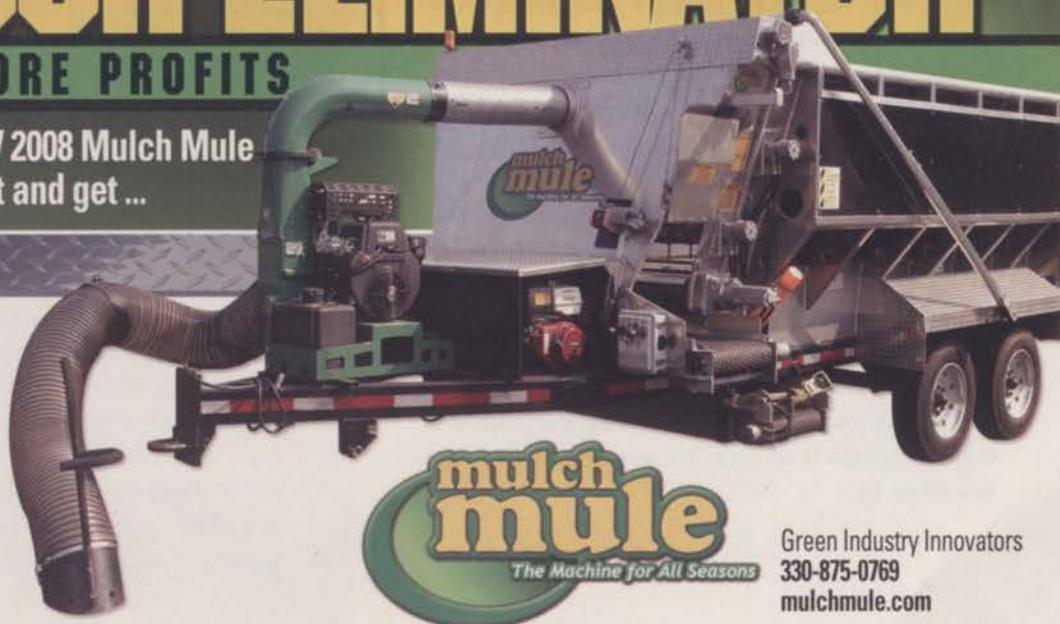
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## Question: "What are the pros and cons to landscape contractors having their own equipment technicians on staff?"

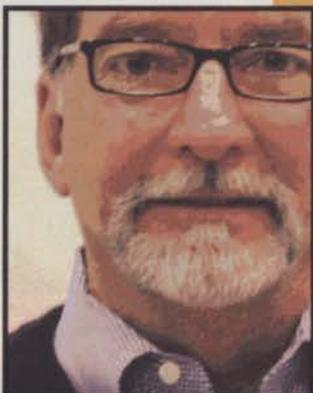
### THE DEALER:

Joe Tegethoff, Manager,  
Heavy Duty Equipment,  
Chesterfield, Mo.

It depends on the quality of the technicians they employ and their openness and willingness to accept if they're wrong about something. A lot of times, they have an opinion on whether something should be covered by warranty or not. As long as they're open to accepting changes in the engines coming out and admit that maybe they forgot to change the oil... It depends on the dealer as well. When they don't spend the money to hire a better-trained technician, you get what you pay for. Having a good technician on a contractor's staff actually helps both the dealer and, in turn, the contractor. A good technician will understand why a particular product is better for the contractor. This will benefit the contractor because if they buy better products, they'll be up and running.

When it comes to sharpening blades and changing the oil, technicians employed by contractors are an asset. We couldn't possibly sharpen all the blades and change all the oil. When you're talking about hydraulic, electrical or warranty work, that's probably best handled by the dealer's technician.

The only con to a contractor having a technician is if the technician is so set in his ways, he won't accept new ideas. **LL**



### THE CONTRACTOR:

Todd Dilley, President,  
Outdoor Environments,  
Savage, Minn.

Our philosophy is that time is the biggest factor. We employ two full-time technicians and they always have something coming up in the morning. Their biggest focus is to get the crews out. When a problem comes up, for example with a mower, our first question is about timing: Can we get the repair done quickly? If so, then we'll do the repair. If the repair will definitely take longer, then we'll have the dealer's technician repair it. If it's going to take two days to repair, for example, it makes no sense for our technician to work on it.



Other than time, the level of involvement in the repair will determine if our technicians will handle it. Can our technician really fix what's broken? In most cases, the answer is "yes," but how long it takes is the more important answer. That's why it's so important for us to have a great relationship with our dealers. Many times, our technician is on the phone with the dealership, who is helping him assess the best way to handle a repair.

For basic service items, like changing oil and sharpening blades, it would be too time-consuming to send every item to the dealer. Our technicians are hired from tech schools and they have a good general knowledge of a lot of machines. We can't hire someone who is an expert just on zero-turn mowers. **LL**

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USE READER SERVICE # 83

# Should You Work for Uncle Sam?

**Red tape or not,** government contracts can be a great line of business for landscape companies. Here are the basics.

**Erik Dihle** is surprised more private companies don't go after government contract work. "It either doesn't occur to them or they perceive it to be bureaucratic," says Arlington National Cemetery's chief horticulturist, adding, "It's really not that bad."

Green industry companies have a unique advantage when bidding on government contracts, Dihle says, because they often have the personnel and equipment to conduct a variety of tasks outside of mowing, leaf removal and pruning. For example, Arlington grants a \$60,000 to \$70,000 annual contract for power washing headstones. Though power washing isn't a typical landscape service, there's no reason a landscape company couldn't be considered for that contract. "I don't like to see green industry outsiders getting into green industry work, but I don't mind the other way around," Dihle says. "You may want to think beyond your typical services."

**WHERE TO START.** Federal cemeteries, military installations, government office buildings and agencies across the country all have grounds-related needs. Firms interested in obtaining government contracts can search for opportunities at [www.fedbizopps.gov](http://www.fedbizopps.gov), the single place where all contracts

more than \$25,000 are listed.

"It's easy to find the business because everything is published," says Bobby Ashe, vice president of Ashe Facility Services, Yorktown, Va.

Winning contracts is another story, though. Ashe, whose \$7-million-plus company has been involved in government contracting for more than 20 years, recommends companies new to this work start with small contracts, build their credibility and then move on to larger ones. "The key is to get your foot in the door and make sure you're learning the business and the strategies of getting the contracts, because it's generally different from the private sector," Ashe says.

Ashe also recommends signing up for FedBizOpps' vendor notification service, which sends out e-mail alerts by set-aside type, classification code or agency.

To identify local opportu-

nities, Dihle suggests calling federal agencies or facilities in your area and asking them when their grounds maintenance contracts are coming up and who to contact in the future to find out about bid solicitations.

**REQUIREMENTS.** Companies interested in government contracting should prepare for red tape.

"One of the most important things to learn about government contracting is there's a separate set of rules, such as Federal Acquisition Regulations and



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<p><b>I. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)</b> <b>CONTRACTOR or SERVICES</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Landscape Contractor <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service) <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Ornamental Shrub &amp; Tree Service <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Irrigation Contractor <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Landscape Architect <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____</p> <p><b>II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks &amp; Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial &amp; Industrial Parks</p> <p><b>III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 9. Dealer <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Formulator <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Distributor <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Manufacturer</p> <p><b>IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency) <input type="checkbox"/> 14. School, College, University <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Trade Association, Library <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please describe) _____</p>	<p><b>Landscape Maintenance</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 9. Landscape Renovation <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Tree &amp; Stump Removal <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Turf Fertilization <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Irrigation Maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Turf Aeration <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Erosion Control <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Tree &amp; Ornamental Care</p> <p><b>Pesticide Application</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 16. Turf Disease Control <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Turf Insect Control <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Turf Weed Control <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Tree &amp; Ornamental Pesticide Application</p> <p><b>Other</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 20. Mowing <input type="checkbox"/> 21. Hydroseeding <input type="checkbox"/> 22. Snow Removal <input type="checkbox"/> 23. Interior Landscape Services <input type="checkbox"/> 24. Structural Pest Control <input type="checkbox"/> 25. Holiday Lighting <input type="checkbox"/> 26. Other _____</p>	<p><b>7. What percentage of growth do you anticipate?</b> _____</p> <p><b>8. What year was your business founded?</b> _____</p> <p><b>9. What is your business mix? (%)</b> Residential _____ Commercial _____ Other _____</p> <p><b>10. Is this a Headquarters or Branch location?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Headquarters <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Branch <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Single Office</p> <p><b>11. What best describes your title?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Owner <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Argonomist <input type="checkbox"/> 2. President <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Entomologist <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Vice-President <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Horticulturist <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Corporate Officer <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Plant Pathologist <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Partner <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Consultant <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Managers <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Technician <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Director <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Serviceman <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Superintendents <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Other (please describe) <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Foreman <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Specialist</p>	<p><b>13. Which of the following subjects would you be interested in learning more about? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)</b></p> <p><b>BUSINESS MANAGEMENT</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Technology solutions for your business <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Employee recruitment/retention <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Ergonomics <input type="checkbox"/> 4. How to set up a safety program <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Immigration/H2B <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Major growth areas for contractors: Up and coming add on services <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Alternative fuel/keeping fuel costs down</p> <p><b>MOWING MAINTENANCE</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. Mowing — labor savers <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Quoting jobs/services <input type="checkbox"/> 10. How to add an enhancement crew/division</p> <p><b>PESTICIDES &amp; CHEMICALS</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 11. Generating revenue by adding lawn care services <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Best practices: chemical applications <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Hydroseeding versus turf <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Fertilization <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Organic/eco-friendly lawn care options <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Chemical lawn care as add on services</p> <p><b>CONSTRUCTION &amp; INSTALLATION &amp; DESIGN</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 17. Simplifying installation jobs <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Installing pave stone <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Software solutions for design projects—designing with technology <input type="checkbox"/> 20. Design "how to's": Best practices for proper installation <input type="checkbox"/> 21. Design/build/install as add on service <input type="checkbox"/> 22. Water features <input type="checkbox"/> 23. Tips on selling design/build projects to home owners</p> <p><b>IRRIGATION</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 24. Basics of irrigation installation &amp; maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> 25. Weather — based controllers <input type="checkbox"/> 26. Dealing with water restrictions <input type="checkbox"/> 27. How to become a WaterSense Partner <input type="checkbox"/> 28. Irrigation as add on service</p> <p><b>HORTICULTURE</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 29. Best practices for dealing with drought <input type="checkbox"/> 30. Soil treatments for best plants <input type="checkbox"/> 31. PGR's <input type="checkbox"/> 32. Software for planning <input type="checkbox"/> 33. Seasonal planting guidelines <input type="checkbox"/> 34. Chemical &amp; installation</p> <p><b>OTHER</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 35. None of the above <input type="checkbox"/> 36. Other (please specify) _____</p>
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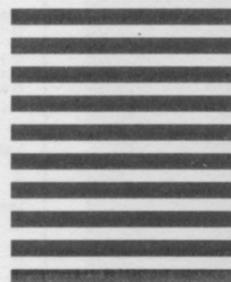
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the way bids are structured," Ashe says. "There's a lot of paperwork involved, management of quality assurance and reports that have to be done, so if you don't want to spend

time doing those kinds of things it may not suit you."

Still interested? There are a few steps all firms seeking government work must take before bidding on

contracts. First, companies should know the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes for their services. "Landscaping Services" is 561730, "Landscape Architectural Services" is 541320 and others can be found at <http://www.census.gov/epcd/www/naics.html>.

Next, companies must have a Dun & Bradstreet Data (Universal Numbering System (D-U-N-S) number, which can be created in one day by visiting <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/> or in five to 10 minutes by calling 866/705-5711 during business hours. The following information is required:

- Legal name;
- Tradestyle, Doing Business As (DBA), or other name by which your organization is commonly recognized;
- Physical address, city, state and ZIP code;
- Mailing address (if separate);
- Telephone number;
- Contact name;
- SIC/NAICS code (line of business);
- Number of employees at your location;
- Headquarters name and address (if there is a reporting relationship to a parent corporate entity); and
- Whether it's a home-based business.

After obtaining a D-U-N-S number, prospective federal contractors must register with the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) at [www.ccr.gov](http://www.ccr.gov) and renew this registration every 12 months. Once a company registers in CCR and receives an MPIN (marketing partner identification number), it's required to register with ORCA (Online Representations and Certification Applications), a system that works in concert with CCR. ORCA is available at <https://orca.bpn.gov>.

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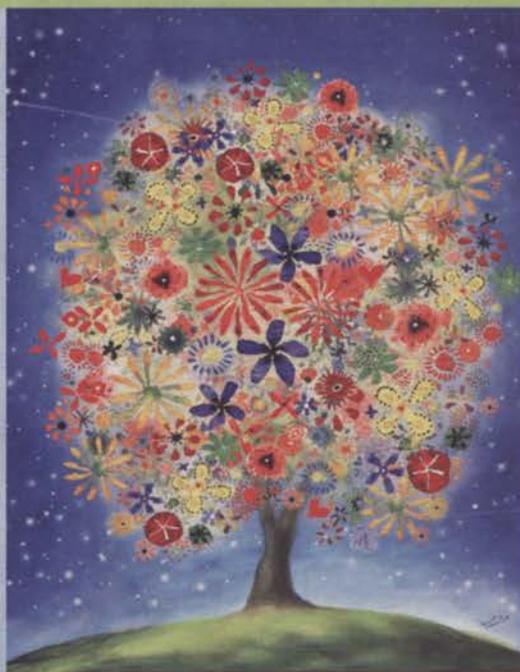
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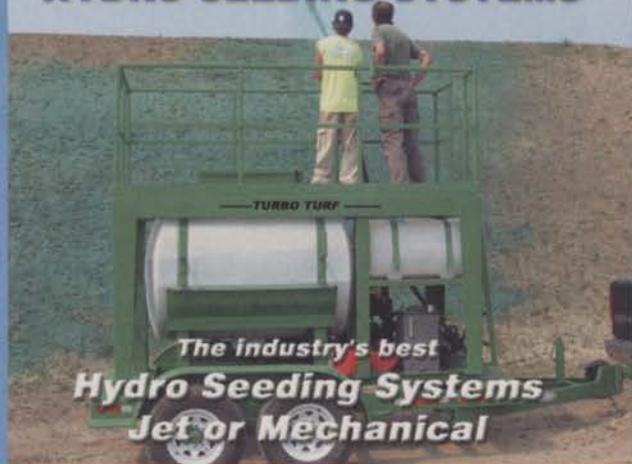
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## SET-ASIDE SPECIFICS

**8(a)/Small Disadvantaged Business** – The 8(a) program and SDB programs are both for businesses that are 51 percent owned by “socially and economically disadvantaged” U.S. citizens. For more information, visit <https://sba8a.symplicity.com/applicants/guide>. To evaluate suitability for 8(a) certification, visit <http://app1.sba.gov/sbat/index.cfm?Tool=2>.

**HUB-Zone** – This certification program is designed to stimulate development by providing contracting preference to small businesses owned by U.S. citizens that obtain Historically Underutilized Business Zone certification by maintaining a principal office in one of these areas and employing staff who live in the zone. For more information, visit <https://eweb1.sba.gov/hubzone/internet>.

**Small business** – Size standards vary by industry. “Landscaping Services” firms (NAICS 561730) are considered “small” if they have less than \$6.5 million in revenue. For more information, visit <http://www.sba.gov/services/contractingopportunities/sizestandardstoptics/tableofsize/index.html>.

**Woman-owned small business** – Woman-owned businesses may self-certify through the Central Contracting Registry. For more information, visit <http://www.womenbiz.gov>.

**Veteran/Service-Disabled Veteran-owned** – To be considered, the veteran must have an adjudication letter from the Veterans Administration or other official military document stating his or her service and/or service-connected disability.

**TYPES OF PROCUREMENT.** The government specifies the types of firms permitted to bid on contracts. Contracts are either listed as unrestricted (meaning any company can place a bid) or one of several types of small business set-asides. Some set-aside designations are granted through a self-certify process during CCR registration, but the Small Business Administration grants certification for 8(a), Small Disadvantaged Business and HUB-Zone status (for details see “Set-Aside Specifics” above).

There are also different types of solicitations, and it’s beneficial to know what type of bid you’re going after, Ashe says. Typically, the government agency would specify the type of bid solicitation in the pre-solicitation notice.

The Invitation for Bid (IFB)

method is typically used for contracts more than \$100,000 and tends to be awarded based on price. It entails filling out forms, as the agency generally prescribes exactly what it wants done, how to do it and how often. The contractor just submits a price.

With a Request for Proposal (RFP), the government proposes a problem and asks bidders to come up with solutions and submit detailed technical proposals specifying how they would manage the work – including experience, personnel, equipment materials, etc. – and what it will cost to do so. RFPs require custom proposals and are generally more time consuming than IFBs.

Another method, the Request for Quote (RFQ), is not a binding contract and is often used to dig up market pricing, according to Onvia, a

firm that helps companies get government contracts.

No matter what type of solicitation a landscape contractor is bidding on, Ashe advises contract-seekers to pay close attention to the government’s specifications.

“They may not be what you’re accustomed to,” he says. “You might think that cutting grass is cutting grass, but they might say every piece of machinery has to weigh under 1,200 pounds and be 60 inches in width. You have to make sure you’re bidding what they’re asking for.” LL



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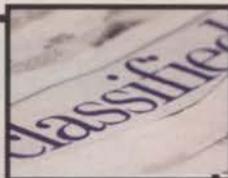
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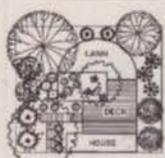
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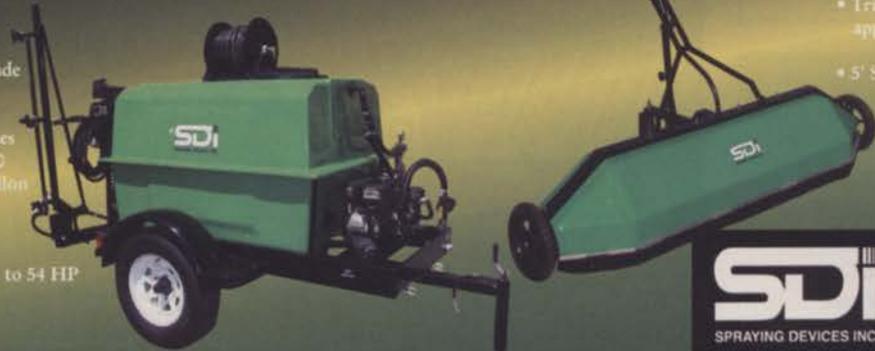
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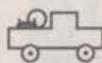
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The first step involved a consultant who helped us establish an employee assistance program (EAP). This confidential program provides professional assessment for all employees and family members. The EAP counsellor discusses solutions and refers the employee to the proper resource for help. This program provides drug and alcohol help, as well as marital, family, emotional and legal problems.

We then placed a policy in our employee handbook that describes our drug-free workplace program. Included in this program are pre-employment, post-accident, random and reason-to-believe drug and alcohol testing. We informed all employees we were doing this as of a certain date with about three months

lead time. Next we developed consent paperwork for employees to sign. It was important to be specific and detail each reason we might test an employee. The forms were then reviewed by the EAP consultant.

Initially supervisors expressed some opposition believing we may lose some long-term, high-value employees. Many were skeptical of the program. A few felt they could just refuse to be tested. But our program explains refusal is treated as a positive test. Nearly all of these concerns were alleviated by the fact we are trying to help people rather than trying to get rid of employees.

The program costs about \$75 per person per year. There are also some indirect costs to run the program, such as taking people who need to be tested to the clinic. We use a rapid testing method and get results in about 15 minutes. These results are only sent to either the operations manager or the office manager who then calls the supervisor and clears the employee to return to work if he tests negative. If an employee tests positive he is brought back to the office and explained his options. We then have someone drive the individual home because you do not want him to drive while impaired.

The company is much better off since we started testing. As a result, our work force is better and we have helped some employees get the help they need without losing their jobs. And since we've been testing for a few years, it is a rare occurrence now that someone tests positive for substance abuse. **LL**

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