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OCTOBER 2008 A GIE MEDIA PUBLICATION | VOLUME 29, NUMBER 10

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LAWN & LANDSCAPE, ISSN 1046-154X) is published monthly, with special issues in January, March, May and September and two special issues in July and November, Copyright 2008 G.I.E. Media, inc. 4020. Kinroas Lakes Parkway, #201., Richfield, OH 44286. All rights reserved. No part of this published may be reproduced or transmitted by any means without written permission from the publisher. Single copy rate; \$5,00 One year suscention rates, \$30 in the United States, \$35 in Canada and \$98 in other foreign countries. One year foreign airmait rate; \$218. Two year subscription rate; \$42. Subscriptions and classified advertising should be addressed to the Richfield office. Periodicals postage paid at Richfield, One, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster send changes to LAWN & LANDSCAPE, D.O. 2013; Skokie, IL 60076-7891.

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Bright Days for Bryant

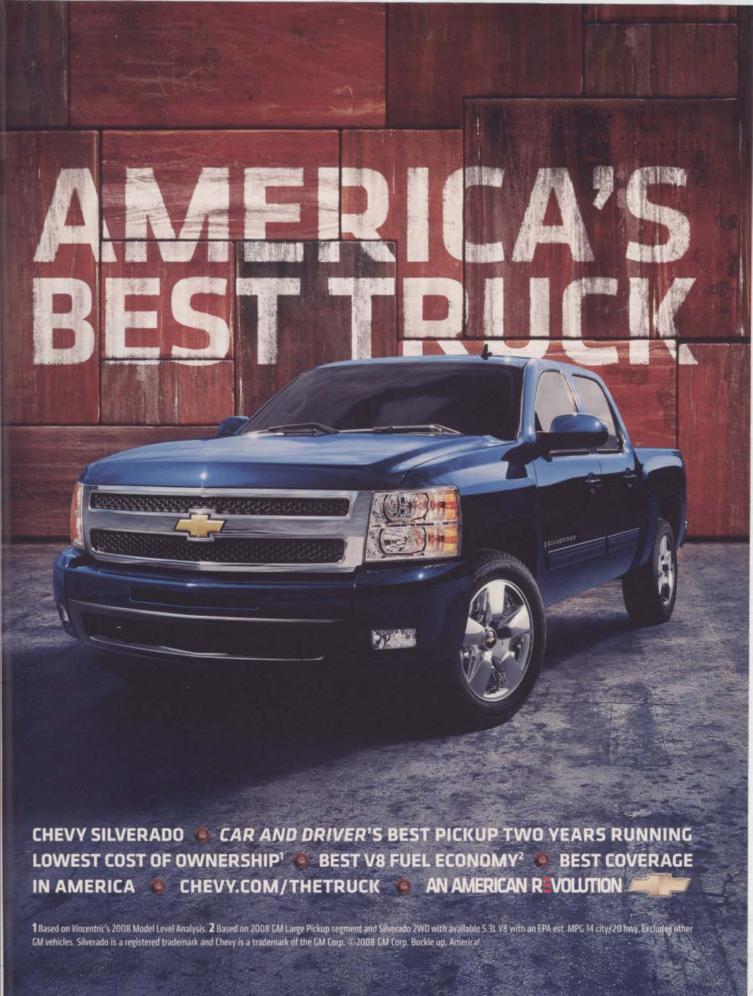
Smart management practices gleaned from FexEx helped Bryant Jernigan create his own winning formula.



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Their research team.

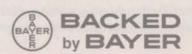


Our research team.



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PUBLISHER'S Note



KEVIN GILBRIDE Publisher

Reinventing ourselves

t's no coincidence: As leading contractors and operators are reinventing themselves to address the challenges and opportunities of today's market, *Lawn & Landscape* is doing exactly the same thing. We've been the undisputed leader in editorial quality, innovation and advertising support in our market for nearly three decades. Yet we've recently made a series of aggressive decisions to take our business to a new level.

Beginning with this issue, we're introducing a new look, created by our award-winning graphic designer Andrea Vagas. And we're in the process of implementing a huge expansion of our digital products and services. Cindy Code, one of the industry's most experienced and talented journalists, has been given the challenge of taking Lawn & Landscape's interactive business to an unprecedented level. Cindy and her content editors, Emily Mullins and Heather Taylor, are working with software developers Brian Darby and Ryan Jacobs to create the largest and best interactive media team in our market's history.

We've made other changes to ensure we lead the market in every category. Trusted deputy editor Nicole Wisniewski has been promoted to business manager and editor of our rapidly expanding custom communications product portfolio. Managing editor Mike Zawacki has been promoted to take the editorial reins of our Snow and Commercial Dealer magazines. Finally, Margaret Hepp of our Folio Award-winning Golf Course Industry staff has been promoted to editor of our flagship publication, Lawn & Landscape. The issue you now hold in your hands reflects her dedicated effort and talent. Together, the team has made our vision for a new and improved Lawn & Landscape a reality.

Meanwhile, our company is doing what many of you have done or might be considering: strengthening and growing our business through acquisition. We're very pleased to announce that we recently added Branch-Smith Publishing Company's magazine and online services in the greenhouse, nursery and garden center markets, to our portfolio. With that acquisition, we now have leading media in the landscape, golf course, pest control, greenhouse, nursery field crop and garden center markets. No other media company in our industry comes close to reaching as many readers in as many professional horticultural and environmental markets as GIE Media. We're equally proud that GIE remains a family-owned and operated company that constantly reinvests in the markets we serve rather than cutting costs and quality to send more profits to an investment bank. Ultimately, that makes us stronger and helps us serve you better.

Here's a sneak preview of some of the changes you'll see this month:

- · A new design to make our articles even more readable for busy folks like you.
- · Real-world perspectives from new writers who've been there and done that.
- New departments, including "Briefcase," a series of monthly case studies focused on real-life management solutions used by small, medium and large businesses.

We think we've taken a great magazine and made it even better. We want to hear what you think. Drop Margaret an e-mail or give me a call with your feedback. We look forward to hearing from you. Thanks again for your readership and for making Lawn & Landscape the industry's No. 1 source for professional business information.

Kevin Gilbride is the group publisher of GIE Media's Horticultural Group. Lawn & Landscape media portfolio was added to his management responsibilities in July 2008.

Lawn&Landscape

Leading business media for landscape contractors

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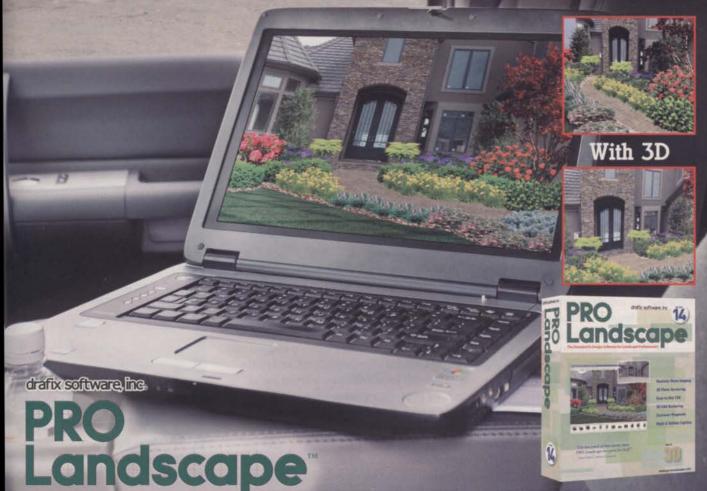


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TOO GOOD 2B FORGOTTEN

We're a small business. We've been participating in the H-2B program for quite a number of years now. Last year, we were burned by the whole process and didn't get the workers back that we had in previous years. We're are about to embark on another year blindly and would really appreciate some words for or against H-2B, or just what is on the horizon for this program. Should we spend the money and risk a lost cause again? Is it looking better this year? Are there certain organizations getting things done? Good companies to go through?

Jessica Schwartz Green Sweep Landscaping Denver, Colo.

Check out an article we published online and in our February '08 issue ("Work Force Woes"). It outlines what's going on with the program. We'd recommend searching on our Web site or posting a message on our message board asking if anyone has any good advice.

> Heather Taylor Content Editor, Interactive Media Lawn & Landscape

GET TO THE CORPS OF IT

I sent a copy of Patrick Astre's article ("Keeping More for Yourself," August '08) to my CPA with several questions relating to S corporation distributions.

Mr. Astre stated that a sole stockholder must take all monies from the corporation in the form of salary instead of salary and distributions. My CPA said this was counter to all current IRS rules on this subject and that he hasn't seen anything in his biweekly updates to support this new position.

Could you please help clarify this discrepancy by providing specific IRS rules and court cases to support such a dramatic change in tax law?

Dan Lewis General Industrial Contractors Fort Worth, Texas

I've gotten a lot of questions on this one and should have explained it better. I apologize for the confusion, but the basics are correct.

The case involved a plumber who operated as an S corporation. He was sole shareholder, officer and director. There were no employees. He collected all money earned, and paid it to himself as distribution without social security or Medicare taxes.

He was audited by the IRS. The IRS used the principle that if a shareholder renders service to the corporation, the money he receives for this service is compensation subject to payroll taxes and not distributions. Because he was the sole shareholder and the only one who could perform professional services (plumbing), the money earned was subject

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READERS' Forum

to social security taxation.

The taxpayer challenged it in tax court and lost. This principle has been around a long time. I've handled a number of audits for S corporations and this always comes up when you have a single member corporation with earnings and distributions without payroll. The specific case came from one of my IRS newsletters about six years ago. Hope this helps.

Patrick Astre for Lawn & Landscape

ROUND TWO

In our case, with multiple employees, my wife is sole stockholder and part-time office manager. Can she take a salary based on accepted rates for her position and also take distributions from the profits?

Patrick Astre stated ("Keeping More For Yourself") that total distributions must be less than officer's compensation. My CPA advises that as long as all officer's salaries are commensurate with accepted salaries, it's appropriate for distributions to exceed the total salary level.

These may seem like picky questions, but they're extremely important to thousands of landscape professionals who operate as S corporations and whose businesses fall under these exact conditions.

Dan Lewis General Industrial Contractors Fort Worth, Texas

Here're the answers: This applies to all sub S corporations where services rendered are couched as distributions that escape social security/medicare taxation.

However, single-member S corporations with no payrolls are easy to prove. Who else can render services? So, there's a focus on single-member corporations, where most of the abuse occurs. This is why on Page 1 of the 1120S, sub S corporation tax returns officers' compensation (Line 7) is separate from other salaries and wages (Line 8). Be sure you don't make the mistake of adding officers'

compensation to other wages and lumping them together on Line 8 while leaving Line 7 blank. That's a certain audit-trigger.

Your situation should be fine. Check this audit trigger on your 1997 1120S corporation tax return:

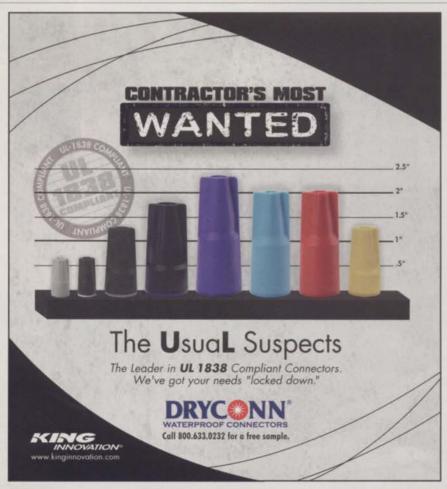
Your wife's salary should show on Page 1, Line 7, under compensation of officers. It should be matched with 941 (Federal quarterly payroll reports) and W-2's for your wife. Her salary on Line 7, Page 1, should be higher than Line 7, Schedule M-2 on Page 4. Certainly the combined Line 7 (officers' compensation) plus Page 8 (salaries and wages) should be higher.

Your CPA is correct. As long as officers' compensation is commensurate with salaries for similar jobs in your area and industry, you have nothing to worry about. However, be aware that because of the current brouhaha about lack of funding for social security, such issues draw a lot of attention from the IRS. Having the figures describe above, where distributions exceed officers' compensation,

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PROVEN SOLUTIONS

READERS' Forum

increase the odds of an audit – and who wants to go through that? It's impossible to tell if it will result in an audit, but if you've been profitable and there are no other audit issues on your return, probably not.

Patrick Astre for Lawn & Landscape

THE PEOPLE'S EYEBROW

As usual, the People's Republic of California has passed watering restrictions that will never be able to be enforced, resulting in more useless laws that clutter the books. If they really wanted to fix a problem, they'd remove all the illegal aliens who reside in our state. With them gone, we wouldn't have a water issue.

People in our county have been very accommodating by limiting the water they use. Cities and municipalities, however, think little about leaving broken water pipes that spew water 50 feet in the air running for an eight-hour day while 10 nitwit employees stand on their shovels

thinking about how to stop it.

Most residential water use has been cut significantly through voluntary conservation, which in turn cuts revenue heading to the various water authorities. How does this affect the consumer? When water authorities have less revenue coming in, they reciprocate by raising water rates rather than figuring out a way to operate on less money, as we do in the private sector. This gives little to no incentive to make changes in the landscape industry to conserve water.

In our company, I have implemented and installed a rainwater farm system with a below-ground tanking system for many clients. When used with a landscape designed around the water available, the need for city water is eliminated.

The people of California would be much better served if government would step out of their lives and let nature take its course. This also holds true to the global warming hoax, absurd air pollution requirements and all the junk science that's used to create the scare.

Bill Schwab Naturescape Landscape Company Encinitas, Calif.

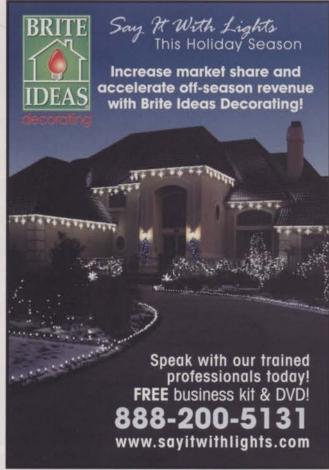
GREEN PASTURES

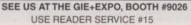
I wanted to write a quick note just to let you know how fantastic I think The Green Issue (September '08) of Lawn & Landscape is. I read it several times already and learn something new each time I read and reread an article. All the stories are very well written and informative. Great job. It's appreciated.

Again, thank you for an excellent magazine all the time – but especially this month.

Norm Coyne U.S. Maintenance Norristown, Pa

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weather forecasters have a 50/50 chance of accurately reporting daily and weekly weather. Unfortunately, lawn and landscape professionals don't have that same luxury when forecasting weed and insect outbreaks in lawns and landscape beds.

No matter the region, weather typically wreaks havoc with at least one of a contractor's programs or service plans.

2008 was a "perfect storm type of year" with more evidence of soil root-borne disease such as summer patch and necrotic ring spot than in the past five to six years; particularly in New England, says Mike Agnew, technical manager for Syngenta Professional Products. On the contrary, dollar spot and anthracnose haven't presented such difficulties this season.

Disease problems reared their ugly heads mainly on southerly and west-facing banks that are subjected to intense heat. Heavy spring rainfalls in the Northeast were to blame, resulting in saturated soils and reduced soil oxygen levels followed by the heat stress of summer.

Also, excessive rains were to blame for weed breakthrough in some regions. While weeds haven't been pervasive this year (unlike crabgrass break-through in 2007), heavy rains contributed to preemergent herbicide breakdown. Increased degradation was evident on slight rather than thicker lawns, and on seeded

vs. sodded turf, Agnew says.

Sod webworms were responsible for damage on home lawns; however, preventive treatments generally suppressed them.

While the mid-Atlantic region didn't experience the flight of the adult Japanese beetle this year, Midwest contractors battled an above-average grub population. Conditions were right – not too wet and not too dry – for grubs to thrive. Additionally, plenty of ground moisture may have been responsible for moving preventive applications of insecticides lower in the soil profile.

Dave Shetlar, Ph.D, department of entomology, The Ohio State University, says significant grub damage has been showing up in turf – even turf that was treated with a grub control insecticide in May and June. He is quick to point out that he hasn't seen massive product failures; rather localized spots where grubs are in sufficient numbers to damage the turf.

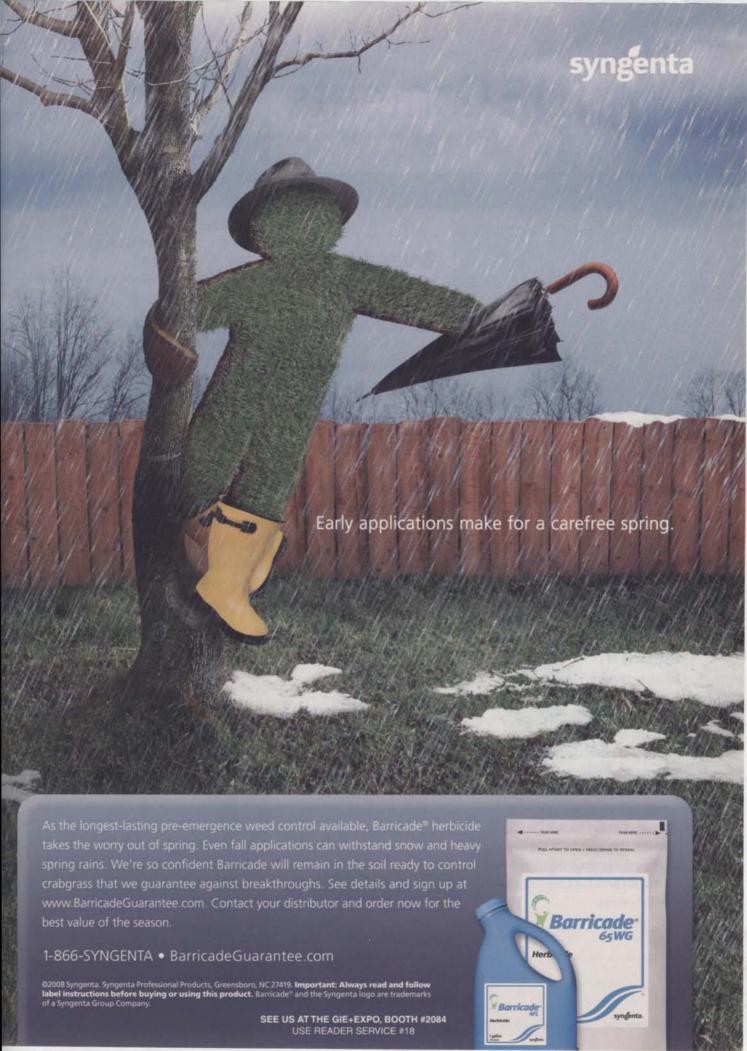
Microbial degradation and thick thatch layers are common culprits, as are general quantities of grubs. "We are seeing areas that the grub egg laying was intense and populations are appearing in the 50 to 60 grubs per square foot and they are munching away," Shetlar says. "Even if a grub insecticide kills 90 percent of these grubs, there will still be five to six grubs per square foot remaining."

Additionally, the thatch layer drops the efficacy of the insecticide down to the 70 percent level and the property ends up with 15 to 18 grubs per square foot, still considered a damaging population. So, in some cases, the grub insecticide did pretty well, but the grub pressure was so high that damage may still result. In these cases, another application may be needed to knock down the survivors.

West of Colorado experienced a very different pest scenario this year with a cooler than normal spring and summer resulting in fewer issues with hot weather diseases, says Dean Mosdell, technical manager for Syngenta.

In fact, it's been a fairly good year for growing turf in the West with below average temperatures based on 30-year averages, and later incidence of crabgrass if any.

Billbugs were the story in Idaho and Utah while clover made its appearance in mid-Atlantic and NE regions midsummer, too late for spring broadleaf herbicide applications. L



ONLINE Contents

/// Network with the industry through Lawn & Landscape's interactive Web tools.

OCTOBER 2008



Bruised, but not broken

A Texas landscape and maintenance business gets a crash course in survival skills from Hurricane Ike.

Get legal with Tom Delaney

In an exclusive Lawn&Landscape.com column, learn why it's essential for you to be a LINK – a lawn and landscape industry network keeper.



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Canada's green industry promotes plastic recycling

MILTON, Ont. — Industry-led efforts are underway to divert horticultural plastic in a recycling program that stakeholders hope to take national. The goal is to collect trade-generated waste, including pots, trays, tags, pipes and greenhouse poly, as well as offering depots for consumers to recycle garden plastic.

Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association staged a successful pilot recycling project this spring, and member volunteers are currently working to match plastic recyclers with garden centers or others willing to serve as collection points.

Two factors currently in place are important for the initiative's success: higher commodity prices for used plastic and resolve by the green industry to reduce the volume of waste it generates. Industry is currently seeking funds to launch the effort.

This dream has sparked interest and participation from Canada's other provincial horticultural trade associations, as well as the industry's national group, the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association. Participants hope to create the first national recycling program of its kind.

Industry volunteers will be answering questions and promoting participation at Landscape Ontario's Garden Expo trade show (www.gardenexpo.ca) on Oct. 21 and 22 at the Toronto Congress Centre. ①



Horticultural trade association members launched a pilot recycling project in Milton, Ont. In spring 2008, gardeners and industry professionals collected more than 5,000 lbs. of plastic.



- GIE+Expo 2008 Oct. 23-25 www.gie-expo.com
- Irrigation Show 2008 Nov. 2-4, 2008 www.irrigation.org
- Second Wave of Modernism in Landscape
 Architecture in America Nov. 13-15 www.tclf.org

GIE Media, Inc. acquires Branch-Smith Publishing

GIE Media, Inc. has acquired all assets of Ft. Worth based Branch-Smith Publishing. This development adds four titles to GIE: Greenhouse Management & Production, Nursery Management & Production, Garden Center and Garden Center Product Source.

In making the acquisition, GIE significantly extends its service to the commercial horticultural and specialty markets.

In announcing the acquisition, GIE president & COO Christopher W. Foster commented, "We are excited to add these publications to our company and build upon the proud history and market commitment the Branch family has demonstrated since 1915. We're humbled by the deep roots and strong tradition of these market-leading titles.



Mike Branch, president of Branch-Smith Publishing (left), with GIE president & COO Christopher W. Foster

The addition of these four titles to GIE Media provides us the opportunity to serve a new segment of business managers in markets important to a large cross-section of our current customer base."

Prior to the acquisition GIE served the horticulture markets through its Lawn & Landscape, Golf Course Industry and Commercial Dealer magazines.

Additionally, it serves the structural pest control industry through Pest Control Technology (PCT) magazine. "GIE has been fueled by strategic acquisitions and innovative media extensions over the years, but the real secret to our success has been an ongoing willingness to invest in products and build upon them by creating strong relationships with our readers and advertising customers," remarks GIE executive vice president Dan Moreland.

"We're pleased that our Branch-Smith publications have been acquired by GIE Media," says Mike Branch, president of Branch-Smith Publishing. "It was important to us when we made the difficult decision to exit this part of our family's heritage business that we find a company that would be truly committed to elevating our magazines to the next level of market value. We're confident GIE Media is that company, and we're excited by their plans to make important investments to extend the business values established by four generations of our family."

GIE Media, Inc. is a leading B-to-B media company active in some 15 industries through trade magazines, interactive media, conferences and tradeshows, reference books and directories, and market databases. L



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Small Business **SPOTLIGHT**

Partners for prosperity

AUSTIN, Texas — Greater Texas Landscapes Inc. has signed an alliance with Environmental Earthscapes (The Groundskeeper) of Tucson, Ariz. Environmental Earthscapes is the largest 100 percent employee-owned landscape firm in the United States.

Austin-based Greater Texas Landscapes was founded in 1981 by Deborah E. Cole, TCLP, CCLP. Greater Texas Landscapes provides commercial landscape management and irrigation services as well as high-end installation throughout central Texas. The company has developed a network of relationships in the office, retail, industrial, facility, multi-family and

homeowner association markets. GTL has made its mark emphasizing high quality and high touch service on all of its sites.

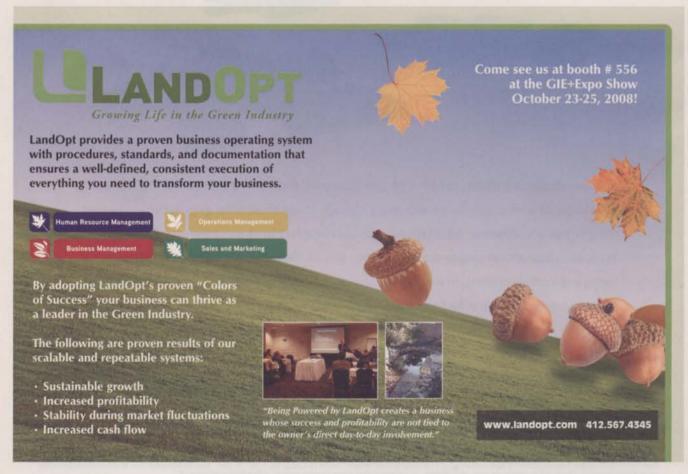
The Groundskeeper (TGK) has branches in Tucson, Ariz., Phoenix, Ariz., Albuquerque, N.M., Reno, Nev., Las Vegas, Nev. and St. George, Utah. Structured around an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), TGK is a commercial landscape management and installation firm. The executive management team has nearly 100 years of combined service at The Groundskeeper and promotes an en-



vironment of commitment to employees as well as customers.

"We have shared best practices with The Groundskeeper for over 15 years," stated Greater Texas Landscapes president Deborah Cole. "I have always valued my professional relationship with the executives and managers of this highly respected landscape firm. When conversations on ESOP turned to how we could join forces to mutually benefit our employees and customers, it was a no-brainer.

The Groundskeeper executive team, from left: Anil Hiremath, CEO; Curtis Steinle, vice president of operations; Kent Miller, vice president of sales; Dave Ramsze, COO



"I have admired the work quality, ethics and integrity of this regional firm for many years. It was quite an honor to be invited to participate in the ESOP and allow our hard-working employees to be a part of the ownership of the GTL and TGK alliance.

"We will continue to share best practices and enjoy the benefits of the relationship turned partnership," Cole says. "Not only will our employees become owners in a business they've helped to build over

MORE

Read more

about

Deborah

Cole's new

venture

in our cover

story, which

begins

on Page 28.

the years, but we'll be able to share the best of both worlds."

The Groundskeeper will be partnering in Texas with Greater Texas Landscapes to provide support and resources for large projects and contracts. (L)

Seeking sustainable solutions for water, food and landscape?

Attend the 14th
International Water
Conservation & Xeriscape

Conference, sponsored by the Xeriscape Council of New Mexico and Intel, February 26-27, 2009, at the Marriott Pyramid Hotel in Albuquerque, N.M. To register, visit www. xeriscapenm.com. ©







Fuel Savings per Year

Hours	You Save
500	\$364
750	\$547
1,000	\$728

Estimate based on 4.8 hours of operation per Gallon of fuel (at \$3.50/Gallon). Your results may vary. PermaGreen™ is powered by a 5.5 HP Honda.™ Other spreader sprayers use 11-15 HP engines.

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The intuitive SmartSteer™ doesn't even need an extra pair of steering levers like stand-on zero-turn units. So, your hands are free to easily operate the spreader and sprayer controls.

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Now that's PermaGreen™ Smart! So, what are you riding?

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Easy Access

"We've learned to stay very organized," says Brian Pierce, co-owner of Pierce's Lawncare and Landscaping Inc. "We operated out of a storage unit four years ago. Even now we don't have a lot of space, so we try to maximize efficiency."

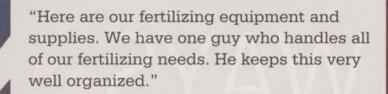
"We keep our handheld stuff here so we can load the trucks quickly."

> our equipment to work for us." manufacture it and sell it, and

"We customize

"We developed a guard to keep from blowing grass on cars and in beds. We

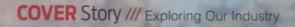
we're developing a patent."



"We see a lot of guys with five different mowers on their trailers. We've invested in two models to take care of everything we need to cut, and we're able to store them all in house."

Yourspace

What does your space look like? Send photos of your shop, truck, trailer or office and why it works (or doesn't) for you: dyochum@gie.net.



TO MAKE YOUR BUSINESS PROFITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE IN 2009 AND BEYOND

a serious recession nears, it's time to examine your business. What's worked? What hasn't? And how can you ensure you don't become roadkill along the shoulder of a perilous economic highway?

2008 is about to be history. It's time to rip up that old business plan, get aggressive and reinvent yourself and your company. We talked with leading contractors, consultants and people from around the industry to bring you the best, most cost-effective ways to stay ahead of fierce competition, unprecedented economic turmoil and a flat demand cycle.

COMMIT TO MARKETING

Too many contractors automatically equate "marketing" with "big bucks," but it doesn't have to be that way. There are ways to separate yourself from the pack if you spend some time up front planning.

First, you must determine your niche. What does your company do better than anyone else? What specific things do your customers rave about? If it's being on time and meeting budgets and deadlines, then you're "prompt and reliable." If it's irrigation work, then you're the "irrigation experts." Whatever it is, focus on that one thing in all of your messaging to customers and prospects.

Once you've identified a niche, target your best prospects with relatively inexpensive tactics such as paper mailers, well-designed yard flags and whatever level of Yellow Pages or local advertising you can afford.

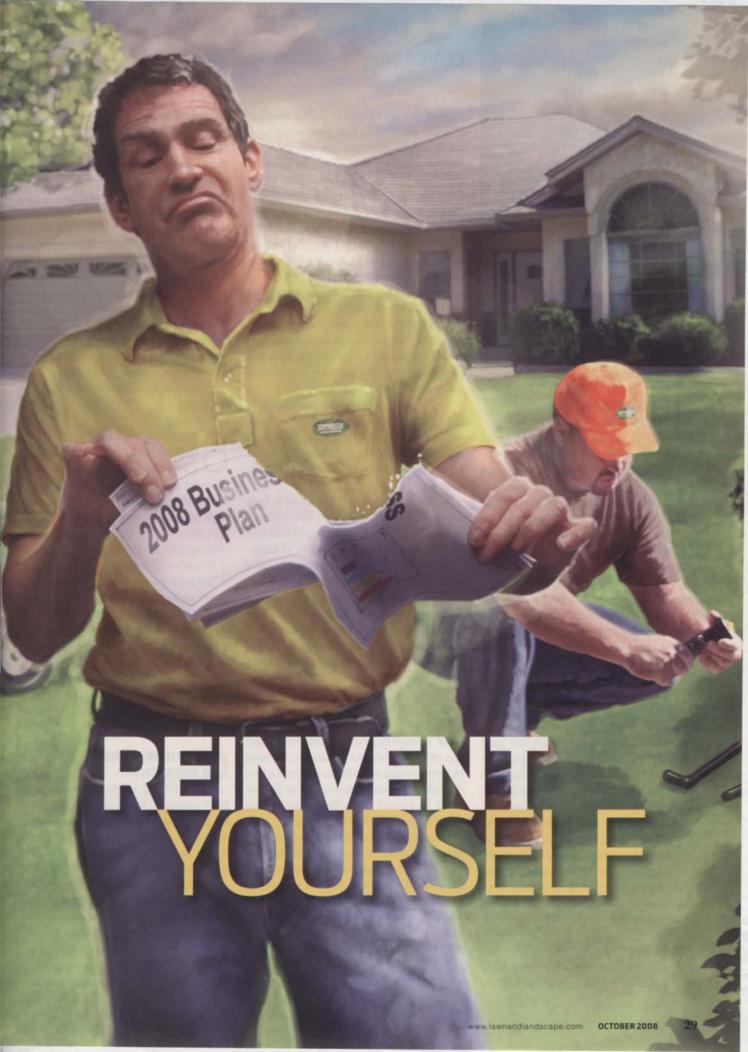
"This year I just got a bunch of door hangers printed and had an extra guy go out with crews to deliver door hangers in the vicinity of where they were working," says Chad Stern, a recent LawnandLandscape.com message board contributor. "We've landed quite a few good accounts from the door hangers, and I've probably spent less money than I did with direct mail."

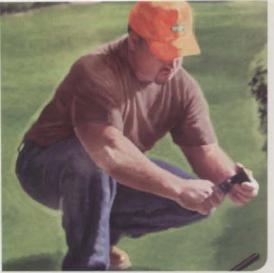
Finally, embrace the idea of media relations. If you have a showcase project or if you're an LCO that's identified a clear niche, start scanning your local newspapers and radio shows to find out which reporters might be interested. Then just pick up the phone (or send an e-mail), introduce yourself, tell them why you're business is "special" and invite them out to see the project or operation first-hand. You'll be shocked at how often it works. And it's completely free.

KNOW THE ENEMY

In politics, they call it "oppo" – short for opposition research. They use the process to dig up dirt on the other candidates, but the same basic idea applies to business. Answer these questions: Who are your top three competitors? What do you really know about their operations? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Are they taking business from you? If so, how?

Start your "oppo" program by getting your hands on a competitor's marketing materials and finding their key niche point(s). Identify a couple of former employees of theirs and take them out to lunch to pick their brains about the opera-





tion. Contact a few of their current customers and (without soliciting) find out

You'll be able to target their weaknesses, counteract their strengths and take clients away.

what satisfies them and what doesn't.

FIRE UNPROFITABLE CUSTOMERS

When's the last time you really did an analysis of which clients are profitable and which aren't? Which customers always seem to require return visits? Which constantly dispute billings or balk at paying for changes they ordered? At what point does the cost of fuel outweigh the value of the account for outlying customers?

Sit down, get out a sharp pencil and a spreadsheet and start determining where your profitability really comes from. You may be shocked to find some of your best, topline customers aren't contributing to the bottom line.

BE AN ENERGY EXPERT

Save them cash, and you'll earn their loyalty. Plant a six- to eightfoot deciduous shade tree on the west and southwest sides of a property to save energy. Create landscape windbreaks to help insulate a building or home and reduce heating and cooling costs. For maximum protection, plant your windbreak at a distance from the building of two to five times the mature height of the trees. Provide timers for outdoor lighting. And remind your customers: A healthy lawn

5 Do you feel like an "island unto yourself"? One operation fighting

has the same cooling effect as an 8.5-ton

COVER Story /// Exploring Our Industry

against dozens of others in the market? Owners are finding that partnering with complementary businesses can shore up their weaknesses and increase the bottom line. Contractor Debby Cole (Page 23), who recently formed a strategic partnership with a larger business, raves about increased employee benefits. Jerry Schill and Rob Palmer (Page 174) formed an alliance to complement each other's strengths and weaknesses.

The idea is to be a co-contractor rather than a subcontractor. Suppose your primary niche and focus is on new construction, but customers are increasingly asking for maintenance as well. Why not create an ongoing partnership with a maintenance company?

Yes, it requires careful examination of the right partner. Yes, it requires a clear, written agreement that legally outlines revenue sharing, joint liability and other issues. But, is it worth it? You won't know unless you investigate.

"If you're not already diversified, look for opportunities to do that," says Nancy Somerville, executive vice president and CEO of the American Society of Landscape Architects. "With our members, the ones most affected by the economy are ones who operate very locally and have a concentration in just one sector, such as residential homes. It's those folks who feel it first and most significantly. Diversity and being able to expand your market that way is very good."

LOOK BEYOND BANKS

The credit crunch will arguably change business models more than any other factor. But expansion, growth or even regular operations demand a line of credit, and banks are going to be far less likely to extend them these days. What other options do contractors have?

Consider community development grants. And Small Business Administration (SBA) lenders are more active right now, says Randy Jones, partner at Funding Solutions, LLC. "SBA loans have tightened less than conventional loans."

MAKE EDUCATION A PRIORITY
Customers will buy into your services if they're informed – and engaged.

Involve clients in your business by scheduling educational events periodically throughout the year. Partner with a local turf program to offer a turf pest seminar, where information can be presented clearly and with visual appeal to hold your audience's attention.

Your business will profit if it's backed by your community. Consider a product demo event, where you can demonstrate the capabilities of newly-acquired equipment. Invite your business partners who are active in the community – your dealer, your bank, your lawyers and accountants, the owners of any restaurants or local shops you frequent – to generate buzz around your business. Establish yourself as a leader in the community and clients will follow.

PROVIDE SPECIALTY IRRIGATION

Cater to your clients by providing specialty irrigation services. It's okay to install new systems, but consider working with what's there, says Brian Vinchesi, past president of the American Society of Irrigation Consultants and president of Irrigation Consulting, Inc.

"Educate yourself on new technology, smart controllers and things that make your systems work better from a retrofit standpoint so you don't have to start over," Vinchesi says.

Working with existing systems is more cost-effective, but it's important to ensure that the current system was installed properly – once you add to it, the system becomes your responsibility.

OPERATIONS

Mulching, edging, mowing – it's fairly simple to find a method that works for you. Consider new mowing patterns. Adjust your mulch spreading or mowing height by even 1/8 inch. Attend product expos to be introduced to new solutions, and while you're there, ask other guys how they're operating. Reorganize your shop. Rotate your cleaning or blade sharpening schedule. Encourage your team to vocalize ideas for new methods or product purchases. Hold a brainstorming session to eliminate waste in operations.

air conditioning compressor.

BE HIGH-MAINTENANCE New construction has slowed

New construction has slowed significantly, especially in the residential market. It's a great time to shift – even temporarily – from new building to maintenance and renovation.

Brian Lemmermann, owner and president of Somerset Landscape in Phoenix, Ariz., also owns two buildings where he rents storage yards to contractors. "None of the maintenance companies have been seriously hurt, but I have had three installation companies go out of business," Lemmermann says. "One is on the verge and trying to do more maintenance to just get by."

The 2008 economy has hurt the entire construction industry, particularly equipment manufacturers, whose businesses suffer from the same challenges as many landscape contractors: higher commodity costs, materials shortages and higher fuel prices.

"Certainly the overall slowdown in the economy has affected equipment manufacturers as well, especially those whose business is very dependent on the residential housing market," says Al Cervero, senior vice president of American Equipment Manufacturing. "Other sectors such as non-residential and commercial construction have fared better."

TAKE TO THE ROOF

Grounds manager Jeff Jabco didn't expect that his job would take him to the roofs of Swarthmore College. Seeking new ways to put its school on the environmental map, Swarthmore sent Jabco to a prominent on-campus building to create a green roof.

Excess water from the rooftop landscape travels down a chute, creating a waterfall effect. The water percolates



through the ground into an underwater tank, where the college recycles it for irrigation. Green roof systems have been shown to retain 60 to 100 percent of the water they receive.

Extensive roofscapes are the most versatile of the two varieties of green roofs – the other is intensive, and requires at least a foot of soil and an intricate irrigation system. Needing a minimum of one inch of soil, extensive green roofs can include a variety of vegetative ground cover and adds only 12 to 50 pounds per square foot to roof material. The cost starts at about \$8 per square foot, which includes materials and installation (EPA.gov).

7 OFFER THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

Market total maintenance to expand your business beyond lawn and landscape care. Offer to treat their pool or spa, or install an outdoor sound system, which can be placed around the existing landscape. Backyards are often sites for parties and weddings. Tap into that market by offering rental services – tents, tables and chairs – or lighting setup.

Offer to repair walkways and stairs, garage doors and windows. If you feel uncomfortable providing these services yourself, consider partnering with a local mason or repairman – and market accordingly.

MAKE A QUICK PITCH
Marketing expert Laura Allen is the author of 15-Second Pitch.
She encourages her clients to get to the point as they sell their businesses, and the landscape industry is no exceptions. Her Web site, 15secondpitch.com, includes more than 14,000 examples of business pitches. How would you sum up your business in 15 seconds? Here's an example

"My name is Carissa Hood-Pope and I'm a landscape designer specializing in residential landscape designs. I use a creative approach to landscape architecture by figuratively painting a canvas. Every design is unique, just like the client. Call today for a free phone consultation."

from a landscape designer:

CREATE AN INTERACTIVE

Now Just Add Water is a Washington-based landscape business with a dynamic Web site, which includes a blog and an interactive feature called MY-YARD. Here, customers can select from six styles of landscapes for full access to every minute detail of a design – once they receive a code from the company with their bid. If you charge for each bid, then you're essentially building in a payper-click system for the site.

Your Web presence is crucial, and it can be a relatively cost-effective means of reinventing yourself. Think about adding a FAQ section, or videos of prior projects.

MAKE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT

Too many operators equate business plans with a big, comprehensive notebook that sits gathering dust on a shelf. Yet, operating without a written business plan is like taking on a construction project without blueprints. If you don't have one, make 2009 the year you change that.

Sure, business plans can be substantial, complicated documents. Or they can be as simple as 10 or 15 bulletpoints, such as:

- New business. Target only high-end premium residential design/built projects within a 20-mile radius.
- Existing business. Aggressively push in-ground irrigation systems by emphasizing their water-savings potential.
- Employees. Implement a training program to focus on the most efficient organization for trucks and trailers.

In short, make your business plans goals clear, concise and relatively achievable to keep everyone focused. Share your drafts with managers and all employees to solicit additional objectives once core ideas are established. Some objectives can be ongoing – one-year goals, three-year goals, even five-year goals – but most should be short-term. Once your basic plan is in place, revise annually and adjust your budget and operations accordingly.

See more tips from experts or tell us how you're reinventing yourself: www.LawnandLandscape.com.

The Cooch Touch

As Pierce's Lawncare & Landscaping responds to market opportunities

once-inconspicuous Blackberry jingles urgently in Brian Pierce's hand, cutting him off mid-sentence. He stares at it, looking perplexed, while it rings.

"It's 800," he says with a furrowed brow. "What area code's that?"

The room erupts in laughter – mom, Sandy, dad, Scott, and long-time friend, Frankie Kudlac. "It's toll free," Kudlac groans. "One-eight-hundred."

Brian, 23, grins sheepishly. "It must be McCain calling me," he says.

It's a brief moment that belies his age, but Brian Pierce picks up instantly

where he left off, and he's once again the confident co-owner of Pierce's Lawncare & Landscaping in Mason, Ohio. He and Kudlac, also co-owner, are startlingly self-assured.

Maybe it's trust that comes from the sturdy net beneath them – both fathers, Scott Pierce and Frank Kudlac, are investors and consultants in the company. Maybe it's the leadership above them. Sandy Pierce, president, and Judy Kudlac have the unique privilege of calling their sons 'colleagues.'

Experience hasn't hurt, either. Brian opened the business with his parents in

2003 and has been managing ever since; Frankie joined the team as co-owner in 2004. It's a firm foundation, and profitability is the cement that locks the team in place. Pierce's has grown 30 percent annually since its inception, and has expanded further since the team founded an affiliate, need-based business, Pierce's Rental, servicing events with everything from tables and chairs to cornhole games. With an expansive foundation in place, the company's strategy is simple: At every opportunity, reinvent yourself.

BUILDING (AND REBUILDING) A BRAND

Pierce's product is the 'Pierce Touch': Safely, enthusiastically and consistently meeting or exceeding customer expectations. "We take care of the customer, and through that, we gain financial strength," Brian Pierce says.

The Pierce and Kudlac families are clearly driven to succeed in business, but none of them dreamed of a career in lawn care or landscaping. As homeowners, though, Scott and Sandy Pierce took pride in their lawn and garden. "We'd spend hours in the yard," Sandy Pierce says. "After we'd finish Scott and I would stand back and say to ourselves, that's the Pierce touch."

OUT WITH THE OLD

A graphic designer, hired to create new brochures for Pierce's Lawncare & Landscaping, brought a whole lot more to the business: a new identity





NEW LOGO OLD LOGO



Brian Pierce (left), Sandy Pierce and Frankie Kudlac manage Pierce's Lawncare & Landscaping in Mason, Obio.

every new project turns to gold

By Margaret Hepp

In high school, Brian developed an interest in working outdoors. It was perfect timing: Scott was looking to branch out from his job as a successful manager in manufacturing, and he and Sandy decided to channel their entrepreneurial spirit into a business. They brainstormed together. What kind of market could they successfully reach? Could they sell pharmaceuticals? Could they work with cars? When they learned of Brian's interest in landscaping, they saw an opportunity.

"We felt it was a good fit," Sandy Pierce says. "Our business sense told us there was a significant opportunity for a contractor with a solid business background. Scott and I possessed just that."

Mason borders King's Island, a major tourist attraction in the area, and surrounding high-end residential areas were densely populated and underserved by existing landscape contractors. Careful to keep their focus narrow, the Pierces decided to target golf course communities, and they've been pleased with their choice. Each property is irrigated and often requires meticulous attention to detail, allowing for a variety of add-on services, including irrigation maintenance, mulching, fertilizing, weed control and grub control.

To market its offering, the team has recently put thousands of dollars into its most significant asset: the brochure. In 2007, the company hired a graphic artist to create a new look. "We asked them to reinvent us," Scott Pierce says. "We wanted a product that was very marketable. We didn't want to be the guys writing the generic bid form."

What came of the design work was unexpected, Brian Pierce explains. "They went through and basically redid everything," he says. "We didn't ask them to redo the logo, but after they did, we liked it a lot better."

WHO COMES FIRST?

As the company made changes to its image, core values remained constant. It's an assertion some companies might hesitate to make in front of customers, but the Pierce business model makes no qualms about putting employees at the top of the food chain. "We started with it from the beginning, and we've run our business by this model from day one," Brian Pierce says. Immortalized on a wooden plaque, the Pierce's mantra lists the company's most valuable assets. Employees – not customers – are ranked No. 1.

"We can't do the work without our

people," Brian Pierce says. "They're the face of our customers. They're the ones who are out there doing the work. They're the most important asset we have here."

Equipment – "It's what makes us efficient and gets the job done right," Brian Pierce says – and production are the next two most valuable assets of Pierce's Lawncare & Landscaping.

"It's all part of the lean process," Scott Pierce says. "You can have production all day long and still get nothing done. Stay lean and be disciplined to it. Don't talk about it and then not go out and practice it. You've got to walk the talk. That's instilled in these guys."

Without internal discipline, growth can kill you, Scott Pierce admits. "That 30 percent revenue growth is a lot," he says. "Most companies don't grow like that and stay profitable."

Customer property is ranked No. 4, but the team stresses that with the right group of employees, it's assumed that all staff is friendly, respectful of property and customer-oriented.

It's a model that showcases the confidence of Scott, Sandy, Brian and Frankie. Scott adds: "If you're going to be the leader, you've got to be miles ahead. Reinvent yourself. Do something different.

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REINVENT Yourself

FUEL FOR PROFIT

It's easy to get hung up on your toys in this business, Scott Pierce says of equipment management. For that reason, he says, a lot of operators now rely on diesel fuel.

"We say diesel's not the way to go," he says. "For one thing, you're not leaning out your business. Your guys are making two separate trips to the pump. It's also more expensive."

Scott Pierce devised a unique solution to the increase in Pierce's fuel costs. Unlike many small to mid-size landscaping businesses, Pierce's doesn't buy gasoline in bulk. Instead, the company purchases from the lowest-priced pump, and pays for fuel with a credit card that offers 5 percent cash back for large purchases. "It's made a 3 to 5 percent difference in what we spend on fuel," Scott Pierce says.

It's crucial to know your fuel costs down to the penny – and brainstorm ways you can reinvent your business to build in reduced fuel costs. Another way Pierce's has accrued huge savings is by mowing only residential communities. They're able to visit a customer-dense neighborhood in one or two days and be available to as many as 60 of their clients in that short time. The company also turns down business that's outside of their current route. "I'm not going to send my crew out 25 minutes from here for one lawn, when I can cut four or five close to home," Sandy Pierce says.

"But a lot of people understand that and agree with us," Brian Pierce adds. "They're dealing with the same thing right now just to get to work."

Pierce's Lawncare and Landscaping branched out to include a rental service that caters to weddings, graduations and other large social functions



SAFE & SOUND

Another of Pierce's core marketing strategies is to promote the company's safety and legal practices. With no H-2B workers on staff, either full- or part-time, the company encourages current and potential customers, through marketing materials, to compare the competition, asking: Is your landscaping company licensed to apply pesticide by the Ohio Department of Agriculture? Has the State of Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation certified this business? Does this business have a State





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REINVENT Yourself

of Ohio Vendor's License? Do you, the customer, have a copy of your contractor's Standard Operating Principles?

Pierce's markets to a discerning, high-end clientele. Their customers pay a premium to receive specialized care and the Pierce's team strives to provide personalized care.

Pierce's has never employed H-2B workers, and they plan to continue relying on local residents and college students to man the business. Speaking on the industry as a whole, Scott Pierce is skeptical of the desperate need for H-2B workers.

"We think it's a big excuse, H-2B," Scott Pierce says. "It is a problem. A lot of the bigger companies are dependent on it. But they've priced themselves into H-2B. We have not. If you price yourselves into it, you've locked in. You've got to charge based on the employees you have."

MAXIMIZE EFFICIENCY

Always eager to discover innovation, Brian Pierce relishes the efficient system he created for the mulching process. It's a well-oiled machine, an assembly line that eliminates wheelbarrows and shoveling and instead uses 20-gallon Brute trash barrels and a Mini Mule mulch machine.

"Shoveling used to take all day," Scott Pierce explains. "When you think about this industry, prices are very competitive. You think, how can you do this much, narrow it down and come out with efficiency. Efficiency is key. You've got to reinvent every day. The technology we were using was too slow. How do you get by it? You reinvent it. Brian came home one day and said: I have an idea."

The crew goes through12 tractor trailer loads of mulch a season. It now takes them three or four seconds to do the work or three or four shovel loads, thanks to the conveyor belt on the Mini Mule. While the machine has had a massive impact on efficiency – by man hour alone, Brian and Scott Pierce have calculated that they work three times as fast as before – Sandy encourages the team to remain as lean as possible.

"It's more useful than the wheelbarrow," Brian Pierce explains. "You can't put a wheelbarrow through a bed without running over perennials.

FAST AND FURIOUS

Brian Pierce created an efficient mulching system that eliminates wheelbarrows and shoveling. Instead, Pierce's employees use 20-gallon Brute trash barrels and a Mini Mulch machine





www.earthandturf.com



Organization plays a key role at Pierce's Lawncare & Landscaping. To stay tidy, employees consider five basic concepts: sort, set in place, shine, standardize and sustain

The guys can walk through with the Brute on their shoulders, dump this and not have a big amount of mulch. We can actually go through and dump exactly what we need. We don't have someone taking a whole day to fill up a wheelbarrow to get it back here and say, We only needed a quarter of that or a third of that. Plus, we can actually fit more in these Brutes than in the wheelbarrow."

Scott describes walking into the office one night after work to find Sandy, Brian and Frankie going through an exercise. "They had drawn a spaghetti chart," he says. "There was a Mini Mule and they'd drawn people, who were running. I said, 'What are you guys doing?' They said they were trying to trim the mulch crew by one more person. They said: 'It's four people right now. How do we go to three?' And they solved it, simply by going through the process."

PROFIT SHARE

Numbers are central to the Pierce's business, and when it comes to profitability, they draw a hard line.

"So many landscape companies operate all season long with no profit," Scott Pierce says. "We don't. We are a profitable company. We will walk away from work unless we make a profit."

How much profit? Twenty-eight percent, according to Kudlac. And if you're making much less than that, says Pierce's management, you're probably doing a lot of work for a little money. "Guys aren't charging for their services," Scott Pierce says. "It's my biggest criticism. They're mowing for \$38 because they think they have to be competitive. You can't say that because you're going to be cheap, you're going to succeed. You should charge based on what your fixed costs are, not what you think

they should be."

It's an assertive business model that requires confidence to deliver. True to form, the team has learned to turn down jobs. Kudlac describes the aftermath of a recent commercial bid: a phone call in which the potential client, a strip mall owner, asked Pierce's to go lower. "I said, 'How much lower?' He said, 'You're overpriced about \$600."

Kudlac flatly refused the offer, and he explained his business philosophy to the client. "I said, 'Just as you're in business to make money over there, we're in this business to make money, too,'" Kudlac says. "'We have a calculated profit margin we need to hit every time we do a job and that's our fixed price." Since Kudlac turned the job down, he says the strip mall owner has fired two contractors who didn't show up.

"I said, 'Well, if you'd paid for good service, maybe would have gotten the service you wanted," Kudlac says.

Driven to maximize business efficiency, Brian Pierce says he and his father spend hours regularly poring over budgets and route sheets.

"That's another thing that sets us apart from everybody else," Brian Pierce says. "My dad and I have spent entire nights figuring out exactly what it takes to make money. We're not going out to a property saying, 'Hmmm, I'll do it for this.' We're not the guy who goes around with his truck and trailer and says, 'Yeah, I can cut that for 25 bucks.' We know how much time a job is going to take and how much money we need to make for our time in order to make a profit."

It's a smart way to run a business, but it's also sustainable long-term, Scott Pierce believes. "If you want to struggle, go out and play golf," he says. "It's a lot more fun." L



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s America faces extensive, ongoing water shortages, contractors have begun partnering with clients to provide a necessary service: efficient irrigation.

"In the next decade, 38 states will have a water crisis," says Rich Bradley, president of Superscape Landscape Management Corp. in East Falmouth, Mass. "Irrigation and landscape people need to start doing the right thing in the efficient use of water and green building. We're caretakers of the environment."

Successful irrigation specialists say that while there are challenges involved in starting an irrigation service, it ultimately reaps returns on the investment of time, labor and equipment.

For example, half of Bradley's \$700,000 annual revenue comes from irrigation (his irrigation customer base is 20 percent commercial, 80 percent residential). Bradley's company provides full irrigation and landscaping services, including design, installation and maintenance, as well as hardscapes and hydroseeding. He has four full-time employees, with part-

time help added as necessary.

Likewise, nearly 40 percent of Rick Hayden's \$600,000 annual revenue comes from irrigation. Hayden, the second-generation owner of Hayden Landscaping in Greenup, Ill., added irrigation to his services in the late 1980s when he noticed he was losing commercial jobs to companies providing the service. Nearly 90 percent of his irrigation work is in the residential sector.

Hayden Landscaping provides landscape and irrigation services including design, installation and maintenance, as well as retaining walls, patios, sidewalks, seeding and sodding. Overall, the company's workload is 70 percent residential, 30 percent commercial and municipal.

Peter Nedwick generates between \$500,000 and \$1 million in annual revenue through his full-service irrigation company, P&P Sprinkler in Burlingame, Calif., which services residential and light commercial sectors. Peter Nedwick's wife, Patty, runs the office; he tends to field work with another full-time employee and two part-time workers. Services include wire and valve locating, wire tracking, repair, upgrades, automation, replacement, design, water auditing and smart irrigation controls.

STUDY FOR SUCCESS

Those who've incorporated irrigation services successfully offer these ideas.

- First and foremost, make sure your business is adequately capitalized.
- Educate yourself. Hayden, who operates in five states, points out permits and licensing varies from state to state. There was nowhere to learn the trade when Peter Nedwick started 28 years ago, so he turned to a plumber to learn plumbing and hydraulics, picking up the rest as he went along.

Today's contractors have more options: Hayden took seminars from a Toro distributor and spoke with other irrigation equipment manufacturers. Bradley points out opportunities also are available through local associations, the Irrigation Association and through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Water Sense program, in which he's a partner.

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· Train your employees. It takes a few years to develop a technician with skills good enough to handle all service calls, Hayden says.

· Engage in ongoing education in response to emerging technologies. The self-taught Peter Nedwick now continues his education through the California Landscape Contractors Association, the Irrigation Association and seminars offered by Ewing Education Services and other supply houses. Patty Nedwick credits Ewing's seminars with "providing

contractors the tools to provide better service and state-of-the-art technology to our clients."

Improperly trained contractors will find success difficult, points out Bradley,

certified as a landscape professional, designer, golf course auditor and contractor. "I see it every day on a system

One percent of

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as irrigation

contractors, yet

45 percent install

irrigation systems

and 36 percent

maintain them.

someone else has put in," Bradley says. "It's a mess and it ends up costing the homeowner three times to get it fixed as it did to put it in. Commercial work is another ballgame - guys will try to tackle a commercial job that's way over their heads.

"Many irrigation guys don't understand how plants work," he adds. "On the flip side, a lot of landscape guys get involved

in irrigation and don't understand how irrigation works. They put the rotors and spray heads on the same zone or water plants at the same time. Different plants, turfs, perennials, and shrubs require different amounts of water. They try to do it all together to get it the cheapest way, but it's not the most beneficial way for the plants."

· Maintain inventory. Peter Nedwick's trucks carry a small amount of various products in different sizes. But don't carry too much, he adds. "If you're buying more materials than you're putting in, that's not good," Peter Nedwick says. "Before we go to the supply house, we make sure we don't already have it on the shelf. We keep track of what's sold and what isn't."

The biggest upfront cost is installation equipment, Hayden says. Usually, he uses a pipe puller rather than a trencher.

As business grows, contractors should add a dedicated utility truck for carrying supplies, Hayden adds.

OVERCOME OBSTACLES

One of the challenges in starting an irrigation service is finding competent





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employees. "It's really hard to find the right service people who will engage the customer and fix the complaint right the first time," says Nedwick.

Hayden has found what deters people in his region from installing an irrigation system is not its cost, but the cost of the water it takes to run it. "Whatever they pay for water, they also pay for sewer," he says.

Hayden's company teaches customers to run their systems more efficiently by not running 20 minutes per zone once daily, but running during an extended timeframe to give it time to soak in.

Building a business from scratch in order to establish a reputation also is a challenge, Peter Nedwick says.

"The biggest challenge is to build the business, generate cash and supply people with the products they want," he says.

His company's strategy: "We call people back, we're on time and we have what we need when we get there."

Figuring out his market was difficult; he eventually targeted residential and light commercial market.

What to know before it snows

Winterizing an irrigation system doesn't just mean blasting excess water from underground pipes. Depending on how the system is connected to a home's plumbing, you might need to take extrasteps to prevent cold-weather damage.

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GET SMART

Water efficiency is a key factor in installing today's irrigation systems.

"More people are concerned not only with saving water, but saving money by saving water," Hayden says. "Going green is catching on."

Although there is no water shortage in his region, residents are still concerned







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about water waste, he says. To create efficiencies, his does preventative maintenance, ensuring correct head and nozzle positioning.

Water efficiency can be accomplished through smart controllers, coupled with good design, installation and maintenance, Bradley says.

"If you repair a sprinkler head and put on the wrong head or nozzle, it's going to throw the efficiencies off," he says, adding he uses multi-stream MP rotators.

Peter Nedwick conducts water audits, a service that's becoming more in demand.

Eventually, 'smart' irrigation may go from an option to a mandate. California municipalities require that smart controllers replace failed ones by 2012.

"You've got to also be smart about your irrigation layout," Peter Nedwick says. "You're not going to see anything other than smart controllers manufactured

after 2012. The technology is rapidly changing and getting better.'

Rain and moisture sensors are popular among Hayden's clients.

Other 'smart' technologies include smart sprinkler controllers that can be programmed to schedule the irrigation based on real-time weather patterns and landscaping conditions. Historical norms are programmed into the weather station. The property's latitude and longitude data is entered. The controller calculates its position, measures the UV light and other factors such as evapotranspiration (ET), plantings, exposure and soil conditions.

FOCUS ON CUSTOMERS

Customers have to be educated on how new technologies work or what upgrades they may need.

"You have to find out how they want their irrigation system to work for them and provide that," Peter Nedwick says.

Peter Nedwick further focuses on customer satisfaction by calling if he's going to be late and attempting to minimize callbacks.

"We can't always do it right the first time because there are variables, especially when you're working on galvanized pipe that's been in the ground for 50 years or longer," he says. "You can fix a leak in a pipe and two feet over, there's another. It's a callback."

In creating cost efficiencies, Peter Nedwick ensures trucks are stocked with required parts as to avoid unnecessary trips back to the office. Like others, he's keen on route optimization: grouping service calls in a specific geographic region to save on high fuel costs and time.

Knowing one's costs is important in setting prices, says Bradley. "You've got to know how long it takes to install a system," he says. "A lot of people price work by the zone. One zone might have







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four heads; another might have 30. Obviously the one with more heads is going to cost more to install, so you charge by the head."

Nedwick also saves time by using a quick clip and bolt-on saddle.

He schedules for efficiency as well: The month's contract jobs are posted on a board and service work fills in remaining slots. With a quick glance, parts can be ordered in advance.

Irrigation work involves emergency calls that push back Nedwick's service calls until he's caught up.

Irrigation contractors must watch for underground pipes and wires during installation, especially in regions where the water table is high and underground utilities are not buried deeply. Some contractors contact a utility-locating organization or ask property owners the location of sewer, septic and landscape lighting lines.

SPREAD THE WORD

Marketing an irrigation business is important, says Patty Nedwick. She's retooling the company's brochures to emphasize services such as smart controllers, weather stations and water auditing, targeted established clients as well as potential ones.

"Several of our communities' properties are worth millions of dollars. If we face water rationing next year, they're not going to want to lose their landscaping," she says.

Whether a landscape company gets into irrigation depends on several factors, says Hayden.

"You've got to be able to devote time and resources to it," he says. "The market plays a big influence. Right now, they're not building new houses. It's not something to consider in a rural area, but it's worth it in places like Chicago area where there are smaller lawns. It's worth

it in an established lawn and landscape maintenance-oriented business."

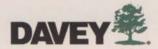
Nedwick says irrigation is not a good fit if the main thrust of one's business is gardening or horticulture.

"Over the last 20-some years, I've learned about plants, but I'm not a horticulturist," he says. "If you're not going to be an irrigation guy and a plumber - because basically this is outdoor plumbing - then don't do it. It's wet, it's dirty, you need to know plumbing and electrical, your products - such as sprayers, gear-driven heads, MP rotators, valves and drip irrigation - and how it all works together and put on whatever schedule is needed."

Ultimately, there is a market for irrigation, especially smart irrigation, Nedwick points out.

"People get excited about this stuff," he says. "They want to save water and be ahead of the curve." (L)





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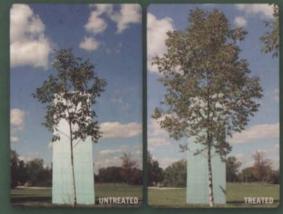
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You say organic ...

Interest in organics has been growing in recent years as people strive to do the right thing for the environment and their families. But landscape companies are struggling to provide a cost-effective, organic alternative to traditional services such as fertilization. Unfortunately, accomplishing this goal is complicated more by confusion over just what constitutes an "organic" fertilizer.

According to USDA's National Organic Program for agricultural crops (NOP), only natural organics, which are products derived from plants or animals or other naturally derived chemicals can be considered in their program. However, according to the Association of American Plant Food Control Officers (AAPFCO) - the scientists who register fertilizer in each state - the definition of an organic fertilizer is, "A material containing carbon and one or more elements, other than hydrogen and oxygen, which are essential for plant growth."

While naturally derived fertilizers such as manure, turkey litter and alfalfa pellets are organic, the science of organic is the science of carbon, not the science of natural.

The confusion arose because, until the early 19th century, it was common thought that only organisms had the ability to bond carbon to carbon or other elements to make polymers into chains and ring structures. It was believed that the covalent bonding of carbon required some type of life force (or "essence") and these compounds were labeled "organic" to indicate their origin. In 1828, Friedrich Wohler synthesized the carbon compound, urea, from inorganic

(i.e., lifeless) components. Urea is naturally derived from urine. Although urea is not considered truly organic, this breakthrough initiated the science of organics and dispelled the theory that organic compounds were fundamentally different from those that were inorganic.

Today, organic chemicals are not only produced synthetically but also are found in other parts of the solar system where life does not exist. Carbon elements, like other elements heavier than hydrogen, are produced in the nuclear cauldrons of stars and were accumulated in our solar system during its formation. For all practical purposes, the amount of carbon on Earth remains fixed - it can neither be created nor destroyed, and only recycled. It's carbon, then, that gives the

upon the structure. As microorganisms decompose organic matter, they secrete enzymes and other compounds that directly improve plant health, and sticky substances that glue soil particles together, improving soil granulation and air and water movement in the soil. Although synthesized organic fertilizers usually have a higher nutrient value than their natural counterparts, it's again the structure that determines whether or not the carbon will result in an increase in microbial population.

The ability of carbon to form covalent bonds with other carbon atoms in long chains and rings is the unique basis for life on Earth. It's also the basis for all organic chemistry. For a fertilizer to be used as an energy source by microorganisms, it must contain

"The science of organic is the science of carbon, not the science of natural."

unique characteristics to organic compounds, not whether the compound was derived naturally or synthetically.

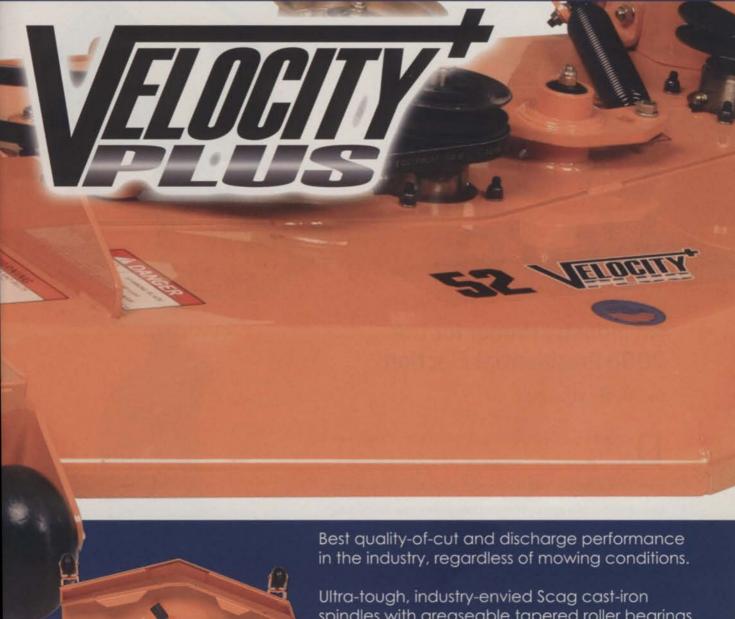
The number of carbons in the polymer, how they're arranged and the other elements and their attachment to carbon determines the specific characteristic of each organic chemical. While it's commonly thought that all naturally derived organic fertilizers will "feed the plant and feed the soil," that is not necessarily the case. Natural organics are often very low in plant nutrient value and the carbon may - or may not - be used as an energy source by microorganisms. Organic matter might be decomposed by microorganisms or hydrolyzed by water, depending

carbon, which could increase the population of microorganisms in the soil. Microbial secretions benefit plant health and aggregate soil particles, resulting in improved soil structure. But some carbon-containing fertilizers are hydrolyzed, and they have no effect on soil structure. A combination of the appropriate natural and synthesized organic fertilizers can provide the desired organic effect (i.e., feed the plant, feed the soil) for lawns and landscape plants in a cost-effective manner. It's time we dispel the romantic myths of the 19th century and work toward an organic fertilizer solution that provides our clients and the environment with real - not perceived - benefits. (L)



ROGER C. FUNK, PH.D., is the chief technical officer for The Davey Tree Expert Company. Reach him at rfunk@davey.com.

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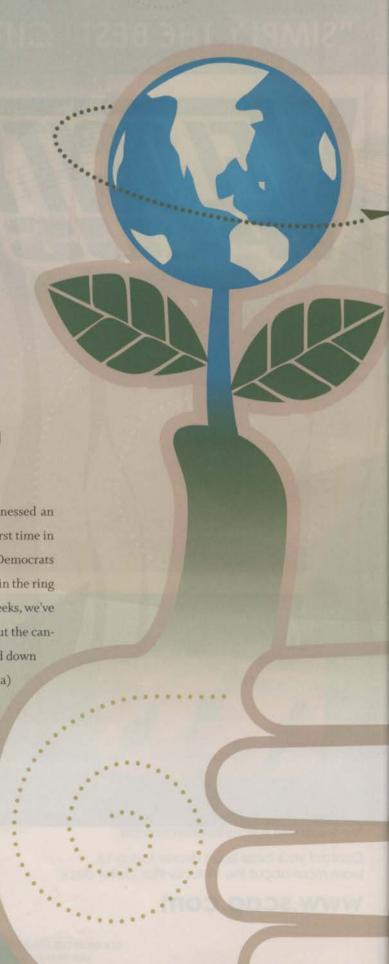


The Green Vote

An Industry Primer for the 2008 Presidential Election

BY TIMOTHY BLEASDALE

During the past nine months, America has witnessed an unprecedented election year unfold. For the first time in more than a decade, both the Republicans and the Democrats had a number of major contenders toss their names in the ring for their party's presidential nomination. In recent weeks, we've seen leading media pundits compare and argue about the candidate's merits. But now, the race has been whittled down to two major players – Sen. John McCain (R-Arizona) and Sen. Barack Obama (D-Illinois) – and as their campaigns hustle to the homestretch, many of us are still left wondering exactly which candidate is right for our industry.



Sure, we've heard all about McCain's and Obama's plans for the war in Iraq, whether or not they will privatize social security and how the candidates think the economy should be fixed. Yet with Election Day at our doorstep, it's not very clear how either man's domestic and international strategies would affect the green industry.

To unravel these mysteries, Lawn & Landscape turned to the experts and discovered answers by examining three major policy areas of the McCain and Obama campaigns.

ISSUE NO. 1 - THE ECONOMY

The policy area where Obama and Mc-Cain share the biggest opinion difference is how each plans to handle a struggling economy. Since the housing and real estate slump began, many lawn and landscaping professionals have battled against the harsh currents of the downturn. But with housing still in a rut and financial turmoil on Wall Street, most are expecting to continue their uphill battles through 2009.

As small business owners, the best place for green industry professionals to begin considering their vote is by taking a closer look at the candidates' economic plans, according to Jeffrey Ladewig, a professor of American politics and political economy at the University of Connecticut.

"A gut instinct would be to follow a candidate who's not necessarily going to increase regulations that will affect the small business owner," agrees Brian Horgan, a turf management specialist and assistant professor at the University of Minnesota. "That will mainly be in terms of tax policy. I would urge small business owners to look at their bottom line and how one candidate will affect that differently than another."

Regarding tax policy, small business owners have more in common with the average American family than they do with big business, Ladewig says.

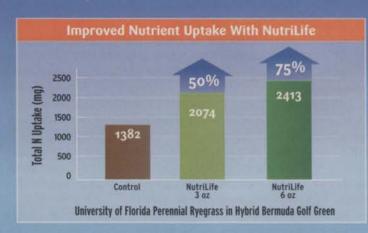
"Both candidates plan to offer incentives to businesses," Ladewig says. "But McCain's [incentives] are more for big business and Obama's are more for small business. Larger corporations will probably be affected less by either of these candidates' policies, because they're generally better able to weather the storm."

According to the Republican campaign, McCain's goal is to make taxes simpler and easier to understand, which could vastly cut the amount of paperwork green industry professionals find themselves digging into this tax season.

According to the Democratic campaign, Obama's plan tries to lower costs by offering health care tax credits, eliminating capital gains taxes and reducing the burden of double taxation that small business

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owners carry under payroll taxes.

"What we really need on a lot of these issues is aggressive change," Ladewig says. "Obama's plan calls for more change while McCain's wants to make the current [government programs and policies] more efficient."

As a business owner operating a fleet of mowers, trucks and snow plows, it can be tempting to ask which candidate will make fuel costs more affordable. Unfortunately, gas prices are one area of the economy where a president has very little control, according to Ladewig.



Ladewig

"Neither candidate has a really good plan to make gas cheaper," Ladewig says. "But a president can't really change [the price] very much. These prices are controlled by market forces beyond the control of a president. If the president gives a gas tax holiday, [gas] will get a few cents cheaper, but it won't last."

ISSUE NO. 2 - THE ENVIRONMENT

Reviewing the McCain and Obama Web sites, it becomes obvious why some have such a tough time determining which candidate's environmental policy is better for lawn and landscaping businesses.

McCain's brief environmental policy is filed on his Web site under the title of "Climate Change," and mostly focuses on ways to decrease greenhouse gas emissions. The Obama site, by contrast, has an eight page environmental plan that touches on everything from global warming to water conservation issues. But as Horgan points out, Obama is the only candidate whose plan mentions a subject directly related to the green industry – Nevada's Cashfor-Grass program.

"Nevada's Cash-for-Grass program, in which people are paid to remove grass and put in desert landscaping, is an excellent model of conservation, and Obama intends to help local communities develop similar projects that work for them," Obama's environmental plan states.

Programs like Nevada's Cash-for-Grass plan claim to improve water quality and usage by paying property owners to convert their yards to xeriscapes, promoting water efficiency through landscaping with plants native to the area.

"Obama seems to promote the benefit of grass for cash programs," Horgan says. "But there is a lot of controversy about how much water is saved and how it affects the heating and cooling of the home – less grass, more air conditioning – and how it really affects the water running off the property."

Still, aside from one sentence in the Obama plan, neither candidate is say-



Horgan

ing much directly related to the green industry. In broad terms, Horgan says Obama seems to lean more toward increasing environmental regulations while McCain is more for less government and probably fewer regulations.

Surprisingly though, the presidential election might not be the most significant race affecting green industry environmental policy. According to Horgan, most of the regulations that will change the way the industry does business will come from below the executive level.

"Pay more attention to the congres-



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"I don't vote for a party. I vote for the best person for the job."

- KEVIN KREPS

"Being a small business owner, I'll naturally be voting Democrat." - ANDREW HARDSCAPE

"If you were a BIG business owner then you'd definitely be voting Republican." - DANIEL HANSON

"I'm a Democrat. The two parties stand for different ideas of what America should be. Obama is a Democrat, and on major issues he doesn't differ from Hillary Clinton or FDR. My ballot will be solidly Democrat." - JAMES BINNS

"I wish I could vote for someone more down the middle but our two-party system won't allow for someone like that to get the nomination." - RYAN HOLT



sional district and state representatives, because that's where the small business owner is going to make his voice heard and be able to make a difference [on environmental issues]," Horgan says. "Where landscape professionals can be affected is on a state by state level rather than by federal mandate."

ISSUE NO. 3 - IMMIGRATION

In an industry that relies on recurring seasonal positions, the immigration policies of McCain and Obama might have a big impact. Historically, it's been difficult to retain American workers for the kinds of seasonal positions the lawn and landscape industry offers. This personnel shortage has lead to an increasing dependence on temporary foreign workers with H-2B visas.

The H-2B visa is the only visa program that allows nonagricultural employers to import foreign workers to fill their employment needs. Since its creation in the early '90s, the H-2B program has limited the number of visas available to 66,000. Special exemptions passed by Congress in 2005 and 2006 allowed employers to bring back past temporary employees without counting against the visa cap. But to the dismay of many employers, that exemption has not been extended, causing the elimination of at least 100,000 workers from the labor force.

The big immigration question for many in the industry is how Obama or McCain will improve this situation.

"Both candidates want to crack down on illegal [immigrants] and employers who hire illegals," Ladewig says. "So expanding the H-2B will be difficult."

Immigration is a touchy subject for each candidate because of their political base, according to Ladewig. McCain has angered many Republicans by being more moderate on immigration issues while Obama has had to tread carefully not to anger blue-collar workers by advocating for foreign workers. Because of these pressures, both candidates are likely to approach the subject fairly cautiously.

"The H-2B cap really could be changed by executive order [from the president]," Ladewig says. "If that happens, Obama is more likely to make it fairer. Obama is slightly more amenable to temporary workers."

ELECTION DAY: NOV. 4, 2008

Both Ladewig and Horgan urge green industry professionals to consider the future before punching their ballot, and to think more about policies and issues rather than about one particular candidate.

"There is a famous quote that says, 'You get the democracy you deserve'," Ladewig offers. "Put thought into your vote, ignore the stereotypes and hype, and no matter who you vote for, you'll have helped improve our democracy greatly."

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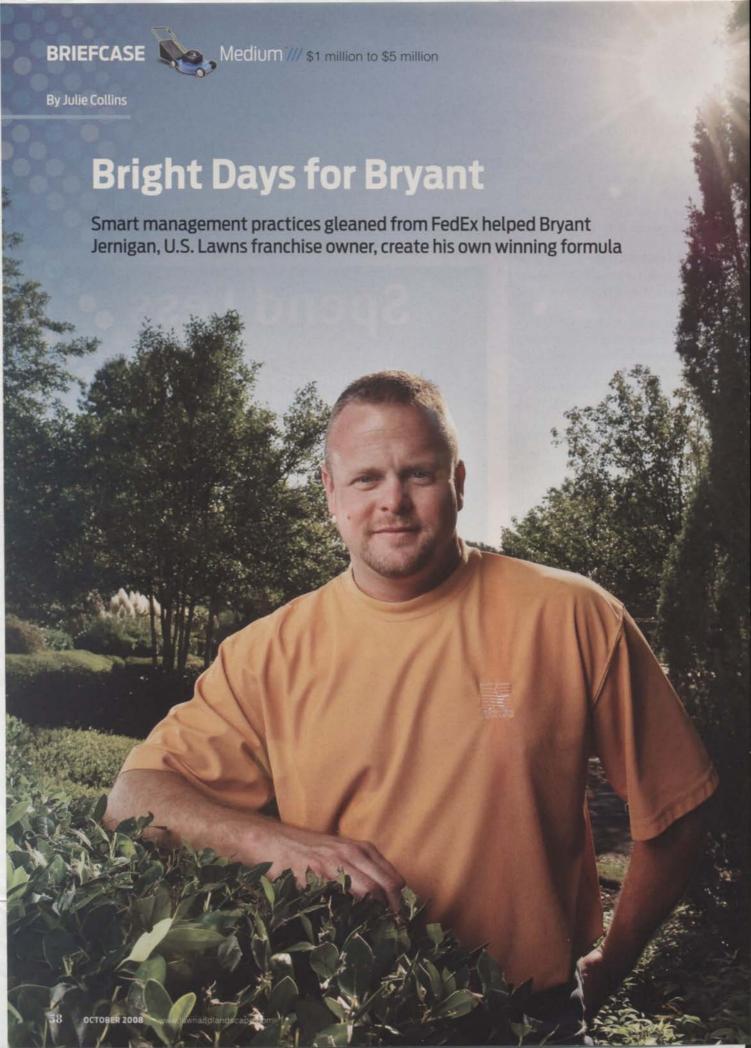


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he phone number emblazoned on the vehicles and employee uniforms of U.S. Lawns of Memphis, Tenn., and U.S. Lawns of Northwest Mississippi doesn't direct customers to a switchboard or an answering service. That's because it's owner Bryant Jernigan's cell phone number. And it's just one of the ways the franchise owner sets his business – one of the most successful U.S. Lawns franchises – apart from competitors.

Less than a decade ago, when Jernigan was working to build a small residential landscaping business during the day and moonlighting as a manger in FedEx's worker's compensation and disability department, he probably never imagined he'd be a U.S. Lawns franchise owner. But the skills and knowledge he acquired from these two previous – albeit disparate – lines of work helped him reach his present status.

"Since high school, I'd always cut grass in the residential market," Jernigan says. "As things began to change at FedEx, I wanted to expand on that and get into the commercial side of landscaping."

But Jernigan also decided he didn't want to start from scratch.

"I wanted something that separated me from every other person driving a truck, pulling a trailer," he says. "Was there something out there that could be beneficial to me from the beginning and continue to support me throughout?"

There was, Jernigan discovered after a bit of research. It involved opening a U.S. Lawns franchise in an area that didn't yet have one – and expanding to cover not one, not two, but three territories in the Memphis area, making Jernigan's one of the company's most successful franchises.

THE RIGHT FIT

"I wanted to continue owning a business, but I was really fond of having the support of a nationally recognized company, something property owners or managers moving from state to state would see and recognize," Jernigan recalls. "I learned a lot about benchmarking at FedEx, so I was looking to see if there was something in other parts of the country. That's when I came across the U.S. Lawns products."

After meeting with U.S. Lawns repre-

sentatives a number of times, Jernigan and his wife, Edna, decided the company was the right fit.

"I knew there'd be support along the way as I grew and my needs changed," Jernigan says. So Bryant and Edna purchased their first territory in 2002 for \$30,000, then they proceeded to invest another \$40,000 to \$45,000 in equipment.

Early on, Jernigan focused on educating himself about commercial maintenance and building his client base. "Obviously, when you're starting out, getting that first contract is one of your primary goals," Jernigan says. "But then you have to take that and do something with it. I'm happy





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to say that six years later, we still work with some of our first customers."

CUSTOMER SERVICE CUES

Jernigan's U.S. Lawns franchise offers commercial maintenance, irrigation and installation services. And there's a reason customers keep calling Jernigan's company back: He knows how to care for his clients as well as he cares for their grass.

"One of the things that sets us apart is customer care," Jernigan says. "Everything – the employees' uniforms, the trucks, the trailers – has my personal cell phone number on it. Whether that's to complain or compliment, people can see that number on the side of the truck and call me."

Jernigan says it's a step toward dispelling the image of the "evil contractor" he believes people often have in their minds. And it also ensures he's available.

"In working with Bryant over these four years, I know I can get a hold of him at night or on weekends," says Frank Cable, facility manager for 63 Regions Banks and Jernigan's customer. "He's a devoted family individual, but he still finds time to work with the customer."

And, as Cable can attest, Jernigan's willing to work to meet customers' unique needs. For Regions Bank, that includes addressing security-related standards set by the local and state government, as well as requirements set specifically by the corporation dictating plant type and height, among other things. "Bryant makes sure he maintains those security-related issues so when we have inspections, there are zero incidents in which he's not meeting those standards," Cable says. "He just goes above and beyond."

As much as Jernigan knows about what it takes to treat customers right, he also knows how to build relationships with his suppliers, as Dalton Howell of Ripley Outdoor Equipment Inc., Jernigan's primary supplier for mowing equipment, can attest. "He's very professional and loyal to his suppliers," Howell says. "If I do something wrong, he tells me and we straighten things out. And if I'm doing a good job, he lets me know that."

Howell also appreciates the way Jernigan takes the time to listen to his equip-

ment recommendations – not something every customer does. "My job is to direct you – not to oversell you, not to undersell you, but to give you a product to do the job," Howell says. "Yet a lot of customers don't take my advice. But Bryant listens."

SMART MANAGEMENT

The principles of customer care were ingrained in Jernigan's mind when he was with FedEx, and that's not the only thing he learned during 15 years with the company. Jernigan also regularly relies on the managerial and cost-efficiency expertise he acquired there, two of the most challenging aspects of his business.

"When I was a courier and managed couriers, I would set up routes and manage the employees," Jernigan says. "Now it's understanding how to route your crews if a customer has a particular need for a particular time or day."

Smart management strategies also help soften the blow that high gas prices and the current state of the economy have had on Jernigan's business. "I think a lot of the commercial customers are tightening up and really watching where they're spending money," Jernigan says. "Their fuel costs and their energy costs are rising at the same rate mine are, so I understand."

Not surprisingly, Jernigan says business is slower as a result of the economy. "We're in good shape for the future, but are definitely experiencing a bit of a slow-down this year."

For a company that relies so heavily on fuel, such a slowdown makes managing fuel costs, en route to work sites as well as while on the job, all the more vital. Jernigan does a considerable amount of planning before crews leave the shop each day, determining the best route they should take to each site to minimize backtracking or traveling out of the way. He also relies on GPS tracking and company cell phones to keep tabs on where crews are and how much time they spend on each job.

On-site, asking employees to turn off equipment such as weed eaters and mowers when they're not using them makes a considerable difference. "We make sure that we're not sitting in the truck at lunchtime with the air conditioner going, that we're sitting under a shade tree or somewhere else cool," he says. And it also means taking time to secure job sites. "We've had several occasions where fuel tanks or cans have been stolen off trucks," Jernigan says.

Ensuring that all these cost-saving expectations are met requires buy-in

from employees – something Jernigan works hard to obtain. "This year I sat the employees down and explained to them: We might be asking you to go this route rather than the route you're used to taking, and here's why. They have to understand where we're coming from so they don't think we're just fussing about something," he says.



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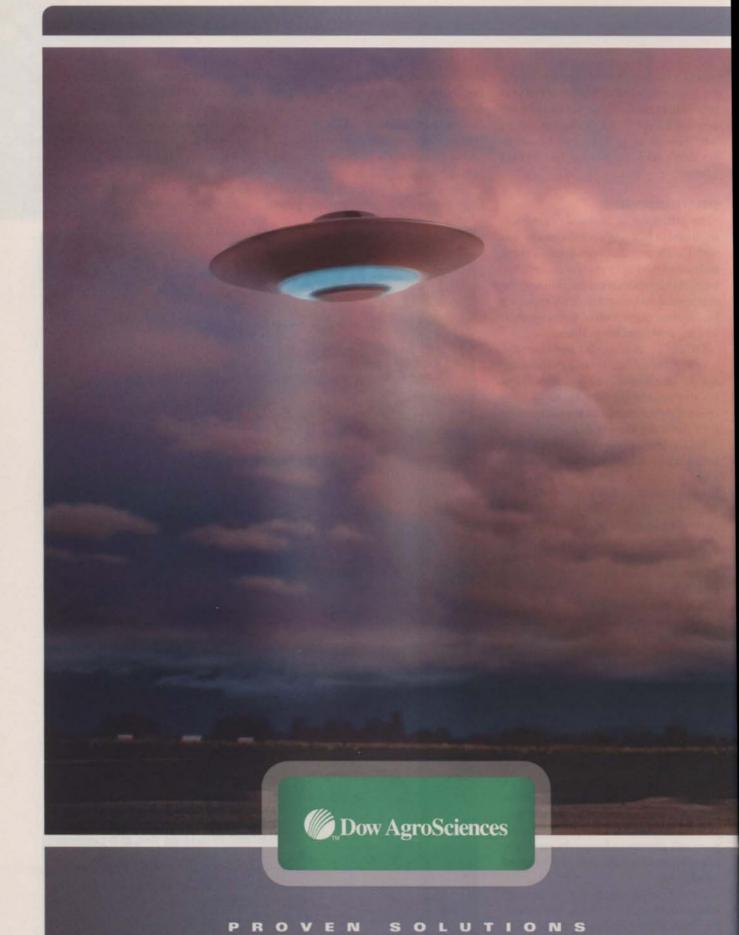
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It's a mentality that helps with more than fuel savings. It also ensures Jernigan is able to recruit and retain quality employees. His workforce has grown from four to 14 people, many of whom are H-2B workers and return each year from the same community in Mexico, and Jernigan relies heavily on operations manager Jerry Rochelle to assist him in hiring and managing employees. "We've been fortunate enough to be growing so the employees we're putting through the training process actually get to see themselves move up, not only in salary, but also in responsibility," Jernigan says. "If somebody who's been in the truck wants to be a crew leader, he's going to get that opportunity."

Beyond offering advancement opportunities, Jernigan strives to treat his crews well. "They have to understand that I want to have a future here and I want each one of them to have a future here if

Fast Facts: U.S. Lawns of NW Miss./Memphis

Year first franchise started 2002 Startup capital About \$75,000 2007 revenue \$1.2 million Current number of employees 14

Service breakdown

85% maintenance 10% irrigation 5% installation

Client breakdown

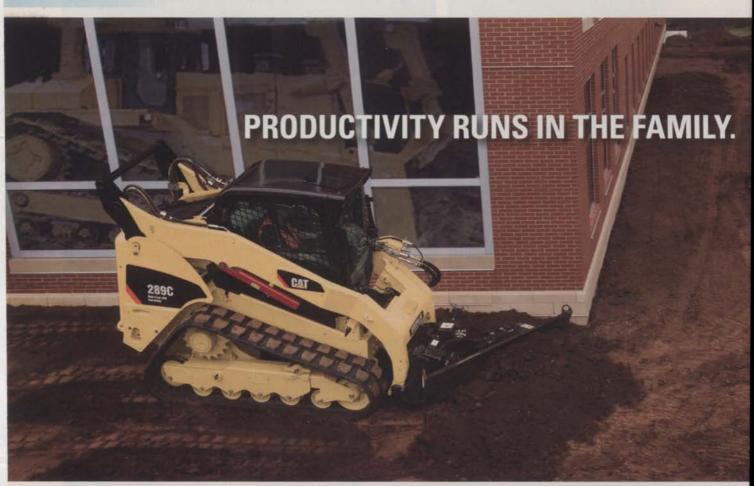
85% commercial

15% homeowners' associations and apartments



Management philosophy Stay close to the employees, customers, manager and suppliers so they understand our goals and we understand theirs.

What keeps you awake at night? Is the perception of the company something I'm honored to be a part of? Did I do well? Did I do right?



they so choose," he says.

It's not uncommon for the company to take a crew out for lunch or allow employees to leave on an occasional Friday to enjoy some extra time off. In addition, the company rewards good behavior. If employees end the month with the inventory they started with, they might receive a gift certificate to a restaurant as a thank you. "I want them to know that I appreciate what they do for me," Jernigan says. "I tell them that I'll defend them with every breath but if they mess up they have to be ready to face it. They know they can come to me and work it out. After they see you defend them, that helps tremendously."

Customers and suppliers alike recognize how hardworking Jernigan's employees are. "His crews are probably one of the better crews in the industry," says Howell, who visits Jernigan's work sites when delivering new equipment and

making repairs. "As they're coming back off their routes they will stop and pick up paper in the parking lots. They're very professional, very customer oriented."

A SUCCESSFUL APPROACH

Jernigan's focus on customer service and employee management has helped the company's sales grow from \$200,000 in the first year to \$1.2 million last year. And Jernigan's business now encompasses multiple territories: Jernigan purchased an additional territory in 2005 and a third in 2007.

He hopes that the quality of his company's work and the positive image the company projects speaks for itself. But earning a few awards along the way certainly hasn't hurt. Jernigan was named U.S. Lawns Franchisee Rookie of the Year in his first year with the company and has also won the Superior Achievement award (in 2004 and 2005) and the

All-American award (in 2006 and 2007). Locally, the company was named 2005 Lawn & Landscape Company of the Year by the Hernando, Miss., Chamber of Commerce, and Jernigan was a finalist for the *Memphis Business Journal*'s 2008 Executive of the Year.

Despite the rewards and accolades from those who work with Jernigan, there is, of course, always room to grow. "I'd like to do more site work, where the guys are at one location throughout several days or an entire week, now that we've established ourselves financially and we're educated to where we can handle it properly," Jernigan says. "That's the direction I've been headed from the very beginning." (L)

Julie Collins writes about all things green. She is pursuing a master's degree in business and environmental science. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening and golfing.





By John Torsiello

The Massey Guarantee

Florida-based Massey Services proves that a little confidence can stimulate giant growth When Harvey Massey purchased the former Walker Chemical and Exterminating Company in Orlando, Fla., in 1985, he saw a termite and pest control firm that had a core of solid service technicians and growth potential.

What the business didn't have, Massey felt, was "the right culture and the right image." So, he set about reinventing the company by purchasing new service vehicles, altering the business's logo and color schemes on shirts and trucks, and redoubling efforts to instill core company values throughout his workforce.

"When I bought the company, which

had been around since 1930, it had four offices and a good team of technicians," says Massey, who has been in the pest management business for 45 years, spending long stints with Orkin and Terminix before becoming a chairman and CEO. "I replaced 68 vehicles in six months and changed the way our trucks and technicians looked. We established standards for the company and our goal of total customer satisfaction."

Under Massey's leadership, the company also built its values of teamwork, integrity and honesty. He made simple, concrete alterations. For example, Massey

Reason to smile: Massey Services is on pace to generate \$80 million in revenue for 2008 under the guidance of chairman and CEO Harvey Massey (right) and president and COO Tony Massey



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Massey Services Moves into **New Corporate Headquarters**

assey Services has moved into a new headquarters in the city of Orlando. The new offices are adjacent to the company's flagship complex, which houses four service centers and a training center and is located on the site of the original business that Massey purchased 23 years ago.

"We've been planning for this for over three years," says Harvey Massey, chairman and CEO of Massey Services. "We had significantly outgrown our Maitland office so this is a most welcome occasion."

The existing two-story building was purchased in 2004 and construction of the new five-story tower, which is attached at the west side of the original building, began in July 2007. Additionally, the exterior of the original building was renovated to match the design of the new tower. The new building has offices on four of the five floors, with parking and a reception lobby situated on the ground floor. Massey Services employs 135 team members at the corporate facility, and more than 770 company-wide.

Massey Communications, the public relations and advertising agency purchased by Harvey Massey in 1997, will also be housed in the new facility.

The new headquarters tower was designed by Powell Design Group and built by Brassfield & Gorrie. Interior finishing was handled by Harkins Development. The new building incorporates several "green" features which include automated light switches with sensors that turn on and off automatically and a programmable AC unit that is set to adjust thermostats at the end of the day to conserve energy

"I'm especially happy for our people," Harvey Massey says. "As a result of our incredible growth, we needed additional space to accommodate our increased staff."



consolidated technician routes, which led to an increase in their income as well as enhanced health coverage and other benefits. "That's why, to this day, we have a lot of the people who were with us when I bought the company," Massey says.

It's a well-laid plan that's worked nicely. Massey Services has grown from those four offices in 1985 to 62 offices spread across the width and breadth of Florida, and even into Georgia and Louisiana. The firm has around 800 employees and a fleet of 700 vehicles. Twenty-three years ago, the company averaged \$4 million in sales annually, but Massey Services is now on pace to break \$80 million in 2008. The company has undergone between 15 and 17 percent annual growth, and has moved up five spots in Lawn and Landscape's Top 100 this year.

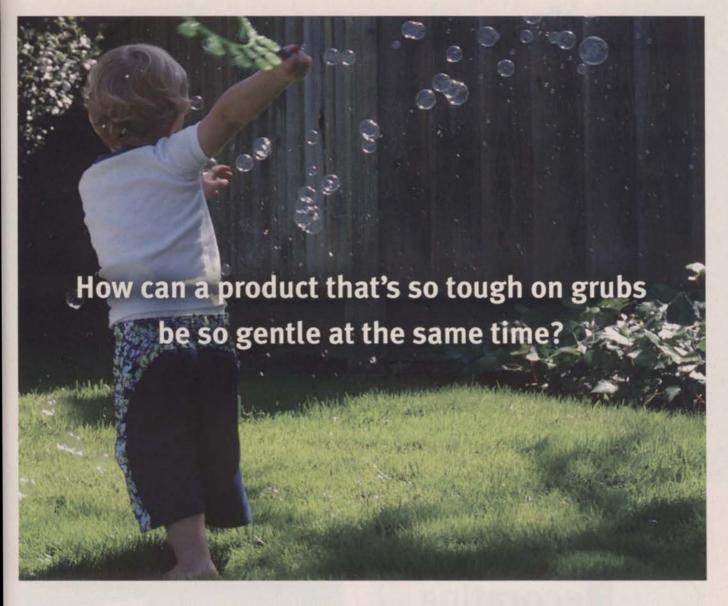
Harvey Massey, a straight shooter who talks with a decided Southern drawl, is adamant when he says that one of the driving forces behind the company's continued success has been its dedication to customer service and satisfaction.

"When we launched a marketing campaign in the 1980s, we decided to offer the money-back guarantee," Massey says. "People in the industry called me and asked if I'd lost my mind because this is a nickel and dime business, and we've been fighting that battle for years. But I felt that if you treat people the way you want to be treated, you shouldn't have to worry. And if customers aren't satisfied with what you do, they deserve to get their money back."

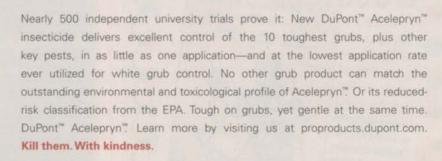
The campaign brought in new customers. But it was how the effort was perceived by Massey Services' team members that surprised management.

"It was internally that the money back guarantee had the biggest impact," Massey says. "It was like turning on a light with the service technicians in terms of what they thought of themselves and the confidence we were displaying in them. It was one of the defining moments in our company history."

Massey Services conducts intense screening of potential employees and was one of the first companies, Massey believes, to integrate drug testing into that process. There is also an intensive and ongoing edu-



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BRIEFCASE Large /// \$5 million and up

cation and training program for service technicians.

"Our training is more of a lifestyle," says Adam Jones, vice president and director of quality assurance. "We don't produce a product, per se. Our product is the people who work for us, and we invest money and time in that product by giving them the information they need to do their jobs properly. We also instill in our employees the understanding that there are no stupid questions and that they can come to us for answers."

At the same time, Massey Services empowers its team members to make the calls in the field.

Says Jones, "Another mission for us is to have our people understand what the policy is for a specific situation. If they understand what it is and where the boundaries are, they will probably make the right choice. There is freedom in that.



Massey Services spent a significant amount of time and money crafting its public image

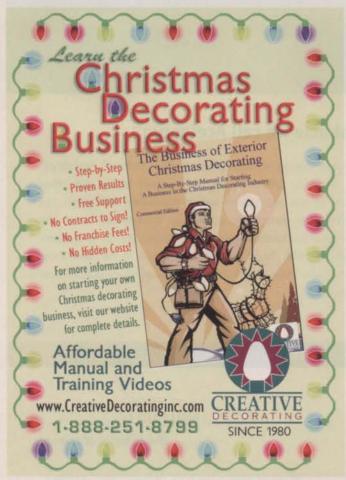
They know what our attitude is toward customer service and that the happier our customers are, the longer we keep them and the more profitable the company and its employees are."

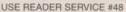
The company promises a detailed, customized written service plan for each customer and 24-hour service if a problem arises. Both a doctor of plant medicine and a board-certified entomologist are full-time staff members.

"Mr. Massey had the foresight to buy a business like this in Florida, a growth state that is hospitable for pests," says Bud Brewer, president and CEO of Massey Communications. "We're never going to win the battle, so we have that working for us. That being said, other companies have come along in this state and don't have the growth numbers and consistency of growth that we have, or our employee retention rate. Just getting new customers isn't enough. You can't let them out the back door with poor service. The present customer is always more valuable than the ones you're going after."

About 75 percent of the company's income is derived from residential customers. The remainder comes from commercial clients.

Another change came in 1990, when Massey says his company "got out of the pest control business and got into the pest

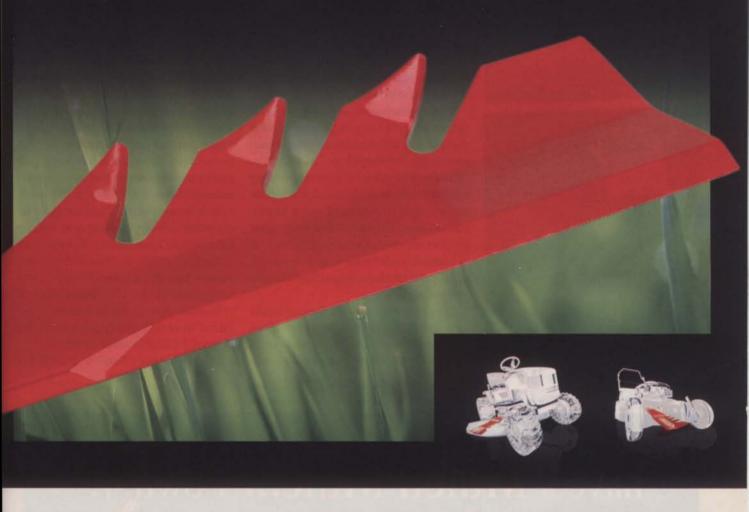






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Massey Services was twice recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for its efforts in environmental stewardship

prevention business."

"We spent \$40,000 changing the vehicles to read 'Pest Prevention,'" he says. "We now pre-treat the homes being built by some of the largest developers and builders in the country."

Water conservation and environmental safety are two increasingly important components of the business. "Water conservation is big everywhere," Massey says. "Hundreds of gallons of water were being used in pesticide dilution and now we can use a couple of gallons of water to pretreat a home. Honestly, I don't care what product we use and who manufactures it as long as it's safe for my team members to handle and safe for our customer's homes and businesses."

Offers Brewer, "You see fleets of trucks being painted green to take advantage of the trend toward environmentalism in the industry. We were green before green

was cool. Back in 1995, we were invited to be a presenting sponsor of the Central Florida Earth Day Festival. We thought about it for a few days because we figured we might be 'teed up.' A pest prevention company being asked to present at such an event? But the woman who was running the festival was a customer for three years. She had come to understand that we were not interested in just putting out pesticides, but that we had an enormous amount of concern for the environment. I think we were on the tip of the spear for the entire industry in doing away with indiscriminate broadcasting of pesticides."

Tangible evidence of that commitment came when Massey Services was twice recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for its efforts, in addition to recent recognition from the Council for Sustainable Florida.

Much of Massey Services' growth has





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been internal, Brewer says, although the company will consider expansion through acquisition if the right opportunity presents itself. In the past 23 years, the company's growth has been 13 percent compounded per year, with organic growth accounting for 12 percent of the overall growth. The firm has doubled in size every five years, a fact that has not arrived by serendipity.

"Having that growth over a five- to six-year period is perfect for our organization," Jones says. "It allows us to bring people into our company, steep them in our culture, raise them up right through the organization and put them in the position to be chomping at the bit and prepared to fly when we open a new office."

Massey says controlled growth is key to his company's present and future success. "We want to grow so we can create new opportunities for our employees. We have 56 offices in Florida, five in Atlanta and one in Baton Rouge, La. When we open a new office, we want to make sure we meet the demands of the marketplace. We need to know who and where our customers are, how we find them and what they expect from us. It's not the same in all locations. You have to change your business model as you go because society changes. We have gone from monthly to quarterly to bimonthly service and we are always adjusting."

Massey Services has been able to hold the line on its prices despite pressures placed on its operating budget by rising fuel costs, foreclosures and a slowdown in new home construction.

"Although gas and oil prices are up 43 percent, our usage rate is up only 18 percent," Massey says. "We have done a better job of route organization, getting people to service customers on the same street the same day."

Adds Jones, "One of the benefits of

retaining and adding new customers is that we're able to keep prices pretty static for existing customers. We haven't had to pass the rising operational costs on to our customers and we won't as long as we can maintain our operational profitability."

For Harvey Massey, it all goes back to having good team members and strong ethics.

"I recently saw one of our posters in our training room and it said that when someone leaves our company for whatever reason, we want them to say that while they were here, they worked hard, learned a lot, made a lot of friends and never once questioned our integrity. I think that says a lot about who we are as a company." L

John Torsiello is a freelance writer living in Torrington, Ct. He has written extensively on turf issues for Golf Course Industry magazine and other national and regional publications.





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Massey Services Recognized as One of the "Best Places to Work"

assey Services, an Orlando-based industry leader in pest prevention, termite protection and landscape services was selected as a top finalist in the Orlando Business Journal's "Best Places to Work" competition.

Among the 211 local companies that participated in this year's competition, Massey Services was listed as a top contender for "Best Places to Work 2008" and within points of winning the "Giant Company" category, which included local companies that employ between 301 and 1,000 team members.

"I am very proud that Massey Services was recognized as a finalist for one of the 'Best Places to Work' in Orlando," said Harvey Massey, Chairman and CEO of Massey Services. "We are fortunate to have been nominated and selected as

a finalist for this award. Our team members have proven that Massey Services is among the finest service professionals within the pest management industry."

Employees of the nominated companies participated in an anonymous online survey that measured various aspects of a company's culture, including: manager effectiveness, trust in senior leaders and feeling valued as a team member. There were also questions that allowed employees to express opinions about their company.

The Orlando Business Journal distinguished Massey Services for its employee health benefits, spring sales blitzes with incentives, awards to annual top team members, and internal contests and cookouts as fun features that encourage team spirit at work.



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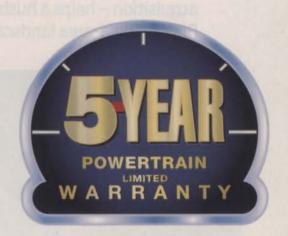


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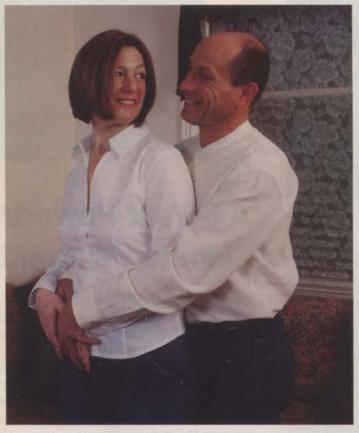
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The Road Less Traveled

A winning combination of skills, service and savvy – and a timely acquisition – helps a husband-and-wife team expand their Philadelphia-area landscaping company



Brad and Dina Baker focused their landscaping business on existing Philadelphia-area homes. Photo: Baruch Schwartz Photography & Video

or 20 years, Brad and Dina Baker have set their residential landscaping business, Baker Creative, apart with their focus on customer service, marketing and innovative landscape design. So when the opportunity to grow their \$800,000-a-year company by acquiring Green Team Gardeners presented itself, the couple accepted the challenge headon – even though it meant purchasing a business in a rocky economy.

"We look at this kind of economic period as a time to actually try to increase market share, because then when the upswing comes we are positioned to benefit faster," Dina Baker says. "Obviously you have to tighten your belt to do it this way, but it's a great positioning technique."

Best of all? The husband-and-wife team didn't even have to seek out the acquisition of Green Team Gardeners. When the woman who owned the business decided to retire, she looked around for a like-minded, knowledgeable horticulturist in the Philadelphia area who would take care of her business. And Brad's name came up, time and again.

After the owner of Green Team Gardeners planted the seed, the Bakers did their research and decided the

"It was unheard of for a residential landscape/design company to have the kind of marketing materials we had," Dina Baker says.



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time was right for the acquisition of the \$220,000-a-year company, which promised to boost the Bakers' cross-selling opportunities and help them increase market share. Plus, the acquisition provides the opportunity to dabble more in the artistic side of landscaping. "The company had been owned by a woman who was a self-trained horticulturist; her formal training was as an artist," Dina Baker says. "We're finding examples of approaches to landscape design that come from outside the traditional horticulture or landscape design field, so we're gaining perspective on landscape design that we're able to grow with."

Plus, the acquisition helps Baker Creative further its mission to become a one-stop shop that promises "Carefree Maintenance." The company now offers its customers myriad services at once, ranging from the landscape design they built the company around to more recent additions including landscape maintenance, drainage work and outdoor lighting design and installation. "It feeds into being an exterior property manager as much as their landscape-build person," Dina Baker says.

FROM SEEDLING TO SUCCESSFUL STARTUP

From the beginning, when Brad and Dina decided they were ready to start their own company, they looked for ways to set themselves apart from the rest. That's why they shied away from marketing to the owners of new homes and instead focused on landscaping existing homes.

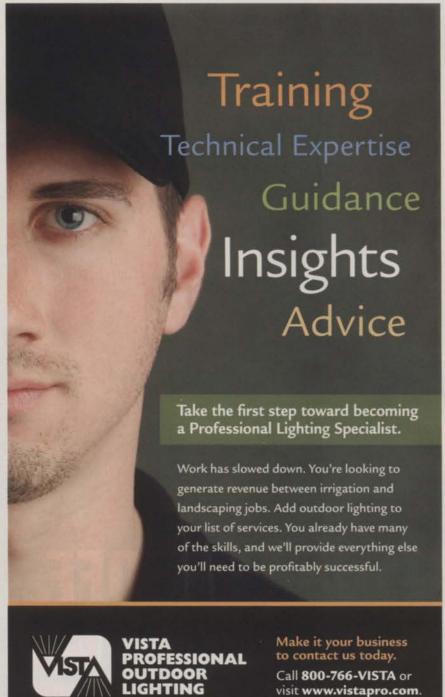
"It was the road less traveled by most other landscapers," Brad Baker says. "There was less competition doing older properties. It required a different level of skill and knowledge to understand and work with what was already existing, as opposed to a blank slate."

It's a decision that's paying off today, when so many other landscape design companies have taken a hit as a result of lackluster new home sales. As Brad and Dina point out, the need for watering and trimming doesn't go away just because the housing market slows.

SMART MARKETING

Implementing a savvy marketing plan from the startup stage hasn't hurt either. Right away, Dina set to work putting her background in advertising, marketing, and public relations to use to drum up business. "It really was unheard of for a residential/landscape/design company to have the kind of marketing materials we had," she says. "Our first brochure was extremely professional and comprehensive. I think that made a tremendous difference."

Today, the company's comprehensive marketing plan still includes an updated version of that first brochure, which is distributed as part of a direct mailing to lists of potential customers provided





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SEE US AT THE GIE+EXPO, BOOTH #1204 USE READER SERVICE #60 by Welcome Wagon. "We know where homes that fit into our model are, where we want to expand into. We are very strategic about it," Dina Baker says.

So strategic, in fact, that Dina keeps records of what works and what doesn't. "We know why people call us, we ask the right questions, we track it, so the deci-

sions we make can be constantly refined to ensure we're marketing effectively," she says.

That's why she knows, for instance, that despite its lower sell rate, advertising in Yellow Book USA is worth spending advertising dollars on. An occasional advertisement in a high-end consumer magazine doesn't hurt either. And drumming up publicity is important too, which is why, for the third year, Baker Creative accepted an invitation to showcase their work at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Flower Show.

Of course, generating traffic to the company Web site (www.bakercreative.com) is another key. "We have a terrific website that provides not only information about the company but also tips for people," she says. "Online marketing is becoming more and more important to our markets."

SERVICE WITH A SMILE

Brad and Dina make no secret of the fact that customer service is a vital component of their business – and has been since the beginning, when Dina started manning the phones and making sure customers spoke to a real person rather than the answering machine when they called.

The Baker Creative model of customer service focuses on seeing things through the eyes of the clients. "We're always trying to put ourselves in the position of the individual homeowner," Dina Baker says. "We try to really learn about who the customer is and then marry that to the knowledge we have."

"It's being able to put our feet in their shoes," Brad Baker adds. "We're not imposing the landscape on them, we're asking them the right questions and helping them put together a landscape that fits their lifestyle."

They take customer education seriously too. "We don't only want to use all the science and technology," Dina Baker says. "We want our customers to understand it and be more effective property owners. We want to teach them something that is going to be of value to them in working with us."

Going that extra mile with the customer has, perhaps, made all the difference. "We started with a level of customer service, and we never walked away from that," Dina Baker says.

Nor do they plan to walk away from the customer base they've built up – or the one they acquired from Green Team Gardeners – anytime soon. In fact, this one-stop shop is just getting growing. L



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STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

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Weathering Economic Storms

Business confidence remains steady as landscape contractors look into the eye of the economic storm, directly facing challenges to ensure profit.

By Nicole Wisniewski



ven with his 25 years in the landscape business, Todd Williams says 2008 has been "the most challenging year of my career."

Every year, the vice president and regional director of Denver-based American Civil Constructors creates a three-year plan, identifying risks, "and this is the first year that every risk we identified actually happened."

Yet, "part of the reason I love this industry is that I love challenges," Williams continues, echoing the sentiments of the majority of the more than 700 landscape contractors we surveyed for Lawn & Landscape's annual State of the Industry Report, conducted by ABR Research, as well as the 20 industry professionals across the U.S. with which we conducted in-depth interviews.

While the skeptics are out there, a whopping 77.8 percent of contractors are confident the landscape industry will rebound next year, 24.7 percent of them feeling very confident. An optimistic 6.6 percent wonder what the industry even has to rebound from, leaving 15.6 percent who lack confidence going into 2009. While some industries, like home building, seem to suffer during economic times

like these, landscape work is a small enough ticket item that draws a steady crowd of garden-loving clients who instead of a vacation or another unnecessary extra will reserve money for outdoor projects and maintenance.

"The desire for beautiful gardens and landscapes is timeless," says David Frank, president and CEO, David J. Frank Landscape Contracting, Germantown, Wis., "so despite hard times, there will always be opportunities for those who know how to create and care for beautiful spaces."

That could be the reason the average contractor held strong at an average 10 percent growth this year - 6 percent down from last year but still respectable - with net profit holding at 10.3 percent, just a hair down from last year's 10.9 percent. Operating costs inched up from an average 16.1 to 16.2 percent, while revenue per employee also increased from \$45,756 to \$46,378. While it cost more for the average contractor to do business, his net profit remained steady, meaning contractors succeeded in either raising prices to cover costs or becoming more efficient in performing service work.

Industrywide, Lawn & Landscape

STRESSED OUT?

Rounding out the top five list of landscape contractors chief business concerns is the fact that many owners feel increasingly overworked and stressed, according to Lawn & Landscape research – and recent economic ups and downs don't help matters much.

According to a National Federation of Independent Business study, 44 percent of small-business owners are spending more time in their businesses today compared to six months ago, and 27 percent are spending a lot more time. Forty-one percent of those spending more time do so because the slowing economy means there are more matters to watch. Only 10 percent say they are spending less time in their businesses and one-third of that group blames the slowing economy for them having less to do.

Fifty-nine percent of business owners took a vacation this year as a means for relieving business stress, according to the American Express OPEN Small Business Monitor. This "may not see so remarkable, until you factor in that 56 percent are experiencing cash flow issues and 86 percent are being squeezed by rising energy and gas costs," says Alice Bredin, an American Express OPEN Small Business Advisor. The point? If you're stressed by the current economy, experts say: "Take a break."

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

research shows there are approximately 80,000 U.S. landscape businesses generating \$59 billion in revenue this year.

THE STRONG SURVIVE. St. Louis-based Dowco Enterprises is up 7 percent this year "simply because we've chosen to be up – we targeted the work and ensured we brought it in the door," says Owner Maurice Dowell.

Todd Reinhart agrees. "We are growing 15 percent and we can attribute that growth to being aggressive and proactive instead of reactive," says the owner, Reinhart Grounds Maintenance, Bloomington, III.

Some regions have been hit harder than others. In Richard Sperber's opinion, south Florida has been the worst hit by the economy, followed by some parts of California, says the CEO of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. in Calabasas, Calif.

For Williams, the Dallas region has been performing better than the Denver region "because the housing market didn't crash like it did in Denver or California," he says, adding his company is growing 5 to 10 percent this year because "we're being aggressive in markets that allow us to be aggressive."

Concerning total revenue, West/Southwest companies brought in 13 percent on average, while South/Southeast businesses garnered 12 percent, and East/Midwest firms grew 9 percent. The South/Southeast suffered more than any other region in lawn

THE TYPICAL 2008 LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR

Gross sales - \$737,417

Total employees - 15.9 (8.1 year-round, 7.8 seasonal)

Years in business - 15.4

Average growth - 10%

Net profit - 10.3%

Net operating cost change - 16.2%

Revenue per employee - \$46,378.43 (considering 15.9 employees)

BUSINESS REGIONS

In which state is your headquarters located?

- West/Southwest 25.3%
- East/Midwest 53.9%
- South/Southeast 20.8%



CUSTOMER SERVICE

What percent of your annual sales comes from the following property types?

PROPERTY TYPE % OF SALES

- Single family residential 63.2%
 Commercial/industrial 25.2%
 Multi-family structures 6.4%
- Government/institutional 4.1%
- Other 1.3%

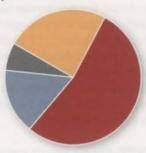
INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

2008				SALES	FROM				
GROSS SALES	% of the Industry	Lawn mowing/ maint.	Lawn	Construction/ design-build	Irrigation	Tree & ornamental care	Snow & ice removal	Single-family residential	
Less than \$50,000	15.0%	60.0%	9.6%	11.0%	6.2%	4.3%	3.4%	80.2%	
\$50,000 - \$99,999	17.3%	48.0%	13.3%	13.4%	7.8%	5.3%	5.5%	72.0%	
\$100,000 - \$199,999	18.6%	45.1%	11.5%	16.3%	7.3%	6.0%	5.9%	64.3%	
\$200,000 - \$499,999	22.9%	40.6%	8.2%	28.8%	7.6%	3.7%	5.4%	60.7%	
\$500,000 - \$999,999	10.7%	30.3%	8.4%	31.5%	13.9%	5.1%	5.5%	56.6%	
\$1 million or more	15.3%	31.2%	10.9%	28.8%	8.6%	8.8%	4.4%	39.6%	
% of Respondents		43%	11%	21%	8%	6%	5%	63%	

REBOUND READY?

How confident are you that the landscape industry will rebound next year?

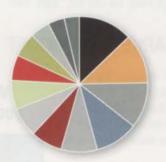
- Very confident 24.7%
- Somewhat confident- 53.1%
 - Not at all confident 15.6%
- What do we have to rebound from? 6.6%



NEXT YEAR'S NEW SERVICES

Which of the following new services does your company plan to offer next year?

- Landscape lighting 13%
- Irrigation/water management 12%
- Green Services 11%
- Waterscapes 10%
- Lawn care 9%
- Design/build 7%
- Mowing/maintenance 7%
- Holiday lighting 7%
- Mosquito control 6%
- Tree & ornamental 6%
- Snow removal 5%
- Pest control 4%
- Other 3%



care services (7 percent growth vs. 10 and 12 percent in the West/Southwest and East/Midwest regions, respectively), but they more than made up for it in irrigation work where the average company grew 17 percent compared to 11 and 3 percent in the West/Southwest and East/Midwest, respectively. Many South/Southeast firms, though challenged by severe droughts this year, thank them for the increased irrigation business.

Some contractors are noticing a number of less established companies in their markets are folding or pursuing other paths until the economy shows signs of recovery, but "fewer contractors means more opportunities for those of us who can weather the storm," Frank says.

"In the past 12 to 24 months, we have gained significant market share," Reinhart adds. "It's going to be a survival of the fittest economy for the foreseeable future, and as some of the mediocre companies fail and go out of business, we are positioned to take advantage of that."

snow saves the Day. Record-breaking snow accumulation caused snow and ice control services to grow more than any other service (12 percent), including staples mowing/maintenance and design/build construction. Though this net percent increase is only up 1 percent from last year, all other services dipped, which is why contractors who offer the service cred-

SALES FROM				REGION NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES			S					
	Multi-family structures	Commercial/ industrial	Government/ institutional		West/ Southwest	East/ Midwest	South/ Southeast	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 24	25 or more
6.	2.0%	14.3%	2.8%	3113	14.6%	14.1%	17.6%	36.6%	17.2%	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%
	4.2%	18.9%	4.6%		15.2%	17.8%	19.2%	39.3%	22.4%	11.3%	2.1%	0.0%
	5.7%	30.8%	1.4%		19.9%	18.4%	17.6%	18.8%	32.8%	22.5%	9.3%	1.4%
	5.9%	26.7%	5.6%		24.5%	23.9%	18.4%	5.4%	26.7%	48.2%	21.7%	1.4%
	11.7%	26.0%	5.8%		10.6%	10.4%	12.0%	0.0%	0.9%	10.7%	36.1%	15.5%
	13.6%	39.6%	4.3%		15.2%	16.4%	15.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	31.0%	81.7%
	6.0%	25.0%	4.0%		24.9%	53.8%	20.6%	18.4%	19.1%	26.4%	16.0%	11.7%
				Average Sales	\$734,603	\$750,613	\$574,313	\$81,473	\$155,388	\$333,125	\$1,059,536	\$3,451,056

Source (charts pages 4-5): Lawn & Landscape

it this year's growth to Mother Nature's wintery bounty, calling snow removal "extremely profitable" and where they receive their "best margins."

However, rising salt prices, as well as salt availability, may cut into those profits this snow season. At the start of winter, contractors reported paying, on average, \$86 per ton for rock salt. But by winter's end, the average price for rock salt had climbed to \$124 per ton. "If we're not able to raise snow service prices, we're going to suffer a little bit on the profit side," Dowell points out.

The biggest drops in service revenue when comparing 2007 to 2008 figures were in design/build work, which cut in half from 12 to 6 percent, and irrigation services which dropped from 12 to 9 percent. After splitting the re-

search in two at the median revenue of \$200,000, where half of survey respondents generated less than this figure and half generated more, larger companies were able to maintain service revenues closer to last year's figures, with 8 percent in design/build, 12 percent in irrigation and a higher-than-average 16 percent in snow and ice control services. Simply, this shows larger companies have been more successful at pricing work for maximum profit.

LOOKING AHEAD. Despite contractors' optimism, the constant barrage of negative economic headlines are making business owners more cautious.

"I'm going to be somewhat conservative in 2009 – I'm going to set a budget I feel we can hit," says Tom

Curdes, owner of Barron's Lawn Service/Weed Man, Toledo, Ohio.

"I'm anticipating 2009 to be more difficult than 2008 as far as work availability and pricing are concerned," Williams adds. "If we can hold our own and maintain our size and profitability, I'd be ecstatic."

Many contractors predict the economy will improve in the next 12 to 18 months. But if there's anything to be learned from 2008, it's confidence and persistence, in addition to focusing on profit, keep contractors in control of their growth. As Mike Biskup, president, Greenkeepers Lawn Service & Landscaping in Medina, Ohio, says: "If the economy is bad and we are still growing then it should be even better when the economy turns." **SOI**

TOUGH ECONOMY GIVES MARKETING A BOOST

Falling off the advertising radar to cut back on spending is tempting when other expenses are rising to record levels, but increased marketing and sales activity can actually help businesses combat an economic slowdown. After all, some people are still shopping and no landscape contractor wants business to completely dry up.

In a slow economy, advertising could lure some penny-pinchers into spending money on nonessential services, and marketing could even convince potential clients that what they're being offered is essential, according to SmallBizTechnology.com.

In fact, the National Federation of Independent Business' recent survey says actions and behaviors stimulated by the economic slowdown or fear of a slowdown seem to fall roughly into three categories – sales and marketing being one of them (cash and banking are the other two).

"The key to being successful will be implementing a more aggressive marketing plan and to continue marketing every day," says Rich Walker, owner of Dreamscapes Unlimited in Bethel, Ohio.

Faced with an obstacle like the lack of commercial development and a depressed housing market, David Frank, president and CEO of David J. Frank Landscape Contracting in Germantown, Wis., says "the key is that we are still marketing our services, maintaining our advertising budgets and staying in contact with prospects."

Smart Internet marketing, including making Web site updates and utilizing search engine optimization, in addition to some strong public relations, round out Atlanta-based Bennett Design & Landscape's marketing improvements, which are proving popular among many contractors in today's digital age.

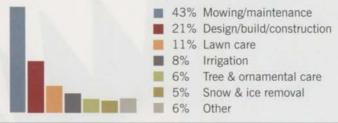
What marketing methods do you use to obtain new business?

MARKETING METHOD	% OF CONTRACTORS
Customer referrals	94.8%
Business associate referrals	65.0%
Company Web site/e-mails	39.0%
Yellow Pages ads	36.7%
Yard signs	33.5%
Direct mail	23.0%
Newspaper ads	22.2%
Cold call sales/canvassing	18.2%
Public relations	16.2%
Internet referral service	15.6%
Internet search	14.7%
Door to door sales	14.0%
Home & Garden shows	11.1%
Radio ads	5.2%
Company retail store	3.5%
Television ads	3.1%
Telemarketing	2.5%

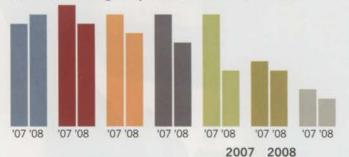
Source: Lawn & Landscape

SERVICE STATION

What percent of your annual sales comes from the following services?

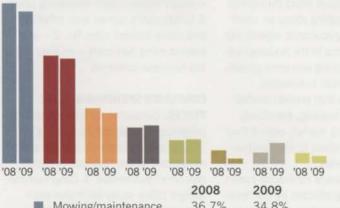


Net sales changes by service in 2007/2008



100	0 0 1	110/	100
-	Snow/ice control	11%	12%
	Lawn care	13%	11%
	Lawn maintenance	12%	10%
	Irrigation	12%	9%
	Construction/design-build	12%	6%
	Arbor/tree care	7%	6%
	Nursery grower	4%	3%

Fastest growing service sectors 2008/expected 2009



19	08 09 08 09 08 09 08	09 08 09	08 09 08 0
		2008	2009
1	Mowing/maintenance	36.7%	34.8%
ı	■ Design/build/installation	24.7%	24%
1	Lawn care	12.7%	11.6%
1	■ Irrigation	8.3%	8.8%
1	Trees & ornamentals	5.4%	5.6%
1	Lighting	3.1%	1.2%
	Snow removal	2.6%	4.8%
	Waterscapes	2.6%	1.9%

Source (all charts this page): Lawn & Landscape

CHIEF CONCERNS

The top 10 concerns landscape contractors have about business in 2009 are:

- Rising fuel prices
- 2. Inflation/rising interest rates
- Low-ball competitors
- 4. Consumer confidence
- Overworked/stressed owners
- 6. Increasing fertilizer prices
- 7. Generating quality leads
- Health Insurance Increases
- o. Health mourance mereases
- New presidential administration
- Delinquent client payments/weather problems/workers compensation costs

Fuel prices have topped this list four four years, so that's no surprise. And the fact that the new presidential administration makes the top 10 this year is also expected. Consumer confidence as a result of a challenging economy jumped from No. 10 last year to No. 4 this year. Yet, surprisingly, overworked/stressed owners dropped from No. 3 to No. 5 this year.

When broken out regionally, most concerns remain ranked as-is except in the South/Southeast where water restrictions jumped to No. 3 (compared to No. 12 nationally) and weather problems shot to No. 5 (compared to No. 10 nationally). The new presidential administration is also a bigger concern for South/Southeast companies, jumping to No. 4 (compared to No. 9 nationally).

After experiencing a two-year drought with severe water restrictions and witnessing some companies in his Indian Trail, N.C. area go bankrupt, Mark Lay, owner of AA Tex Lawn Co., believes South/Southeast companies would have different pressures and, as a result, different concerns.

David Bennett and Dave Price in neighboring Georgia agree. "Certainly the drought coupled with the economic slowdown has forced many landscape companies to go out of business, but it also makes the stronger companies work harder and smarter," the cofounders and principles of Bennett Design & Landscape say.

South/Southeast landscape contractors who didn't diversify services and focused strictly on home builder work are the ones in "serious trouble," they add.



Housing Market Outlook

The housing market may have a bit further to fall but experts predict a turnaround is in sight.

By Nicole Wisniewski

to have a ripple effect throughout the U.S., putting stress on small businesses. Many economic experts say restoring confidence in the housing market is vital to restoring economic growth.

The reason? Small businesses, particularly those that provide related services like landscaping, are closely tied to the housing market, even if they aren't directly involved in the construction or sale of homes.

Even if a landscape contractor hasn't been immediately affected by the housing market, he or she has commented on its link to other business pros and cons – from its influence on consumer spending and confidence to its involvement in increasing market saturation in services beyond residential design/build, such as residential maintenance or commercial design/build and

maintenance. This is the reason green industry professionals answering *Lawn* & *Landscape*'s survey rank inflation and rising interest rates No. 2 – only behind rising fuel costs – on their list of top business concerns.

CONSUMER SPENDING & HOME

PRICES. Consumer spending is directly influenced by real estate, making up 70 percent of economic activity and recognized as the lifeblood of countless small businesses. A Congressional Budget Office study estimates each dollar increase in housing wealth translates to 2 to 7 cents of additional consumer spending. Conversely, a 10 percent decline in home prices could slash consumer spending by as much as \$103 billion to \$316 billion, the CBO study estimates, slicing between 0.7 percent and 2.2 percent from the

nation's Gross Domestic Product.

Sales of new and existing singlefamily homes have fallen dramatically since the peaks in 2005, but recent data suggest the long downslide is nearing an end, the NAHB reports.

Home prices started to decrease in mid-2006 and gathered downward momentum the first quarter of this year, according to the National Association of Home Builders. But the rate of decline has slowed recently, suggesting the massive imbalance between demand and supply in the single-family housing market is being corrected to some degree, the NAHB adds.

Rising foreclosures have been blamed for part of the dip in home values. But a new study called "The Foreclosure-House Price Nexus: Lessons from the 2007-2008 Housing Turmoil," contradicts this theory. saying rising foreclosures will not cause U.S. home values to plunge. According to Texas A&M University's Charlie Hall, "the effects of foreclosure shocks - which promise to grow over the next several months - seem to be smaller than many have feared. Even under their most extreme scenario, the resulting average drop in home prices between 2007 and 2009 would be less than 6 percent."

The study also explained why one landscape contractor in Dallas can boast about a thriving housing market, while a contractor in Fort Worth can state the opposite. There is no "national real estate market," Hall says. Instead, real estate markets looked at by zip code show two extremes exist in many major metropolitan areas, meaning "where you live and operate your business certainly affects business performance," Hall adds.

What's making people so nervous about the market? "Headlines pointing to extreme circumstances in a few states can be misleading about the U.S. as a whole," Hall says. "Despite increased foreclosure rates throughout the country, only 12 states are projected to see foreclosure-induced price declines of 6 percent or more



RISKY REAL ESTATE

According to Forbes, "there's roulette and there's skydiving... then there's investing in Detroit and Cleveland real estate – markets the magazine says are in freefall. "Lenders have fled, foreclosures are on the rise, homes aren't selling and local economies have stalled," the magazine reports. "The riskiest were those that had the highest foreclosure rates, slow job growth or job loss and a rash of listed homes."

By these measures, Orlando has everything working against it. Other spots, like Denver, for instance, exhibit negative characteristics like fore-closures, lending problems and vacancies, but are adding jobs, a sign the local economy can better handle these difficulties.

In a related story, *Forbes* also compiled a list of the Top 10 Worst-Selling Markets – the most sedentary housing areas, featuring a potent mix of dropping prices and sluggish sales. They include:

- Miami
- Denver
- · San Diego
- · Baltimore
- · Washington, D.C.
- Los Angeles
- · Tampa, Fla.
- · Phoenix
- · Orlando, Fla.
- Chicago

LOCATION, LOCATION

LOCATION CITY (Worst - Best Zip Codes) Las Vegas (89085 - 89005)Worst Cleveland (44139 - 44001)Best Seattle (98199 - 98034)Philadelphia (21919 - 08057)(30310 - 30022)Atlanta (33573 - 33606)Tampa New York (08737 - 11963)Minneapolis (55409 - 55127)(93591 - 90004)Los Angeles (84044 - 84103)Salt Lake City (48214 - 48304)Detroit (85031 - 85018)Phoenix (80216 - 80007)Denver Washington, D.C. (22191 - 22043)Chicago (60649 - 60613)San Francisco (94801 - 94920)Boston (01902 - 02481)(77380 - 77418)Houston Miami (33314 - 33469)(76110 - 73220)Dallas -25 25 -50 50 Price change %

Source: Economic Data

^{*} Atlanta, a likely contender for the top 10, was not considered due to irregularities in inventory reporting.

through 2009, led by Nevada, Florida, California and Arizona."

credit Markets. Housing also affects small-business credit. According to AllBusiness.com, 45 percent of outstanding small-business loans are collateralized by some type of real estate asset. Small-business owners, in particular, often rely on home equity loans and credit lines. Some say the decline in home prices and in the collateral that real estate represents has damaged this credit.

The Federal Reserve reports 65 percent of the domestic banks it surveyed this summer raised their lending standards on commercial and industrial loans for small businesses, up from 50 percent in the spring. In some cases, this means banks are demanding higher credit scores and want more collateral before lending.

Small-business owners who say they've had a harder time getting loans rose to 10 percent this year, according to the National Federation for Independent Business' September Small Business Economic Trends survey. This compares to only 3 percent in 2003. But NFIB Chief Economist Bill Dunkelberg says the percentage of business owners having difficulty getting loans in previous economic downturns was much higher than today.

HOUSING MARKET PROS. While NAHB says builders continue to cut back on new home production, responding to weak demand and heavy supply in many U.S. regions, "people are still comfortable investing in their current homes and making the most of their existing properties," says David Frank, president and CEO, David J. Frank Landscape Contracting, Germantown, Wis.

QUICK FIX?

If you could fix one economic challenge to help your business in 2009, what would it be?



Even the increase in foreclosures has presented opportunities for some. "We're doing about \$1,000 a month or more just in maintaining the landscaping of foreclosure homes," says Tom Curdes, owner of Weed Man Toledo/ Barron's Lawn Service, Toledo, Ohio.

HOUSING FORECAST. The housing situation is on the minds of most landscape business owners, but it's something Brandon Rushing says everyone should have seen coming. "The housing market is going down to correct for the 30-percent gains seen for two to five years straight," says the founder and president of B. Rushing Lawn & Landscaping in Lorton, Va.

Though it's high on the concerns list, when probed further, only 5.5 percent of contractors chose the credit-financing crunch/foreclosure crisis as the one economic challenge they would fix to aid their businesses in the coming year if given the chance. Maybe they see what the NAHB and Mortgage Bankers Association predict – a light at the end of the housing slump tunnel.

The Mortgage Bankers Association expects housing activity to recover moderately in 2009. "As economic growth accelerates to trend pace in 2010 and credit conditions return to more normal levels, we expect significant improvement in both housing starts and home sales," the organization reports. **SOI**

COMMERCIAL MARKET OUTLOOK

Commercial construction isn't faring nearly as poorly as residential.

But after strong growth in 2007, commercial construction is expected to pull back, according to Economy.com's Nathan Topper. "Historically, housing-related recessions have slowed business investment in new buildings," he says. "This housing downturn should be no different."

Other economic analysts agree, saying a lengthy downturn would probably lead many commercial property owners to struggle with their mortgage bills. Commercial real estate pricing is starting to reflect a tightening in commercial lending, analysts say.

But if this is the economist's prediction, the landscape industry isn't feeling it yet. In fact, with housing news of late, the commercial sector has become attractive to contractors who once only offered residential services.

"The housing industry collapse has created a significant shift in the supply and demand equation, and there are lots of contractors chasing less work, and those who focused just on residential are moving into commercial and moving into maintenance," shares Todd Williams, vice president and regional director of Denver-based American Civil Constructors.

And they are "desperate for work and bidding our sector of business cheap," says Mark Lay, owner of AA Tex Lawn Co. in Indian Trail, N.C.

The situation is causing prices to decline, "which is tough in light of our costs going up," Williams explains.

As a result, contractors are redirecting marketing initiatives to stronger, less affected areas of the commercial sector – health care and government work.







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The Cash Flow Crunch

When it comes to juggling rising costs, equipment needs and pricing, landscape contractors say, 'you can only play so much defense and so much offense.'

By Nicole Wisniewski

aurice Dowell used to purchase equipment like "a kid in a candy store."

This year, "there is an air of caution and concern," says the owner of St. Louis-based Dowco Enterprises.

Even though more contractors talk about being a bit more watchful when it comes to spending, 53 percent of landscape contractors answering the *Lawn & Landscape* survey increased their equipment budgets this year, and 61.7 percent plan to increase their equipment budgets next year.

This is more positive compared to the general small-business community. Twenty percent of small-business owners reduced, postponed or cancelled planned investments or reinvestments in the last six months, though 11 percent increased plans, a recent National Federation of Independent Business study says. "A slowing economy is the primary reason for the curbed investment in more than half of the cases," the research reports.

Additionally, over the past six months, small-business owners have become more attentive to their cash flow and inventory status, NFIB says. Two-thirds now watch their cash flow more closely with 60 percent of that group attributing their action to the slowing economy. Of those with inventories, 52 percent are watching them more closely – with nearly half of this group (46 percent) attributing this increased vigilance to a slowing economy.

UP, UP, UP. Most contractors have a hard time trying to list what business costs *haven't* increased today.

"Rising fuel, fertilizer, pipe, wire and other materials costs are definitely impacting our business," says Richard Sperber, CEO, ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., Calabasas, Calif.

"Nurseries and suppliers delivering products and plant stock have increased prices 30 percent or more across the board and they all blame higher distribution charges," says Rich Walker, owner of Dreamscapes Unlimited in Bethel, Ohio

To describe fertilizer price increases in the past couple of years, contractors use the term "quadrupled" and the phrase "gone up astronomically." The increasingly expensive lawn need is No. 6 on landscape contractors' top concerns list – the first time this concern has made it to the top 10. In a recent five-month period, Dowell says fertilizer went from \$150 to \$162 per acre.

Fertilizer fees are rising right along with the other escalating cost no one can stop talking about – fuel prices, which ranks at the top of landscape contractors' concerns list.

"It seems gas will raise at times 10 to 15 percent in a day and then it takes weeks to drop a few cents," Walker says, adding fuel costs used to make up 2 to 3 percent of his company's total sales, but now exceed 12 percent.

Sure, when fuel increases 30 percent but is only 3 percent of total sales, "it's not the end of the world," points out Todd Williams, vice president and regional director of Denver-based American Civil Constructors. But when fuel prices start to grow as a percent of sales, profits sink.

Dowell's fuel costs are up 35 percent this year, which were up 20 percent last year. "It's taking a bigger portion of our budget to keep equipment running," he says.

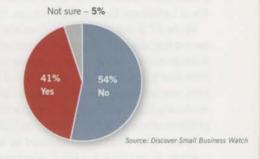
Fuel costs have cut into profits so much at Chris Hurlow's company that "we have to be very tight with our routes," says the lawn care manager of Fast Eddy's in Mount Vernon, Ohio, adding that 80 percent of the company's estimating is now done outside of a truck. "We use cars and motorcycles to cut down on fuel costs."

Bob Keyes checks prices in town and plans service routes to pass the cheapest gas stations. "We're working longer days and fewer days of the week," says the president of The Keyes Group in Langhorne, Pa.

In addition to increasing route density, Lee Helmberger, owner of Lee's

CASH CONCERNS

Over the past 90 days, has your business encountered any temporary cash flow issues that caused you to hold off on paying some bills?



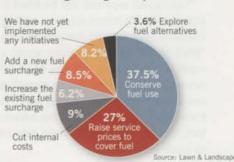
SMALL BUSINESS SPENDING

Over the next six months, will your company increase or decrease spending on business development activities, such as advertising, inventories and capital expenditures?



FUEL FIX

What is your main initiative in combating rising fuel prices?



Lawn Service, actually turned down jobs that were further from his Omaha, Neb. headquarters or were less profitable as a result of fuel prices.

David Frank now includes a clause in his multi-year contracts, allowing him to increase prices if crude oil exceeds a certain level to protect Germantown, Wis.-based David J. Frank Landscape Contracting from gas hikes.

While 37.5 percent of contractors conserved fuel use and 27 percent raised prices to cover rising fuel costs, others added or increased fuel surcharges – 8.5 and 6.2 percent, respectively. But these solutions, albeit necessary, leave some wondering how much of this customers can take going into 2009.

"Many other costs have increased as well – where do you draw the line?" questions Todd Reinhart, owner of Reinhart Grounds Maintenance in Bloomington, III. "You could add a health insurance surcharge, a fertilizer surcharge, a vehicle surcharge, a wage surcharge, etc."

"I think surcharges are annoying – I won't do it," agrees David Bennett, cofounder and principal of Atlanta-based Bennett Design & Landscape. "The bottom line is everyone is paying more for fuel – run your business right and deal with your costs of doing business."

EQUIPMENT EXPENSES. While 27.3 percent of contractors tried not to buy any equipment that was unnecessary this year or opted to say, "we can get another year out of it," the majority still purchased necessary tools.

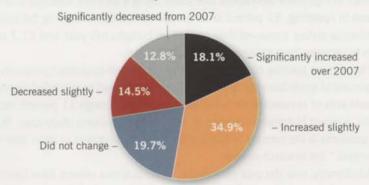
Mike Biskup, president of Medina, Ohio-based Greenkeepers Lawn Service & Landscaping, spent 40 percent more on equipment this year, while Frank made a 10 percent equipment investment in 2008 and plans for another 10 percent in 2009.

While Walker tried not to buying anything unnecessary, "even in bad times it seems you always have needs," he says.

"Our capital expenses will be down if we're not growing," Williams explains, adding his company grew 5 to 10 percent this year. "We'll do belt tightening within reason to make sure everything matches up. It's the nature of this industry. You do everything you can so when good times come, you're positioned to be successful and take advantage of that. You can only play so much defense and so much offense." **SOI**

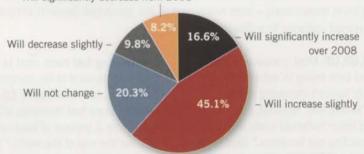
EQUIPMENT BUDGETS

2008 EQUIPMENT BUDGETS



2009 EQUIPMENT BUDGETS

Will significantly decrease from 2008



Source (all charts this page). Lawn & Landscape

SUPPLY LIST

EQUIPMENT TYPE	2008 AVERAGE EXPENDITURE	% CHANGE FROM 2007
Handheld equipment (backpack/handheld blowers, trimmers, edgers, chainsaws, landscape tools)	\$7,265	86%
Equipment rentals	\$4,497	67%
Snow & ice products	\$21,734	31%
Construction equipment (skid-steers and attachments, mini skid-steers, excavators, trenchers)	\$72,972	-6%
Mowers (walk-behind/riding)	\$19,447	14%
Sprayers & Spreaders	\$2,664	15%
Trees/Shrubs/Plants/Seed/Sod	\$71,376	1%
Trucks & trailers	\$52,390	1%
Pesticides/fertilizers/tree care products/PGRs	\$36,061	-3%
Technology (computers, business/design software, GPS)	\$8,560	-32%
Irrigation controllers/valves/sprayheads/ro- tors/Design/Build (Landscape lighting, water features, retaining	\$28,196	-33%
Design/build (landscape lighting, retaining walls, pavers/patios, water features)	\$66,315	-35%



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Swelling Service Fees

Double-digit price hikes keep landscape businesses profitable. By Nicole Wisniewski

andscape contractors are being squeezed of their extra pennies – from rising fuel and health insurance costs to surcharges covering these same items appearing on supplier bills.

And, on top of that, "when the economy is down, customers think they can get a deal," says David Bennett, cofounder and principal of Atlantabased Bennett Design & Landscape.

As a result, in today's economy, landscape contractors spend a lot more time crunching numbers so they don't bid too low and lose money on jobs. "We have turned down jobs because the client has a proposal from another company and we know we can't match it," Bennett and Price say. "Arrogance in the marketplace could cost you your company."

While many customers are pressuring contractors to lower service fees, in reality the majority have succeeded in raising prices this year. In fact, prices increased on average across the board from nearly 11 percent for residential chemical lawn care to 19 percent for commercial design/build work. Residential and commercial mowing prices that increased 11.6 and 10.1 percent, respectively, last year jumped to 12.2 and 14.3 percent this year.

HAD TO DO IT. One of the main reasons for price increases this year was basic economics. "We raised prices in con-

struction work to match the increased prices we're seeing for materials," says Todd Williams, vice president and regional director of Denver-based American Civil Constructors.

"We felt that to remain financially viable we did not have another alternative," agrees Bob Keyes, president of The Keyes Group in Langhorne, Pa.

And many companies "will continue to raise prices to meet our goals and margins," explains Todd Reinhart, Reinhart Grounds Maintenance in Bloomington, Ill. "If a company is not maintaining a decent return on investment, it makes no sense to be in business."

PRICE WARS. What happens when you need to raise prices, but the competition makes it impossible to do so? In maintenance, for instance, "so many are bidding that work cheap," Williams says. Consequently, contractors are either turning down less profitable work or manipulating their pricing to keep key clients. But as Mike Biskup, president of Greenkeepers Lawn Service & Landscaping in Medina, Ohio, warns: "This business is relatively easy to get into but hard to stay in if you're not pricing right."

The one category where Lawn & Landscape research revealed large pricing discrepancies was in design/build work. While average fees increased

on par with other services, when we split the research in half at the median revenue of \$200,000 – with half of survey respondents generating revenue above this figure and half below – average fees changed substantially. Average residential design/build work went for \$2,782.80 for companies with revenue less than \$200,000 and \$7,695.60 for companies with revenue above the median. Commercial figures were \$4,812.60 and \$13,430.40, respectively, revealing that smaller companies probably aren't charging enough for this work to ensure they cover their costs.

customers understand. Luckily, considering price increases across the board even on everyday items, many customers "understand the increases because they feel it themselves at the pump" and in other places, points out Grant Sorterup, owner of Heritage Landscaping in Waldoboro, Maine.

Some customers do feel like it's a little bit of "double jeopardy, but they understand our position," Keyes adds.

Many contractors think while continuing price increases will likely be necessary in 2009, customers may become less understanding. But, as Maurice Dowell, owner of Dowco Enterprises in St. Louis, Mo., says, to maintain a profitable business today, "we have to do what we have to do." **SOI**

RISING RATES

SERVICE	2007 PRICE	2008 PRICE	% CHANGE			
Residential mowing	\$42.70 per hour	\$47.90 per hour	12.2%			
Commercial mowing	\$48.20 per hour	\$55.10 per hour	14.3%			
Residential chemical lawn care	\$16.70 per 1,000 square feet	\$18.50 per 1,000 square feet	10.8%			
Commercial chemical lawn care	\$53.30 per acre	\$59.80 per acre	12.2%			
Residential design/build	\$5,164.10 (avg. project size)	\$5,850.50 (avg. project size)	13.3%			
Commercial design/build	\$9,075.40 (avg. project size)	\$10,799.90 (avg. project size)	19.0%			

Source: Lawn & Landscape

Today's Customer

Though polls say half of consumers are worried about cash, contractors report a slow-to-decide, but still viable customer.

hile Gallup polls show 44 percent of Americans are worried about money and 50 percent rate economic conditions as poor, most contractors say customers are still buying, albeit they have become slower decision makers.

"When there's downward pressure on our pricing and upward pricing on the things we buy, that's pretty scary," says Todd Williams, vice president and regional director of Denver-based American Civil Constructors. "Most people haven't seen anything like that in their lives, and it doesn't lend toward consumer confidence."

This also means customers are shopping around more for best prices. But the good news is money is still coming in. "The necessary projects are still being done," says Mike Biskup, president, Greenkeepers Lawn Service & Landscaping, Medina, Ohio. "People are mainly scaling back instead of cancelling, and they seem to be watching their budgets more because of unknowns in the economy."

According to Lawn & Landscape research, 36.5 percent of contractors report residential customers scaled back construction projects, while only 16.8 percent say commercial customers did the same.

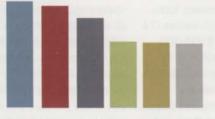
Only 22.5 percent of contractors say residential customers cancelled programs entirely.

While customers are still spending, projects are getting smaller, some notice. Brandon Rushing sees opportunity with homeowners who did not overspend during the good years of real estate growth, but he says clients are more savvy, particular and conservative today. "We've seen our average job go from \$16,000 to \$8,000," says the president of B. Rushing Lawn & Landscaping in Lorton, Va.

Residential customers who spent money despite tight cash flow are the ones who have been slower to pay, according to 34.7 percent of contractors, while 33.2 percent of contractors report the same from commercial customers. "Some people have been sending in their invoices with partial payments," explains Lee Helmberger, CEO and owner of Lee's Lawn Service in Omaha, Neb., adding this has increased his time spent on collections. "Our biggest obstacle has been cash flow related to putting forth money and waiting for the return." Contractors are thwarting this by concentrating on jobs with the best profit margins and cutting back on wasteful spending and labor expenses. **SOI**

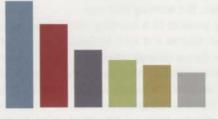
CLARIFYING CUTBACKS

If you saw residential cutbacks this year, how did they reduce their services?



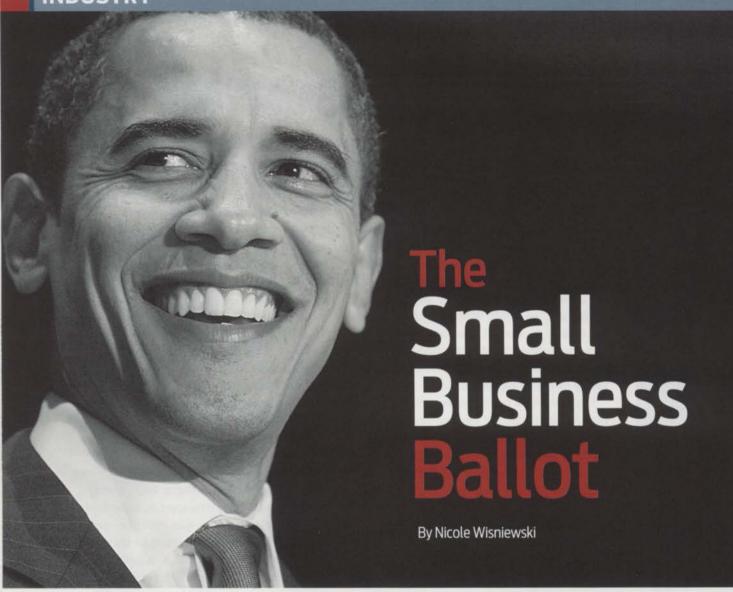
- 36.5% Scaled back construction projects
- 34.7% Didn't cancel, but have been slow to pay
- 30.6% Cancelled lawn care services
- 22.5% Cancelled their programs entirely
- 22.2% Cancelled construction projects
- = 21.8% Cancelled maintenance jobs

If you saw commercial cutbacks this year, how did they reduce their services?



- 43.2% Landscape services out to bid
- 43.2 % Landscape services out to bid
- 33.2% Didn't cancel, but have been slow to pay
- 22.9% Cancelled construction projects
- 18.8% Cancelled maintenance jobs
- 16.8% Scaled back construction projects
- 13.8% Cancelled lawn care services

Source: Lawn & Landscape



paign in full swing, the candidates are setting their sights on voters who own their own businesses. But winning their support may prove to be a daunting task for Barack Obama and John McCain.

Rather than a colossal voting bloc, the small-business community covers a vast channel of characteristics and creeds. The Small Business Administration estimates there are 23 million small-business owners, while the National Federation of Independent Business, counting only those who operate their business as a primary income, estimates 16 million. Because they make up 15 percent

of registered voters, by the federation's calculation, any shift in their voting intentions could tip the balance in a close race for the White House.

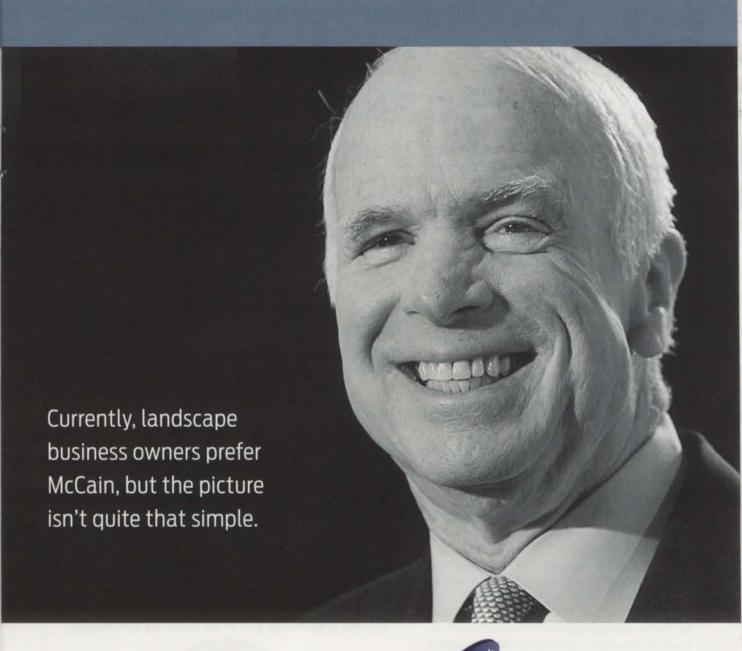
Unfortunately, small-business lobbyists and landscape business owners (74 percent of which bring in \$500,000 or less annually) are frustrated at the scarcity of details from the candidates on many small-business policies.

"We are watching the election closely to see what each party's platform will include," says Lee Helmberger, owner, Lee's Lawn Service, Omaha, Neb. "Neither candidate has come straight out yet to give their opinion on environmental issues or small business."

When it comes to what they

think would be best for their businesses, 66.8 percent of respondents to Lawn & Landscape's survey prefer a Republican-run administration wins the upcoming presidential election. As far as landscape customers are concerned, when asked which candidate will have the most positive influence on their pocketbooks, a majority 40 percent of people answering a CNNMoney.com poll chose McCain. But regular Gallup polls tracking voter preference change daily – on Sept. 25th they were tied with 46 percent each. By presstime, Obama had a seven-point lead.

"Typically, Democrats are not a friend to any size business, and I am truly concerned should Obama win



the election that we could be faced with one of the most hostile business environments since the Jimmy Carter years," shares Todd Reinhart of Reinhart Grounds Maintenance in Bloomington, III. "Combine that with the current status of the American economy and it could truly spell disaster."

But some don't want to discount the possible positive affect a change in administration could have on client spending. "An election of Obama may improve consumer confidence in the short term," points out Bruce Bachand, vice president of Carol King Landscape Maintenance in Orlando, Fla.

Despite McCain's clear lead in the landscape industry sector, it's not that cut-and-dry. The final outcome will be based on each
candidate's stance on specific
issues. The current top voter
issue is the economy, with
gas prices, Iraq and health
care remaining important, a Gallup poll
says, adding "a continuing uptick in
consumer confidence, downward drift
in gas prices and increase in perceived
success in Iraq could benefit McCain."

OUT OF POCKET. All three small-business association lobbies – the NFIB, NSBA and the National Association for the Self-Employed – agree the tax cuts initiated by President Bush should be made permanent, a position shared by

McCain, who also plans to cut the top corporate tax rate to 25 percent from its current 35 percent. Obama plans to leave the rate as is and extend tax cuts for households earning less than \$250,000.

"For the long haul, McCain would reduce taxes and try to stimulate economic recovery," Bachand says.

HEALING THE SYSTEM. The NFIB says health care costs have increased 129 percent in the last eight years – the biggest reason why it's the No. 1 issue of concern for its members. The NASE also found strong support for health care reform among its members.

Concerning a mandate requiring

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

employers to cover their workers' health insurance costs, all three small-business lobbies oppose it.

This is the one area where McCain seems to have an edge. While Obama hasn't said he supports a mandate, he has said he plans to require all companies to offer health insurance or contribute to employee coverage. Under the plan, *small* businesses will not have to provide coverage; they will be offered a tax credit to encourage them to do so. But Obama hasn't specified how small a company would have to be to qualify – a key stipulation that small-business owners and lobbyists are waiting for.

Another labor-related issue contractors are watching closely is immigration. While Obama and McCain support guest worker programs and a path to legalization for illegal immigrants that includes learning English and paying fines, Obama plans to toughen penalties for hiring illegal immigrants.

"I think both McCain and Obama are sympathetic to the industry's needs and are in alignment with the industry's position in respect to immigration issues," says Todd Williams, vice president and regional director of Denver-based American Civil Constructors.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME. Both Obama and McCain envision the Federal Housing Administration providing new, cheaper mortgages to distressed homeowners.

Obama wants to create a \$10 billion fund to counsel homeowners before they slide into foreclosure; help people sell homes they bought but could not afford; and ensure loans can be modified in a timely manner to avoid foreclosure or bankruptcy.

If the next president can make people more optimistic, "the slow rebuilding of confidence will help to increase home values," contends Cal Jillson, a political science professor at Southern Methodist University.

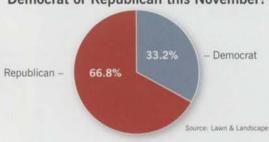
CREDIT CRISIS. In a recent New York Times article, George Cloutier, chief executive of American Management Services, a Florida consulting firm for small businesses, says the biggest small-business concern is banks' stinginess with credit. In fact, 72 percent of respondents to a recent Discover Small Business Watch survey said borrowing money has become harder.

The NFIB is relieved Congress voted yes to the \$700 billion big business bailout plan because its members feel it will improve the credit situation. As NFIB's Tony Gagliardi says, "Sometimes, businesses have to access a line of credit to meet payroll – having that line of credit available is very important."

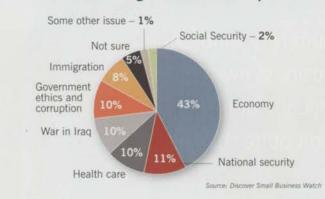
Mike Biskup, president of Greenkeepers Lawn Service & Landscaping in Medina, Ohio, agrees, saying: "It seems that whenever a president is for the working man then the economy is better off." **SOI**

BALLOT BOX

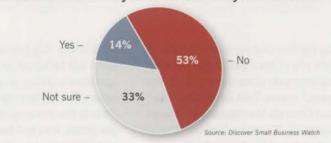
L&L Business Owners: Will you vote for a Democrat or Republican this November?



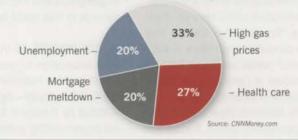
Small Business Owners: When thinking about how you will vote in the 2008 Presidential Election, which of the following issues is most important?



Small Business Owners: Has the 2008 election season created a forum for you to be heard by candidates?



American Consumers: Which issue should be the priority of the new president?



Economy Broadens Labor Pool

Labor is easier to come by and owners give themselves a raise this year.

By Nicole Wisniewski

he crumpling home building market and corporate layoffs as a result of economic-related downsizing have lead to high unemployment rates in some regions. Consequently, few contractors report having a hard time finding labor this year.

In southeastern Wisconsin, the availability of qualified labor, including middle management, is the best it's been in five or six years, says David Frank, president and CEO of David J. Frank Landscape Contracting.

In Bob Keyes' Langhorne, Pa. market, a rough start where the president of The Keyes Group was down three workers resulted in an influx of interested applicants mid-season as other local contractors scaled back their crews.

Owners experienced the most challenges with "in-between positions" – this was especially the case with crew chiefs/foremen, says David Bennett, cofounder and principal of Atlantabased Bennett Design & Landscape.

While Bennett has a regular flood of

calls and e-mails coming in from landscape architects and designers, "no one is hiring those positions," he adds.

While the majority of news is good, it wasn't all easy filling positions this year. While the applicants were there, they weren't always retainable. "Out of 100 people, we'd interview 20 percent and hire five, but they'd only last a week," shares Chris Hurlow, lawn care manager at Fast Eddy's in Mount Vernon, Ohio. "People who have never been in this industry don't understand how hard this work is."

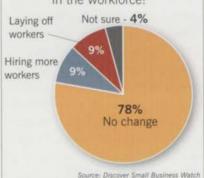
As a result, additional training and turnover were necessary throughout the year, contractors report.

While a few contractors did mention rising expenses absorbing the funds available to divvy out raises, the *Lawn* & *Landscape* survey shows increases in every pay category. Nothing was below double-digit increases in hourly wages, while salary increases were a bit lower, except for the owner and supervisor positions, which saw 20 and 13.9

percent rises, respectively. For the green industry, which is notorious for having owners who don't pay themselves adequately, this is good news. However, when splitting the research at the median revenue of \$200,000, smaller businesses paid owners \$46,068, while larger firms paid owners \$86,434 – an approximate \$40,000 difference. **SOI**

HIRING PLANS

Over the course of the next few months, will your company be hiring more workers, laying off workers or making no change in the workforce?



WAGE WATCH

POSITION	HOURLY WAGE 2007	HOURLY WAGE 2008	% CHANGE
Mower operator (entry-level)	\$ 8.00	\$ 9.00	12.5%
Mower operator (experienced)	\$10.40	\$11.80	13.5%
Spray technician (entry-level)	\$ 8.00	\$ 9.60	20.0%
Spray technician (experienced)	\$11.10	\$12.70	14.4%
Construction worker (entry-level)	\$ 8.40	\$ 9.50	13.1%
Construction worker (experienced)	\$12.30	\$13.70	11.4%

POSITION	ANNUAL SALARY 2007	ANNUAL SALARY 2008	% CHANGE
Owner/President	\$58,031	\$69,629	20.0%
Landscape architect	n/a	\$50,857	n/a
Landscape designer	\$39,696 (designer/architect)	\$42,577	7.3%
Supervisor	\$37,196	\$42,355	13.9%
Account manager	\$37,412	\$40,132	7.2%
Crew foreman/leader	\$28,099	\$29,908	6.4%

Source: Lawn & Landscape

Who Bails Out Small Business?

In the midst of government bailouts and limited bank lending, landscape company owners do what small businesses do – battle it out on their own.

By Nicole Wisniewski

ears like 2008 "are what separate the people who can take on the responsibility of owning a company and those who can't," say David Bennett and Dave Price, coowners and principals of Atlanta-based Bennett Design & Landscape.

"My business partner and I have cut our salaries, we work longer hours now, we work weekends, but we have a lot of employees who depend on us for their mortgages," Bennett and Price explain. "We take that seriously. Our employees know our commitment and they have stepped up their game. We're all in this together."

That's the small-business story in a nutshell. When a small business is faced with challenges, who typically bails it out? The small-business owner.

It's a fact many are talking about after the government recently bailed out business giants Bear Sterns, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and AIG. "Small businesses have a high failure rate and when things go bad there are few options open to entrepreneurs, especially in today's tight credit market," points out Eve Tahmincioglu on MSN's Your Biz.

"It is interesting that the government is bailing out the big companies while the small guys are left to slug it out on our own," says Dale Micetic, president, ISS Grounds Control, Phoenix, Ariz. "If we have issues, the story remains, 'too bad, business is inherently risky everyone knows with reward comes increased levels of risk.' So we are left to our own devices while the availability of labor decreases, costs of fuel, fertilizer and chemicals increase and the levels of government or "compliance" reporting increases - all due to government legislation or lack thereof. Sometimes it can become discouraging being a small business person in the U.S."

Of the more than 1,000 Americans surveyed in a national CNN poll, 62 percent think the government should step in to address the problems facing

Americans think the cost of the \$700 billion plan passed by Congress Oct. 3 is too high. Though 55 percent favor the bailout, 65 percent said it will probably treat taxpayers unfairly.

struggling financial institutions. But

Even a green industry veteran like Micetic can see, while they may seem inappropriate, government bailouts are necessary when they serve to maintain a stable economic market that is healthy and growing. The cost of doing nothing may be much more severe.

"If they don't jump in and fix the 'free fall' in the financial markets, we risk losing foreign investment as well as other revenue sources that drive our economy," he says. "The issues of liquidity impact every small-business owner in his or her ability to borrow money to finance growth. It also impacts our clients in regards to what they are willing to pay for landscape services. If the market meltdown isn't fixed, every American lives life in limbo not knowing if they will have jobs and, therefore, not spending their money on the somewhat discretionary items our industry provides."

In fact, 88 percent of the 518 CNN survey respondents said they are concerned or even scared by the tumult in the financial markets. The criminals in this case are not the politicians, but the "Wall Street guys who continued to take home huge salaries and bonuses while they made decisions that lead to the ruin of the businesses they were entrusted with managing by corporate boards of directors and the stockholders who pay their salaries," Micetic adds. Since the markets are circular and related, failing companies can also negatively impact people's ability to get mortgages and loans - further decreasing the average person's trust in these large corporations. But that could be good news for the small-business owner, who gains another distinguishing point from his larger counterparts - increased trust.

"Yes, the bailout of large business interests is disheartening and will probably be an expensive fix that each American taxpayer will pay for," Micetic adds, "but it is also the best thing for the economic health of the country." **SOI**



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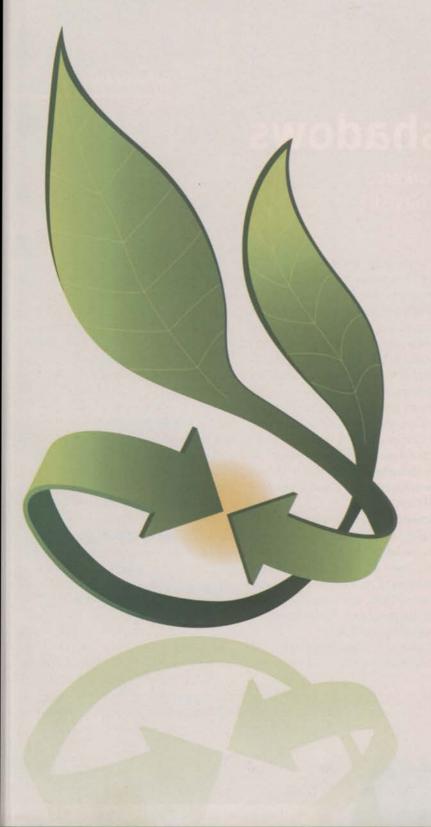




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USE READER SERVICE #67



By Patrick Astre

Work in the shadows

H-2B is capped and you need workers. But is hiring illegal help worth the risk?

t happened in Long Island, N.Y., about four years ago. The man's name was Carlos. (It wasn't, but we'll call him that.) He'd been in the United States for more than a dozen years, was married with American-born children attending local schools, and by most accounts was a dependable, hard-working family guy who'd never committed a crime in his life.

Well, that's not exactly true. Carlos had one crime under his belt: He and his wife immigrated to the U.S. illegally. They crossed the Rio Grande one night and made their way to New York, where

Carlos' nephew helped them settle.

Carlos found work at a small construction company that framed houses. He was one of three employees; two of them, including Carlos, had nothing – no green cards, social security numbers or driver's licenses. And no safety violations caused Carlos to fall from the roof on that unseasonably warm April afternoon.

It was an accident, plain and simple. Because he was building a one-story house, Carlos didn't fall from a great height. But it was enough to cause serious injuries, including a broken back. He had to be air-lifted to Stony Brook University Medical Center.

The construction company didn't sustain physical injuries, but the employers are now bankrupt and out of business—all from Carlos' accident. They still owe large amounts of back taxes and assessed employment fines. They are also facing criminal charges brought by the New York State Department of Labor.

For Carlos, it will be a lengthy time before he's able to do any kind of carpentry, and he will never do the type of work he did before the accident. He is walking again, but with a pronounced limp.

As an illegal alien, Carlos doesn't benefit from any worker's compensation insurance, mandatory New York disability insurance, state unemployment or federal unemployment tax paid. No federal or state income, social security or Medicare taxes were withheld from his paychecks. Carlos was paid in cash – completely off the books. Now, his family lives on the little income his wife generates from cleaning houses, supplemented by charity.

The lives of both Carlos' family and his employer's family have essentially been ruined by an unfortunate fall. Both were decent, honest working folks. They meant well, but didn't have the foresight to do things correctly. Or maybe it was the circumstances and a lack of know-how?

It's estimated that there are between 15 million to 25 million illegal aliens living and working in the U.S. today. Nobody knows the actual number. One thing we can be sure about – all of them are working illegally without the protection of various instruments like worker's compensa-

tion and unemployment insurance. And the people who hire illegal workers are putting their businesses, assets and future earning power at risk. They may even put their own liberty in jeopardy if criminal charges are leveled. In the construction industry, most large contractors require worker's compensation from smaller sub-contractors, eliminating many illegal workers. On Long Island, however, land-scapers are the largest group of employers hiring illegal aliens. And with modest crews, most are independent and work for homeowners and commercial businesses that make no such demands.

So, to avoid putting your personal business and lifestyle at risk, try adhering to the following rules:

- Hire people with documentation, such as a social security card, driver's license, passport or green card.
 - · Put every employee on the books.
- Collect federal and state taxes, social security and Medicare taxes.
- Have protection such as workers compensation, disability insurance and whatever else your state requires. Do this for everyone you hire.

These are the best solutions. But here's the real problem, exactly as told to me by

one of my landscaping clients:

"Patrick, I have no choice. I can't get enough people to work for me. (Illegal workers) are dependable. They do their work and never give you a hard time. I can leave them alone on a job and when I come back it will be done. For me it's not an elective. I want to put them on the books, but I can't because they don't have a social security number. I'm going to keep them working off the books and pay them in cash. I really have no choice."

Of course there are a number of employers that will deliberately hire people off the books to save money. Some will do it out of greed. Some do it to survive in a tough business climate. However, a great many, like my client above, will do it simply because they can't find enough quality workers.

This is quite a dilemma, and the blame lies directly with a federal government that refuses to deal effectively with the H-2B situation. But I can offer some sort of solution.

Let me first say that it is not a good solution. There are no good solutions. The main thing is that it will bring about some protection by putting illegal workers on the books, paying the taxes and bringing them under the protection of workers compensation and other programs mandatory under current labor laws.

It's important to understand that this is not a solution from a pro- or antiimmigrant author. As an accountant and financial advisor (who works daily with landscapers, contractors and a variety of business owners) I am a realist. I believe we must face this situation and deal with it as best as possible. Burying our heads in the sand is no longer an option.

Here is the alternative for employers hiring an illegal worker:

Have the employee apply for a TIN (Tax Identification Number) through the Philadelphia Internal Revenue Service office. The number is issued automatically. Even though the immigrant may be here illegally, they still receive this number. It's not a social security number, but it looks like one – three digits, then two, then four. Now, put the employee on the books using that number. Collect social security, federal and state withholding, and all the taxes required. Put the employee on workers compensation.

Are you legal now? Certainly not!

However, you're safer than just distributing cash off the books. It's afforded a



level of protection that didn't exist before. I would also recommend that, before taking this step, you consult with an attorney familiar with your state and local laws.

How does this affect the employee?

First they should consult with an immigration attorney to see if it's suitable for their situation. Employers are more likely to retain an employee they can put on the books and avoid the risks of getting caught by the IRS. There's also the risk of injuries to a worker and ensuing liability. This way, employers have workers compensation and other required instruments

Yet getting a TIN proves a worker is in the country illegally. This will bar issuance of a legal visa for five years (10 years if you've been in America longer than six months), which will be a problem if there's a visa pending; perhaps something like an H-2.

This has not been a concern for those I have spoken to. They will not go back to their homelands just to apply for a visa that may not be issued for decades, if at all. Most have risked their very lives to get to America and will not return voluntarily.

Each party must make their own decisions, and I strongly recommend consulting with a knowledgeable immigration attorney before making this decision.

It's true - an employer's safest bet is to only hire workers who are here legally and put them on the books. But if you are going to continue employing illegal immigrants, at least this method is better than just paying them under the table and absorbing all the risk. (L)

ANLA Testimonials

On April 16, 2008, ANLA Executive VP Robert J. Dolibois, CAE, attended the House Immigration Subcommittee hearing on the H-2B program. The following excerpts are from an addendum to his deposition:

Type of Operation: Retail Garden Center/Farm Market

Location: Massachusetts

Regular number of H-2B Workers: 20 per season

- · "The positions they held were as kitchen workers everything from dishwashers to line cooks and kitchen counter customer service. They were also retail stock clerks - cashiers and stockers in our market and garden center. Many of these employees had been coming back to us for more than 10 years and are like family. They went home every year to be with their families in the winter months."
- · "This shortage has me scrambling to find workers to replace them and, here on Nantucket, this is especially difficult. Since we are 30 miles at sea, commuting is not an option for most people. We are either forced to provide what little housing we can or pay more and only choose from people currently living on our small island."
- "Given the poor performance of the American dollar, many Americans will stay in the States for their vacations and more Europeans will travel here to take advantage of the exchange rate. That means this could very well be a busy tourist season on Nantucket. But if we, as a destination spot, can't meet the needs of our customers in satisfactory way, then these tourists won't come back."

Type of Operation: Landscape Design/Installation

Location: Rhode Island

Regular number of H-2B Workers: 25 per season

- "I'm short 25 of my 30 employees currently. The five remaining workers are all upper management. The workers we lost are the veteran laborers, equipment operators and masons."
- · "I've attempted to hire new American workers to fill these slots, but based on the past month's production numbers and the low quality of the work, I'm very concerned that my very hard-earned reputation and credibility will be shot by the end of the year. When this happens, there'll be no more work for the five people who earn at least \$50,000 to \$75,000 annually with full benefits and have families to support."
- · "I'm gravely concerned that my company is self destructing, and there appears to be nothing I can legally do to prevent this. We haven't only lost the labor but the mid-level crew leader who makes upper management's job possible and viable. My managers and I are out laboring in the field trying to keep it together and it's physically impossible to be all things right now."
- "At this moment I have \$750,000 in work to complete. I already turned down \$100,000 directly due to the lack of returning, trained workers. I'm scared to take on any more."

Type of Operation: Nursery/Landscape Installation **Location:** Virginia

Regular number of H-2B Workers: 5 per season

- "I want Congress to understand the impact their stand on H-2B has on our company. Because we install the plants that we grow, I need H-2B workers: two men to install pavers, flagstone and brick from a separate location; three to drive trucks. Clients clamor for their work. They are multi-faceted in their abilities."
- "I bought a house one mile down the road for the nine months or less they stay in the country, so that they'd have a nice place to stay. I know I don't have to do this, but I like to reward my best employees, and these guys are the best."
- "Without these men, I will go under after 26 years as a woman-owned and solely-started business. I'm also losing customers who are fighting to get these men back. It takes time I don't have. I have worked many hard hours to get the respect I receive from customers."
- "Without these men, I'm afraid foreclosure isn't far away from the house I bought for them to live in. The truck might be reposessed. These men are part of our community and are missed by the neighbors."

Type of Operation: Landscape Contractor/Maintenance

Location: Tennessee

Regular number of H-2B Workers: 35 per season

- "We are a landscape contracting firm with a lawn maintenance department that's hired as many as 35 H-2B workers over the last couple of years. It's hot work and the fact that it's seasonal makes it hard to find Americans who want to do this type of work. We need good, dependable workers. Our business has grown in that division to \$2.5 million per year. When we started using the H-2B we were probably doing about \$1 million per year."
- "This work is very labor intensive and these men came every year, learned our property and did great work. They were here every day and took great pride in their work. Their endeavors certainly helped grow our maintenance department."
- "Last year, when things starting slowing down the process, we only got 12 of our 35 men. Because the paperwork was jammed, we didn't even get those men until May. That four-week delay caused our company to lose \$250,000 in business because we simply did not have the manpower to take care of all our clients."
- "2008 was a disaster. We filed three different petitions and all were approved by the state because we couldn't get any workers. But because the cap was met so quickly, INS stopped the paperwork. Based on the outcome of this year and what happens in early 2009, we could be laying off three or four managers – all with families, all who have been with us for five to 10 years."

Snow, ice, mud, rock and salt is the dirty dish you'll push and blow this season, which means you need the most durable equipment to withstand the rigors of winter's grind.



Type of Operation: Garden Center/Greenhouse

Location: Oklahoma

Regular number of H-2B Workers: 10 per season

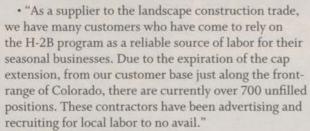
- "We have a very unique sales curve, with the vast majority of sales taking place during a 10 to 12 week period between April and June, and a secondary peak taking place during 10 to 12 weeks in the early fall. As such, we hire seasonal employees, almost doubling our labor force during the key seasons."
- · "We started using the H-2B program about six years ago. These employees are extensively trained to use landscape equipment and to perform specific tasks related to landscaping. The employees are invaluable to the company and they're paid well. With them, we've developed a dependable continuity, which allows us to hit the ground running as soon as the heavy workload begins."
- · "In 2008, we were unable to bring those 10 employees back to work. This has affected our landscape and greenhouse production departments. Extensive recruitment efforts have yielded a few applicants for these key positions, most of whom were untrained, and some of whom have already left the company."
- "The landscape department has been forced to turn away sales prospects because the novice crews have affected efficiency. Likewise, the production department is lagging behind due to difficulty in employee retention and the loss of key H-2B employees. We hire recent landscape design graduates to manage landscape projects, as well as horticulture graduates, and we can only justify their employment if we have the labor force to accomplish the work."
- · "In December 2007, an ice storm devastated landscapes in our city. If we had been able to secure our H-2B labor force, we would have been prepared for the task of assisting our customers in their property repairs and replanting of trees and shrubs. Without access to our trained workforce, the opportunity for us to lead in this effort has been compromised."

Type of Operation: Landscape Contractor/Maintenance Location: New Jersey

Regular number of H-2B Workers: 75 per season

- · "We are primarily a large, nationally recognized landscape maintenance firm that also has a construction department. We have hired as many as 150 H-2B workers over the last 13 of years of petitioning DOL/INS/Homeland Security and applying to obtain a legal work force."
- "We've brought many of the same workers back year after year, which has aided us in having workers who know how to perform the same work and provide us with a high-quality product output. Our maintenance department, into which many of the H-2B workers are brought, generates approximately \$8 to \$9 million in revenue each year"
- · "We are unable to find dependable and willing workers in our local markets for this outdoor work. Without these temporary seasonal H-2B workers, we would've been unable to grow our business to where it is today!"
- · "We have zero H-2B workers this year. We've had to rely on temporary, inexperienced help and an increased workload thrown onto subcontractors to get contracted work done. If not, we would have had to turn down any new work to stay in business. The houses that we provided for H-2B workers are empty this year."

Type of Operation: Nursery/Industry Supplier Location: Colorado Regular number of H-2B Workers: N/A



"Our company has been enrolled in the E-Verify program for almost a year now. Much has been said about what small businesses can do more of to avoid being a magnet for illegal immigration. We have experienced that we have no problem attracting applicants for our open positions. Our problem is that less than two percent come back eligible to work that do apply. We have pursued hiring high school kids, college students, created internship programs and many other avenues to find workers we need for both our nursery operations and our distribution center."

• "Many argue that higher wages will attract more local labor. That is an ignorant statement because workers not only decide where to work based upon an hourly wage, but they also care about having a full-time job not just a seasonal one. If we have only a certain amount of workers in the economy, one sector must offer a more attractive job, including better wages, to take labor from other sectors. Many other sectors are able to raise wages and pass on increased labor costs more effectively than in the industries that rely and trust the H-2B visa

program."

• "The users of this program aren't large, faceless corporations that simply operate to screw everyone for the sake of huge profits. These are normal, small business people who want to follow the law, make an honest living, take care of their workers and provide a valuable service to their communities. The workers in this program don't want to become citizens of this country. They want the opportunity the program provides to make wages they could never dream of at home and return each year to their families. H2B is an honorable program that benefits the workers who participate and gives employers a stable, legal workforce." L

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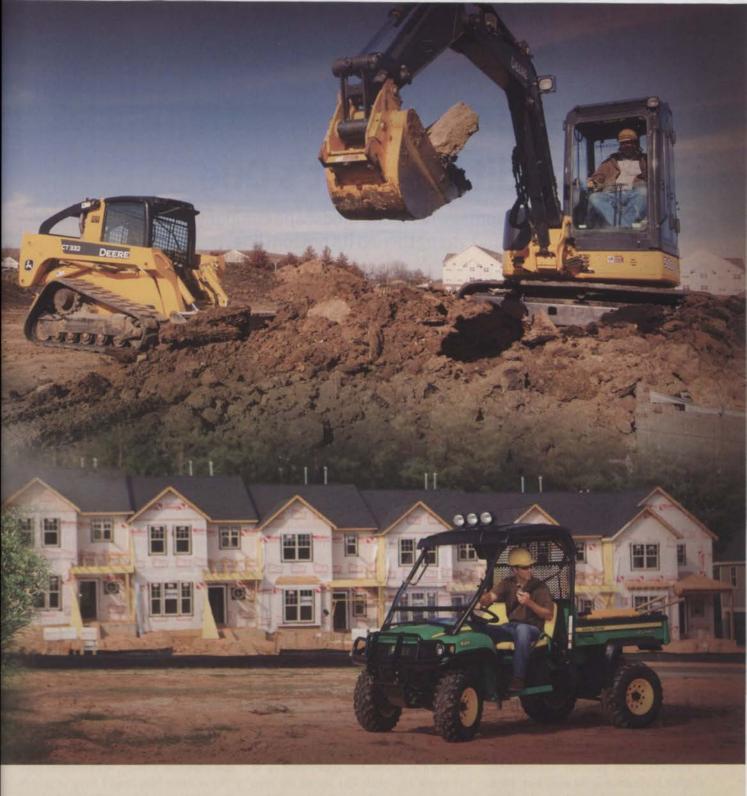


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Giving Credit Where It's Due

By offering financing to homeowners, one landscape company increased its client base and strengthened its bottom line

by Anne Moore Odell

in front of the TV. "I'd see electronics and furniture advertised that offered financing and say, "There has to be a way that I can do that," says Canete, owner and president of Canete Landscaping and Garden Center, headquartered in Wayne, N.J. "If people are willing to finance a couch or a television, there has to be a way for people to

finance landscaping. Landscaping is a

capital improvement. It isn't going to walk

om Canete had his eureka moment

away like a TV could."

After growing his lawn care and landscaping business to include landscape design, snow removal and a 3000-foot garden center with four acres of plantings, Canete saw he could do more. He wanted to reach new clients and realized offering financial flexibility was a key to helping homeowners build their landscaping visions.

Serving Northern N.J., Canete Landscaping (www.canete.com) is one of the only landscapers in its area that offers onsite financing - no bank required. Since offering financing directly to his clients last year, Canete says his top-line numbers are up around 20 percent.

However, the process of becoming eligible to finance is no easy feat. First, you need to have a retail site. In 2002, Canete opened a retail garden store in Wayne. Then he had to apply for a New Jersey banking license, a process that took more than 10 months to complete (Canete received his banking license in 2007).

After exploring different financing companies, Canete decided to go with GE Money, which has nearly 20 years of experience in the home improvement industry and over \$14 billion in home improvement loans originated. Canete couldn't be happier with his choice.

"Financing works well with the economy," Canete explains. "You might know you have a Christmas bonus or tax return coming, but you want to get your landscaping done now."

"Most contractors specializing in remodeling, siding, windows, sunrooms and pools have used consumer credit programs as a way to energize their business," says Bruce Christensen, vice president and general manager of GE Money's home improvement division. "Now, landscaping providers recognize that consumers are a lot more sophisticated about credit, and that financing can be a valuable option."

Canete finds that offering financing

lets clients create the outside space they envision, without being limited by cash on hand. "For example, we did a job in June and the customer only had a budget of \$15,000," Canete says. "But when they learned about financing, by the time we were done, their invoice was \$33,000."

With on-site financing,

there is no reason a client has to wait. Canete's salesmen complete credit forms on site and phone the application in to get quick approval. The terms are zero percent down, with zero percent interest for 12 months.

Christensen says, "Financing is being used by savvy landscapers for projects of every size. As most contractors know, there is a point in the sales process when the customer and contractor must discuss cost and payment options. That is the critical moment when many jobs are either lost or scaled down. Properly presented financing options divide the project into affordable payments and enable the customer to dream bigger.

"In this current environment, we see a focus on improving versus moving, with many homeowners expanding or enhancing their outdoor living space. People recognize the value of curb appeal, as well as adding decks and hardscapes like walkways, patios, firepits and retaining walls. Some may also add features such as decks, pergolas, outdoor kitchens, play areas, fencing and lighting."

Offering financing options also means money in the pocket. Canete explains, "The day you start, you get a third of the cost from GE. You don't get paid in full until the project is completed. The rest of the money gets paid after the consumer

> signs off that the job has been completed."

> Having collections move from the landscaper to GE Money also freed up time for Canete's team, which can learn from GE Money's online tutorials, sales training and marketing materials.

> "We work with our partners to support them in giving the

customer an exceptional experience from design and project outline to billing and customer service," Christensen says. "We've been busy, and I have to give financing some of the credit. Also, I hired two very good salesmen."

Not every kid who started mowing lawns in 1977 had the vision and dedication to grow into a huge landscaping business. But getting a banking license? Well, that takes a different kind of vision, the kind possessed by Canete as he positions his business for the next thirty years. (L)

Anne Moore Odell is a freelance writer who focuses on green businesses and socially responsible investing. She lives in Vermont with her husband and sons.







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Feed the revolution: More consumers have become interested in growing vegetables instead of buying them

By Tracey D. Samuelson

Reclaiming larden Victor

A new kind of food movement breeds a new kind of entrepreneur

n a surprisingly fog-free afternoon in San Francisco Jeremy Oldfield, co-owner of Freelance Farmers, shuffles hand tools and overturned seedlings in the back of his partner's SUV. "We took a turn too fast," he says, scooping a few fistfuls of rich brown soil out onto the pavement. Oldfield already wears a smudge of dirt across his brow and has thin brown crescents under his fingernails. Add to that his overgrown blond hair and a copper beard, and he looks very much like your stereotypical farmer. But Oldfield's not any old grower. He's a new breed of urban farmer, an edible landscaper.

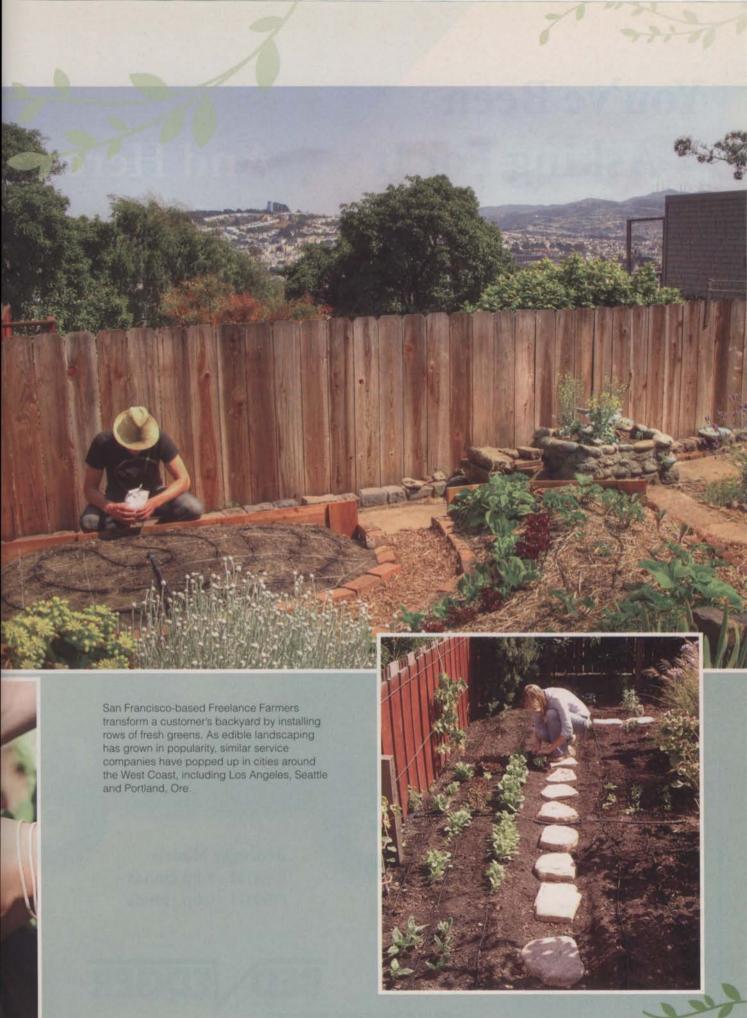
Most Americans are, by now, readily familiar with food movements, the bursts of energy that surround a specific message about the way our food is grown or consumed. Through the years, these movements have taken different forms: During the food shortages of World War I and II, the U.S. government encouraged its citizens to plant "victory gardens," or kitchen gardens, to increase domestic food production and improve morale by including average Americans in the war effort. Later, in the 1960s and 70s, many frustrated urbanites started to abandon their confining cityscapes for rural stands, becoming known as "back to the landers" or "homesteaders." More recently, the organic and local food movements have seen Americans attempt to gain more control over the source of their food products and the conditions under which they were created. Of course, environmental concerns,

regarding both the impact of the growing process and the carbon footprint of longdistance food shipping, have also played significant roles in these movements.

Most recently, the edible landscaping movement has sought to build upon and deepen these traditions by combining organic growing techniques with hyperlocal production - farms so close to the consumer that they're literally located in their backyards. In this sense, the edible landscaping movement seeks to create a network of microfarms across U.S. urban and suburban areas. Where there are currently barren concrete expanses, edible landscaping proponents seek to plant rows of cabbage, chard and cauliflower; in suburbs where acres of lawns and ornamental plantings offer little more than eye candy, tomato vines and broccoli stalks can provide welcome sustenance. Even the White House lawn has not been spared by edible landscapers; Roger Doiron of Kitchen Gardens International is currently petitioning for part of the president's lawn to be converted to a food garden.

Like most food movements, edible landscaping finds its foot soldiers in the young and socially conscious. Oldfield and his partner, Emily Stevenson, founded Freelance Farmers to help further spread edible landscaping practices and educate

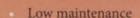




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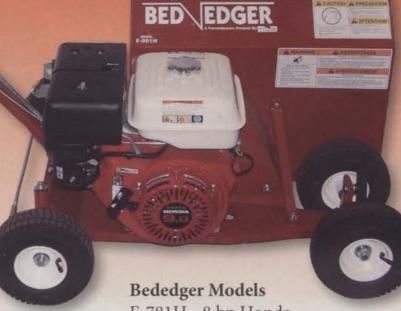
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Freelance Farmers seek to create a series of mircofarms from small, privately-owned urban plots, including yards and roof decks



consumers about organic food growing techniques, and they're not alone in this endeavor. Edible landscaping companies are popping up in cities around the U.S., including Seattle, Los Angeles, and Portland, Ore., in addition to San Francisco, where there are a handful of companies as well as Freelance Farmers. Trevor Paque, also of San Francisco, has founded MyFarm, an edible landscaping company that's already received positive press in The New York Times and the San Francisco Chronicle. Yet, while both MyFarm and Freelance Farmers seek to create a series of mircofarms from small, privately-owned urban plots (including yards and roof decks), their founders come from very different backgrounds and have approached the challenges of turning a business into a social movement in decidedly different ways.

Paque founded MyFarms after closing his mortgage brokerage office downtown and volunteering with a communitysupported kitchen for three months. Growing up in Sacramento, he was always attracted to gardening. "I grew up on about three quarters of an acre and we grew vegetables and fruit trees, and had ducks, geese and chickens. When I'd see my grandpa I'd go out and work in his garden and go to sleep in the garden and wake up and – Sacramento's a hot place – just feel the sun beating down on my face. I'd open my eyes and reach around, start smelling the tomatoes and feeling for my breakfast. I guess I've always liked being in the garden."

Paque likes to think of his company as a decentralized farm to which people lend their yards. Clients can choose from pre-established installation packages or opt for a custom garden design, but they must agree that Paque and his team will handle the plot's maintenance. In this respect, his business model is similar to that of a CSA (community supported agriculture). Clients are largely hands off (though they can help if they're so inclined) and each week they receive a basket of produce collected from Paque's network of microfarms across the city. "That's the whole point of what we do," says Paque, explaining why clients let him maintain plots. "We're not a landscaping company as much as we're a farm. People are giving up their backvards for us to grow vegetables in."

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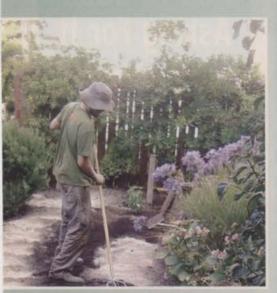


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A new breed: Farmers like Trevor Paque, MyFarms founder, are ditching desk jobs for positions that make them feel more connected with people and the environment

Keeping MyFarm's niche well defined helps Paque to ensure he is realizing the company's mission. "One of the reasons why I left the mortgage industry was because I felt totally disconnected in lots of ways. That's what this is really about—connection. Connecting people to their food, to the people that grow their food, and connecting people to their neighbors."

Where Paque experimented in the corporate world before founding MyFarm, Oldfield and Stevenson went straight into farming after graduating from college (though Stevenson worked briefly in publishing). They refined their growing techniques by crisscrossing the country, working on farms in California and Maine, with stints in New York and New Mexico in between. But it was at the Four Season Farm run by Eliot Coleman that Oldfield and Stevenson really began to define their farming aesthetic. Coleman, author of the

1989 organic farming bible *The New Organic Grower*, proved an excellent mentor for them, just as Scott Nearing, author of *Living the Good Life* and a prominent voice of the homesteading movement, was for Coleman. Nearing established his farm in Harborside, Maine, in 1952, prompting Coleman to move there in the 1960s. In this respect, Oldfield and Stevenson could be considered the third generation of a farming lineage in which each generation learns from, builds on and modernizes the work of the generation before.

Like Paque, Oldfield and Stevenson also stress connection with their clients as a motivating factor in establishing Freelance Farmers. However, they choose to focus on custom installations and the education of their customers, and are less interested in maintaining the gardens themselves. According to Oldfield, "As we teach people, the idea is that they will teach other people and maybe this





What and where is CSA?

Community supported agriculture (CSA) connects local growers with local consumers. About 50 CSA sites existed in 1990; today, there are close to 2000 sites in the U.S. and Canada. Source: LocalHarvest.org



could be the starter crystal for a new way to imagine the urban yard." He and Stevenson revisit a garden twice monthly after its initial installation, training the new garden owner on maintenance practices such as soil fertility, thinning, pest control, weeding, composting and drip irrigation techniques. They also make a customized manual for each new gardener, an extra which Oldfield notes the customers really enjoy. "We'd rather keep expanding our clientele than just stick with fifteen clients and close our doors," he adds.

Though Oldfield and Stevenson plan to grow Freelance Farmers, they don't currently have aspirations of moving beyond what they themselves can do. For them, the personal interactions with their clients and the opportunities to educate a new group of growers are the cornerstones of the business. So when they think of expansion, they think of ways to

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reach different populations. "We'd like to explore working with schools to set up school lunch and salad bar gardens and to look at working with hospices and hospitals, involving patients or residents in gardening just like they historically might have been."

For Paque, on the other hand, it's important that MyFarm is able to expand its reach beyond San Francisco. "We want this to be something that can replace a good portion of the way that food is produced right now," he says, adding that his main hesitation regarding expansion is maintaining the quality on the installations. He says he's eager to see the MyFarm model replicated in other cities, but is unsure currently just how that replication should take place. "Open sourcing is one way for it to grow, where we just post our model online and make it available for anyone who wants to start it up in their town. But then, part of our

concern with something like that is how we know that this idea of backyard farming won't get a bad name because some people failed to do it right it somewhere. In San Francisco, we're doing it successfully. In something like franchising or licensing, we'd have more control."

This is the idea that unites both companies: They're not just in the business of planting food gardens; they're contributing to a movement larger than their companies or themselves. Yet it can often be a difficult thing to balance the financial responsibilities of making a company work with responsibilities to a greater cause.

For Oldfield, it's something he admits to struggling with initially: "It's been hard to merge a transcendent love of vegetable farming with charging people, but it has also meant that you can keep sharing that knowledge. Maybe that's the Johnny Appleseed vision. Instead of planting trees, we're trying to plant people who will want to plant."

He admits to thinking about the movement first and his bottom line second, adding that, "The bottom line has to line up for it to even happen, but it has been. We're fortunate enough to be meeting with certain circumstances where the bottom line works itself out."

Thus far, MyFarm and Freelance Farmers are proving that business and social change can coexist and thrive. If these companies are any indication, there might be a new business model emerging, something Oldfield refers to in his quiet, pensive way as "casual entrepreneurialism." He can't articulate exactly what that means, but he knows it when he sees it: a guy with dirt under his fingernails and seedlings in his car. ©

Tracey Samuelson is a freelance writer currently based in Portland, Maine.



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BY MARGARET HEPP

Phil Sarros wouldn't call himself a trendsetter. What's at the heart of his business isn't just a bandwagon, he says – it's the future of lawn care.

To an increasing percentage of the industry, he's right. The National Gardening Association predicts organic lawncare products will be used exclusively by 10 percent of homeowners in 2009, and that's twice as many as 2004. But as the trend takes root outside Atlanta, Ga., where Sarros Landscaping operates 100 percent pesticide-free, it's impossible to deny the bandwagon effect that's swept residential areas of the county, right down to the Sarros lawn flag, beckoning,

ALL-ORGANIC

Since he's dropped pesticides, **Phil Sarros** has watched his Atlanta business beat the odds





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"Jump on!"

In the second year of business-threatening droughts and water shortages, Sarros is riding the crest of a profit wave. Customers are frustrated with opaque restrictions and regulations, he says, and they sense a coming change.

"During the past two years, I've heard more green talk than ever before," Sarros says. "Water shortages weren't quite as bad this year, but there seem to be a lot of politics involved with it. It makes it hard to grow and live, and harder to thrive. A lot of irrigation companies have been put out of business completely

Did you know? Antibacterial soap, dishwashing soap and laundry detergent are technically toxic pesticides because they kill germs.

because of it."

The shortages have made many homeowners hesitant to install new landscaping, and many local landscapers are equally nervous to put their businesses on the line. Sarros and his team brainstormed ways to make his customers feel comfortable and confident in their

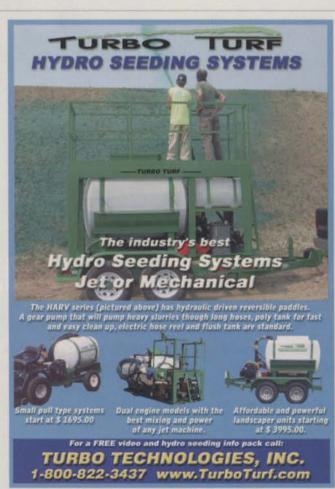
"We found that the easiest way to make customers feel comfortable is to make a guarantee on the plant material. In order to do that, we had to be very comfortable that the amount of plant material we were going to replace would be extremely low."

That's where organic fertilizers came in, Sarros says. Working with products from Organic Growing Systems, Inc., headquartered in Alpharetta, Ga., Sarros made the switch to entirely organic products, including OGSI's 4-2-2 organic fertilizer, manufactured from chicken

manure in Monticello, Miss.

"We started using organic fertilizer to ensure our plants survived," he says. "Under normal water conditions, with plenty of natural rain and watering, a synthetic fertilizer will do an aboveaverage job of helping something grow. But under drought conditions where it's very hot and very dry, it's more likely that a typical synthetic fertilizer will burn the plant and kill it faster. An organic fertilizer is a huge benefit to us because it's non-burning and, as a result, it's a benefit to our customers."

Third-quarter financial results for Advanced Growing Systems, the parents company of OGSI, showed overall revenue suffering from the water shortages and housing market lull that's affecting the greater landscape and nursery industry in Atlanta. To bolster profits and meet demand, OGSI is adding two additional organic fertilizers to its current product



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offering later this year, increasing production to five to seven times the present rate.

Both landscapers and customers are clamoring for organics, it seems. Sarros finds that safety is the No. 1 concern among his customers.

"There's a lot more awareness now in terms of toxicity and chemicals," he says. "Homeowners realize that their families and pets are walking on lawns that have been treated. People want healthier options. Organic's as healthy as it gets. It's wonderful for the plants and the lawns, but it's also good for your kids and your pets."

A clear advantage to organic fertilizers is that prills absorb water and provide slow, gradual release of both nitrogen and water to the plant and the soil.

"We've been able to go to our customers in the middle of a drought and give them a warranty for their plant and guarantee that it'll live," he says. "And it's working. It helps us to keep our revenues generating during a time when the media is focused on drought conditions."

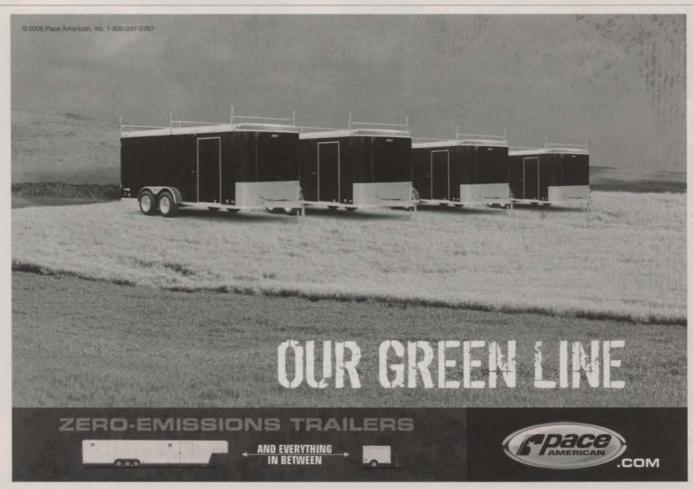
Appropriately, Sarros' confidence in organics was cultivated as an organic lawn is grown: slowly, thoroughly and gradually. He tested the product on his own lawn two years ago and tested it on his friends and neighbors as well.



Sarros Landscaping markets its commitment to pesticide-free landscaping through its eye-catching lawn flag.

"Companies make claims, but I had to know for myself it was going to work," he says. "After a year, it worked great. I don't even carry a pesticide license."

In his first year as an organic company, Sarros has marketed his new identity heavily, but he recognizes organics won't appeal to everyone.



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USE READER SERVICE #84

"There is still a market for chemical products," he says. "An organic regimen is not for the customer looking for instant gratification. You have to allow for one full growing season and be willing to give the program enough time to be successful."

Education, says Sarros, is essential to the process. Many customers don't understand how and why organic products work, and why it takes longer.

"I explain to my customers that blasting the lawn with nitrogen is like steroids for a lawn," he says. "It instantly turns green. An organic program is the equivalent of someone who works out regularly and eats healthy food. It takes longer to reach the result, but it's better for your health and the results last longer."

Interactive Web sites that include message boards and live discussions are becoming increasingly popular sources for research, and Sarros says he uses online forums to talk about what works and what doesn't with organic products and practices. "There's a general openness among peers in our industry to share information," he says. "There's nothing wrong with good competition. There's nothing to be afraid of."

While Sarros finds most of his information online, he's also found tremendous value in consulting and partnering with supply companies. "Vendors are more than willing to spend time with you, too," he says. "The key is to encourage them to come out to your operation. And vice versa – go out to an organic plant, see how it's made. They've done the scientific research, and you don't have to go back to school to understand it and explain it plain English to your customers."

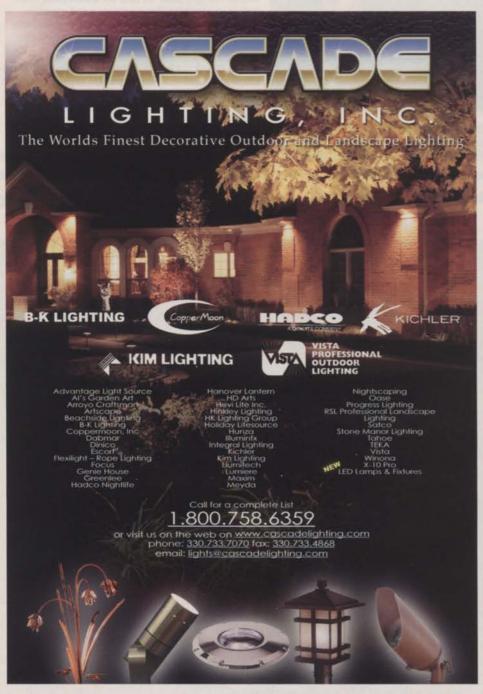
You might not have a Ph.D., but if you've done your research, you probably know more than your customers, and it's important to help them understand the pros and cons of an organic program. Think about the next step, Sarros tells customers. What if your neighbor isn't on an organic program? When it rains, where will pesticide runoff go? Right into your lawn.

As organics become more popular,



Not all pesticides are equal Toxicity levels vary by product and instructions for use are clearly outlined on each pesticide's label. Labels are designed to explain the correct application procedure, so the chemical has little or no direct negative impact on organisms beyond the targeted pest. As a rule, chemical experts consistently stress the importance of reading and following the pesticide label."

—Todd Burkdoll, BASF technical specialist "There is still a market for chemical products," Sarros says. "An organic regimen is not for the customer looking for instant gratification."



USE READER SERVICE #83

particularly in Atlanta, this might become a less common problem. But Sarros competes with companies whose lawns are lush and green, and it can be tough to convince customers that there's another way. Not one to pursue profit for profit's sake, Sarros says that his best marketing tool is sharing his own philosophy on pesticides to his customers.

"We've made a commitment as a company to be 100 percent organic because it's the right thing to do, and because we can," he says. "We're in a position of responsibility. We serve a large area of our county, but it's also our own backyard. We want to be in a position to make a difference for our friends and our neighbors and the place where we live. It's not just a trend. It's the right thing to do."

And if he's so persuasive he convinces other landscape operations to go the same route?

"I'm not worried about the competition," he says. "To me, there's no conflict of interest when another company says it's going to go allorganic. I don't get scared or worried. We promote that. I'd be happy to bring a company in and have the crew spend the day with me. There's enough business to go around for all of us."

The demand for organic lawn care products continues to grow, though the long-term benefits of using exclusively organic products, compared to a combination of organic and synthetic chemical products, remain to be seen in Atlanta. Still, Sarros says, it's important to remind customers that they have a choice.

"I don't sell anyone," Saross says. "I ultimately let them make the decision. It's a choice, not a sale - but when you let the customer choose, the sale will come. If you present your information in an educational way, chances are your customer will make the choice that yes, this is what I want to do. You'll generate more revenue. For me, that's the ultimate benefit. My business has grown. And it's just getting started." (L)

landscape design

THE BIG CREEP

Don't let project odds and ends erode your profit

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Don't let project odds and ends erode your profit

The Big Creep

By Laurie Prescott

It happens all the time and it's probably happened to you: You've sold a landscape installation to a customer and thought you'd covered everything necessary to get the job done. But as soon as the project starts, other things begin popping up. Perhaps the client has a few gift plants that she wants planted, and then there's that overgrown shrub that wasn't visible before and now needs pruning. And maybe those shrubs you

just planted should be moved over a little bit to the left.

Not a big deal, right?

Multiply the time spent by the number of changes over the course of a landscape installation and you might be losing money. This is "scope creep," a term first coined by the IT industry to describe the tendency of a project to include more tasks than originally planned without further compensation.

Scope creep is tricky. Sometimes the client is one of those people who has to get as much as possible for nothing, or he's just plain picky. Sometimes it's just unexpected stumps or buried debris, storm damage, changes in availability of materials, etc. Whatever the reason for it, scope creep can be difficult to manage. No contractor wants to seem like he or she is being petty - and yet these tasks add up. Do you discuss the cost of each item as it comes up or simply add them all up at the end of the job when the bill is presented? Either way it can be cause for misunderstandings and possibly hard feelings. It's wise to be prepared for changes that inevitably appear along the way, as an installation rarely progresses



Design/Build Intelligence Report

Our first design/build segment survey reveals how firms are faring in today's tighter economy.



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As gas and airline prices skyrocket and other economic concerns force consumers to pinch their travel pennies. landscape design/build firms capitalize on these expendable dollars to beef up backyards.



Cue up any one of Home and Garden Television's landscape shows - "Landscapers' Challenge," "Get Out, Way Out," etc. - and there is no mistaking that the keen consumer interest in outdoor rooms has grown roots.

In fact, a 2008 Propane Education & Research Council survey revealed that 42 percent of homeowners have a finished outdoor room, an increase from 35 percent three years ago. Of those who have these retreats, 64 percent are spending more time in them - 75 percent use their outdoor rooms two or more times weekly and 30 percent use these spaces daily to relax, cook, dine and entertain.

The landscape is an extension of the home and design-build contractors have profited by providing clients highend, wow-factor features (fireplaces, waterfalls, tiki bars equipped with flat screen TVs, etc.).

In today's more challenging economy, the project well has not dried up by any means. In fact, 57 percent of the 304 landscape architecture firms surveyed recently by the American Society of Landscape Architects reported average or above average billable hours in the second quarter of 2008 - slightly higher than first quarter results.

The reason? Many households cut back on summer travel this year - a

Rand McNally survey found two-thirds shortened or cancelled summer road trips. As gas prices continue to climb in a belt-tightening economy, many Americans are spending even more time in their backyards.

Still, designers like Scott Cohen, whose projects at The Green Scene Landscaping in Canoga Park, Calif., range from \$500,000 to \$800,000, notice that even clients with money to spend are keeping a lower profile.

"A client signed a \$250,000 contract for a backyard remodel and asked me not to put up one of our signs that says we are doing this job," Cohen says, noting the marketing tool generally creates buzz in a neighborhood, which reels in more business. "I asked why," Cohen continues. "They felt uncomfortable spending this money, knowing what's going on in the economy. They didn't want to show off to the neighbors."

Compared to commodity services like landscape maintenance, design/ build has proven more resilient, though no less challenging, some firms say. Professional Landscape Design conducted its first Design/ Build Intelligence Survey this year to find out how firms that offer this custom, attractive service - one that inevitably comes with larger price tags than other landscape offerings - are doing in spite of the economy,

housing market, rising fuel prices and consumer tip-toeing.

Design/build was the fastest growing service for 37 percent of design/ build firms who responded to the survey, with maintenance falling close behind at 32.5 percent. When we polled all companies (even those that do not offer design/build), the design/ build sector still came in strong with 24 percent of respondents reporting it will be their fastest growing sector in 2009, behind maintenance at 36.7 percent. With the average design/ build business boasting revenue at \$875,282 (\$137,865 higher than landscape contractors offering other services), and a total net revenue increase of 10 percent expected this year, design/build companies are not faring too poorly despite dipping customer confidence levels amid negative economic headlines.

In general, design/build business owners sum up their bread-and-butter sector as challenging, but promising and "as good as you are good," all as long as new construction isn't the company focus.

SLOW TO DECIDE. Most design/build companies agree consumers think twice before jumping into a project more today than they did before.

Doug Freer's average job and work backlog have both shrunk as a result

of job loss and a sunk housing market that the president of Cleveland Heights, Ohio-based Lawn Lad calls "a double whammy." Design/build work that used to be booked four to six weeks out is now down to a week or two.

While customers who want to rebuild patios; renovate backyards; and add walkways, fire pits or water features are still calling, they aren't making fast decisions. "The sales cycle is longer," Freer says. "Before, when they were more flushed with cash, they were at ease with making a decision sooner. Now, it's, 'I'll probably not do this until fall."

Fall sounds good to Freer if that means he'll eventually win the business. "The seeds we are planting now will be harvested next year," he says.

Fifty percent of *Professional Land-scape Design* survey respondents said residential customers are scaling back construction projects, while only 22.5 percent said commercial customers are doing the same. Only 28 percent of design/build businesses reported residential and commercial project cancellations. On the commercial side, nearly half of respondents (48.8 percent) said customers sent work

out to bid. And, while work may be slowing in some segments, 45.3 percent of respondents report making 10 percent or greater profit margins on design/build projects.

In the greater Washington D.C. area, design/build becomes a bigger part of Bill Trimmer's business every year. "We are booked out as far as we were last year and the year before, and we keep at least a couple of months backlog on the books," says the president of Professional Grounds Inc. "It's certainly growing faster than our maintenance department," he adds, echoing survey results.

Daryl Schauss, president, Cedar Run Landscaping, Aldie, Va., expresses similar views about the Capital City market, and he's earning the same profit margin on jobs he did last year – anywhere from 10 to 30 percent. The difference is, clients are asking about phase work more often and are signing on for smaller jobs. His average project is about \$10,000; before it was closer to \$30,000.

Interestingly, Dalton Hermes, CEO, Hermes Landscaping in Lenexa, Kan., says his company has completed \$30,000 jobs in neighborhoods that generally aren't calling for big-investment services. "Owners of

smaller homes are spending larger amounts than we've seen before," he says. Hermes offers financing to assist (see "Money Talks" on page 7).

NEW CONSTRUCTION SUFFERS. Most firms report renovation business is still strong, even if contractors are taking on more jobs to meet last year's revenues. The new construction market is another story. While Hermes' leads are up 50 percent, "those aren't new construction," he clarifies.

"While the majority of landscape architecture firms reported steady or increased work, the housing troubles have certainly slowed some segments of the market – especially major real estate developments," says Nancy Somerville, executive vice president and CEO of ASLA. "Landscape architecture firms have turned to high-end residential work, commercial development and public sector projects to mitigate most of the slowdown from the housing market."

In Andy White's opinion, "if you are aligned with the building industry, you are going to suffer more," explains the president, Wayside Landscape Services, Asheville, N.C., who has made it a point not to align with builders in his 25 years in business. "I never wanted this company to be pushed around by the housing market. We go after people with money to invest, and when the conditions for investing are poor, they invest in the things they know and feel the best about, and that's their homes."

Hermes prefers to gauge his company's success by measuring what he can control. His design/build department will grow by 25 percent next year because of improved execution and sales, particularly more customer follow-up from designers and accurate pricing from estimators. "We are more sensitive to price resistance on a select basis," he says. "By doing a good job with things we can control, we marginalize what we cannot control."

Rather than riding economic highs and getting bruised during downtimes, Hermes focuses on efficiencies. That's what successful design/build contractors will have to do this year and next to maintain profitability. As Cohen says, simply: "We'll work smart and play it tight." *

HIRING ON HOLD

While landscape design/build firms remain busy, 71 percent didn't hire employees in the third quarter, according to the American Society of Landscape Architects.

"Tighter lending restrictions and overall economic fears have decreased some of the future pipeline of work, reflected in a drop-off in firms planning to hire," says Nancy Somerville, executive vice president and chief executive officer of ASLA.

As these companies slow hiring, others who need workers say finding them is not a problem, particularly since construction tradespeople are not reporting to home building sites. According to the *Professional Landscape Design* survey, labor ranked well below fuel prices, rising interest rates, consumer confidence and low-ball competitors among factors affecting business success.

KEY DESIGN/BUILD EMPLOYEE SALARIES/WAGES

Owner	. \$71,822 annually
Landscape architect	\$50,923 annually
Landscape designer	. \$42,389 annually
Construction worker (entry level)	. \$9.70 hourly
Construction worker (experienced)	. \$14.10 hourly



BY KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE

Design Dossier

Hardscapes, greener-scapes and ambiance top the list of buyers' outdoor desires.

Fire and water. Mix these elements in an outdoor room and wait until the sun goes down.

"The combination of fire and water is really powerful," says Scott Cohen, president, The Green Scene Landscaping, Canoga Park, Calif. "Fire has a way of mesmerizing people – it relaxes you and encourages conversation. Water is reflective, and fire adds warmth, light...beauty."

Setting a mood and creating an atmosphere is a priority for today's homeowners planning landscape projects. According to a Gallup Poll, landscaping can add 7 to 15 percent to a home's value, and homeowners recover 100 to 200 percent of the cost come sale time. And, according to the American Institute of Architecture, 63 percent of residential architects name outdoor living as a trend that continues to grow in popularity. This added attention to outdoor spaces has prompted an increase in upscale landscape amenities, such as fireplaces, gazebos, courtyards, swimming pools and tennis courts.

The American Society of Landscape Architect's recent survey concurs, reporting that 87 percent of landscape design firms see increased client demand for water elements, such as fountains, pools and ponds.

Lately, hardscapes consume a higher percent of the overall landscape, says Dalton Hermes, CEO, Hermes Landscaping, Lenexa, Kan. "Historically, we might do 15 to 20 percent hardscapes in a job, and I would say today it's closer to 50 percent," he says, adding that landscape lighting is a top priority for making these outdoor spaces usable after-hours. In fact, *Professional Landscape Design* research shows 17 percent of design/build companies plan to add landscape lighting to their service menus in 2009.

One popular hardscape is patios, which have gone double- and triple-decker with separate "rooms" and conversation zones not unlike the arrangements in a home: kitchen/gathering space and casual living room.

"Patios are the first thing clients put in," says Daryl Schauss, president, Cedar Run Landscaping, Aldie, Va.

Next come hardscape walkways and plants. Homeowners on a budget can opt for manufactured stone products. Interlocking retaining walls. stamped concrete patios and pavers that look like they were harvested from the Old Country trick the eye and please clients who want value.

Increased use of hardscapes is good news for contractors in drought areas as well. The landscape architecture firms answering ALSA's survey concur, reporting increased demand for energy efficient and water saving design elements. Eight out of 10 firms reported increased client interest in native or drought-resistant plants.

Outdoor kitchens are a perennial request, and the range of high-end grills and weather-ready cooking stations is inspiring more mid-range clients to embrace the concept. On the higher end, grills are housed in stone or brick. According to the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association, a record 17.4 million grills were shipped in 2007 and nearly eight out of 10 households own an outdoor barbecue grill or smoker. The majority of grill owners (58 percent) use their grills year-round, the association reports.

In fact, according to Bill Trimmer, president, Professional Grounds Inc., Springfield, Va.: "Those projects are as strong as they've ever been." *

GREEN STRATEGIES

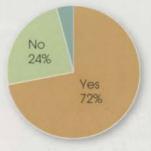
What are the top sustainability issues for landscape architects?

ISSUE	PERCENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
Water (bioswales, stormwater management)	72%
Energy Efficiency (irrigation, low-maintenance, native plants, less lawn)	68%
Accreditation (LEED points, national/state/local guidelines)	55%
Habitat (open space, preserving natural habitat)	32%
Green Roofs	28%
Links (access to transportation, trails, parks)	25%

Source: American Society of Landscape Architects

Do your clients have a higher interest in sustainability issues?

Unknown 4%



Source: American Society of Landscape Architects

Money Talks

What are you charging? How are clients paying? Where are you cutting expenses and what's eating your profit?

The trick is to be competitive in today's market when you are building in tomorrow's," says Scott Cohen, summing up the materials price increases he bears on what seems like a weekly basis at The Green Scene Landscaping in Canoga Park, Calif.

He says materials prices are "astounding" this year. The average design/build company's operating costs rose 15 percent, the *Professional Landscape Design* survey says. In fact, Cohen hired a part-time person whose sole role is to evaluate the company's true cost of materials and labor so they can price jobs properly. "By the time we type our proposal and start working on the project, the prices have already risen on petroleum, the PVC pipe we use for sprinkler systems and drains, and the copper we use for wiring and lighting," Cohen lists.

Those costs can't all be absorbed in-house, he says.

"We are running leaner and meaner than we have in a long time," Cohen explains. If margins were 25 percent three years ago, they are 15 to 18 percent this year.

"We see firms giving away their services, and that's a huge mistake," especially when materials prices are increasing like they are, Cohen adds. His design fee is \$250 for an hour and a half of time on site. "If you have skills, experience and are recognized for your work, you best get paid for it."

Only 34 percent of design/build firms charge fees for residential and commercial consultations. Those fees run the gamut. Daryl Schauss of Aldie, Va.-based Cedar Run Landscaping charges \$50. Bill Trimmer, owner of Professional Grounds Inc. in Springfield, Va., may implement design fees in 2009 to separate shoppers from serious potential customers.

Also, firms say clients ask more

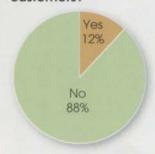
FINANCING & FEES

Do you charge a design fee for design/build projects?

RESPONSE	% OF DESIGN/ BUILD FIRMS			
Yes for residential projects	18%			
Yes for commercial projects	2%			
Yes for both residential and commercial projects	34%			
Do not charge design fees	46%			

Source: Professional Landscape Design

Do you offer financing for your design/build customers?



questions about financing, value and phasing in projects today. Thirty-four percent of *Professional Landscape Design* survey respondents say residential clients are slower to pay for their work, while 32 percent say the same for commercial clients. The research also shows only 12.2 percent of design/build businesses offer financing with the average cost of a financed project at \$12,221.

But "there are customers who are getting bigger packages with financing than they would have without it," points out Dalton Hermes, CEO, Hermes Landscaping, Lenexa, Kan.

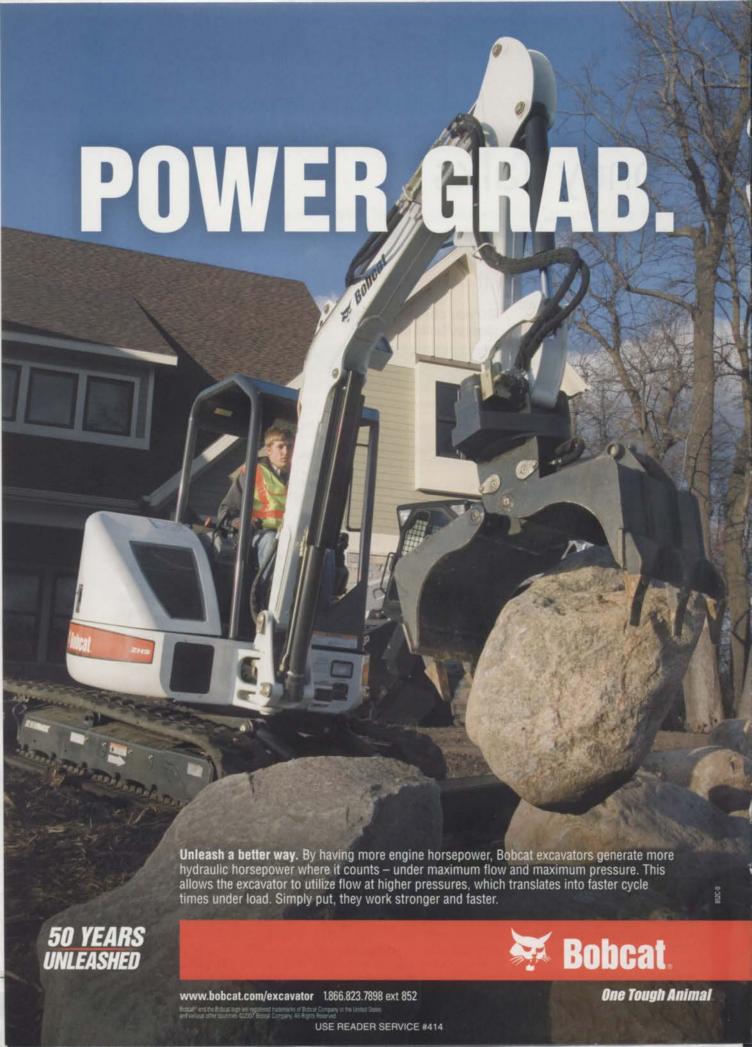
As for absorbing the cost of materials, Mark Schroeder says he has not lost profit margin on jobs because of firm relationships with vendors who hold pricing for him. "We have some jobs that were estimated a year prior to installation, and typically vendors will not hold prices for that long," says Schroeder, president, Mark Schroeder & Co., San Diego, Calif. "But if you have relationships with vendors that will work with you through those situations, at least you can manage some of those increases that seem to happen monthly anymore."

Schroeder says his average profit margin is about 8 percent, though he'll shoot for as high as 15 percent. "What has helped us is we have good estimating projections," he says. "We know our costs. Where owners go wrong is not knowing their real costs."

Hermes will continue to grow the design/build side of his business, despite the fact that "margins are squeezed in a significant way," by taking on more work. "It's a competitive market and we have the Wal-Mart mentality that 10 nickels are better than five dimes," he says. "You have to do more work for thinner margins."

The key is identifying quality customers and earning referral business, Cohen says.

Doug Freer says clients are more comfortable talking price today. They want to understand cost, but they also want to see value, says the owner of Lawn Lad in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. "You better be more value-focused today because that will keep you in business," he stresses. "Everything around customers is crunching, and people don't have as much liquid. But they are willing to spend it if you show them the value." *



exactly the way you think it will.

Plan Ahead

The wise estimator will do his homework to avoid surprises. A lack of attention to detail can lead to disastrous consequences. Will fill be needed after tree and shrub removal? Will additional trips to the job incur extra charges? How will you handle stumps and other hidden obstacles? Is your client hard to please? Develop a checklist that you refer to during your estimation work.

Peggy Hung, a San Francisco-based designer, itemizes tasks in a detailed, standard list. "Then I add any customized tasks specifically for each project," she says.

Some contractors will add in an amount to cover the possibility of some or all of these factors affecting job cost.

"Everyone spending money with a contractor wonders if they're getting a good deal," says Steve Hansen, owner of Hansen Landscaping in Castro, Calif. "We price our projects with enough profit to afford to not have to nickel and dime the client once the project starts. Then, when little things come up that could have been a legitimate change order, offering to handle it at no cost helps the client justify their decision to hire us. For requested items at a higher cost, we prepare a change order."

Communicate with the Customer

Make sure the customer knows what you're including. It's hard to put too many details into a proposal or contract. The contract should include a statement, such as, "Any alterations or deviations from the work, specified above, involving additional labor and/or material costs will be performed only upon written order from the owner and will be an added charge to the agreed amount." It's also possible to include a statement that up to X number of hours of supplemental labor

Hardscape construction can be prone to change orders as the project progresses and the client actually sees the physical dimensions are included, if necessary, and there will be a charge of \$____ for every hour of extra labor beyond that. But be prepared. Some clients will be determined to get that supplemental labor performed.

If you decide to not charge for a small change, tell the client at the time that the extra service is requested that you usually charge for extra tasks, but you'll do it this time as a favor. This establishes that it is a favor, and that there will be a charge for any other services.

Hansen includes a list of exclusions in his contract. "Later, this might save the client from thinking something was included that wasn't," he says. "People tend to be optimistic that the project includes everything. The exclusion list includes items discussed as an option but not part of the contract, and it's as — if not more — important than the list of included items."

A final inspection of the site before beginning the project should always be done, especially if the project has been delayed since the original contract was written, or if it's a newly constructed building.

Managing Job Costs

If you're aware of how an installation is going, you'll know if there's room for some flexibility in your treatment of

problems or requests that come up. If your materials or labor costs are running lower than expected, you might be more open to throwing in a few extras; but if you're over budget, you obviously won't be as willing to be as magnanimous. Still, you can't judge this until you're aware of where you stand, so review your current cost situation as often as possible. If you're not on-site or ordering materials, make sure the person who is there keeps you informed. It's just as important to know what the extra cost of additional labor, material, delivery, etc., is when pricing a change in the project. If possible, don't give an off-the-cuff price. Tell the customer you'll be in touch as soon as you're able to check the cost.

Change Orders

When the requested service or product goes beyond a minimal change, it's time to write a change order. Similar to the original contract, a change order doesn't have to contain all of the components. The essential information is the description and price of the add-on or deletion, the terms of payment and the signatures of both parties. Some contractors add an "administrative fee" to additional work in order to cover the cost of a separate delivery, set-backs in the schedule, etc. Others simply add the additional costs



hoto: Laurie Pres

into the price, especially if line item pricing hasn't been included in the original bid.

Nancy Wise, vice president of administration of Wise Landscape in Kissimmee, Fla., has been in business for 20 years. She still finds it difficult to maintain a balance between customers and cost. "To keep the customer happy without being taken advantage of is a major issue that most landscape companies deal with," she says. "We really pay attention to changes and create change orders on a regular basis. We have the client pay for the change order immediately after the change has been completed. This tends to make them think about changes before they request them."

Pricing deletions can be just as important. If you've already ordered materials and had them delivered to the job site or your business, you have extra costs for moving, storage and/or maintenance until you can sell them to another customer. A restocking charge can be used to cover these additional costs and an explanation of the charge can be included in the change order, if necessary. Adding a restocking charge can help your customer understand your cost of making the change and, hopefully, will discourage more deletions.

Enough is Enough

There's a point in every job when it's wise to consider how far you'll go to make the customer happy. If it seems the changes are unending, you might have to wrap up the job by telling the customer you have another job scheduled with a deadline and they might need to find someone else to help them. If the customer is displeased and the result is a slightly smaller final payment, consider whether it's worth it to move on to a new project which might be less demanding and more lucrative.

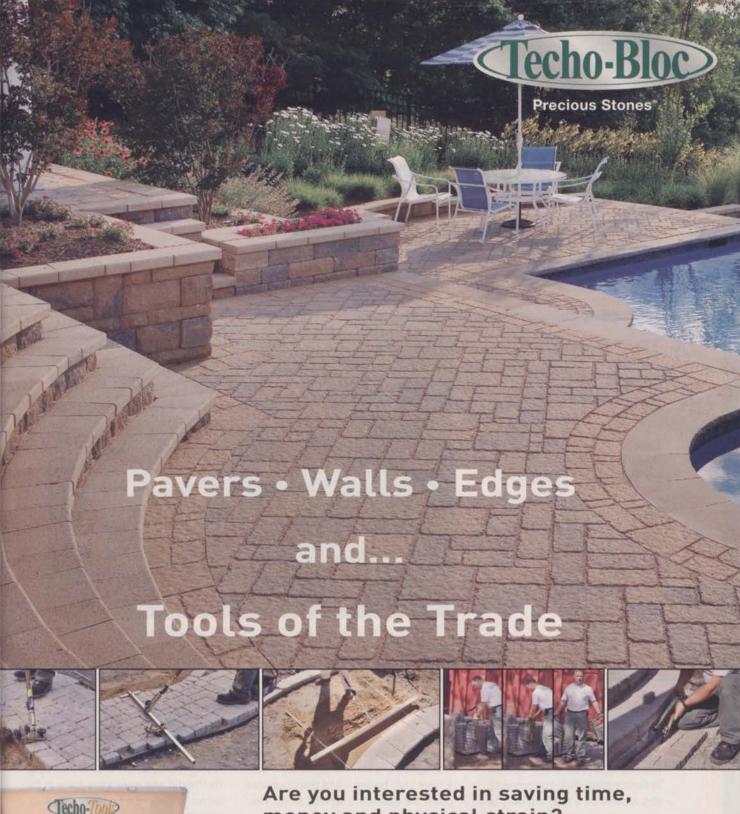
Opportunity Knocks?

Managed correctly, scope change can turn out to be the source of additional work – and income.

Joel Lerner, who also owns Joel Lerner Environmental Design, has faced clients who add subtle changes to the scope of a job as it progresses. "This type of client can be a cash cow for a company or can zap a company's creative energy, nl depending on how your company frames the conversation and contracts the job," he says. "Landscape professionals should clearly state that all changes must be in writing and a fee will be charged for 1 % additional work. It's not the client's fault if you give away your work for free - it's yours. The client is simply trying to get the most for his money. It's your job to set the policy that you can't work for free and stay in business." PLD



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Identity, Preserved

A firm in Deer Park, N.Y., designs a clever way to reinvent the past for a commercial franchise client

JOB DETAILS

Contractor

Green Island Design, Deer Park, N.Y.

Team

Mark Pappalardi, Senior Designer; Jon Pappalardi, President

Site

The Melting Pot, Farmingdale, N.Y.



"The Preserve" was designed to operate under freezing conditions by incorporating freeze protection engineering. Photo: Green Island Design

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In the fall of 2007, The Melting Pot, a national chain/franchise fondue restaurant, opened a new location in Farmingdale, N.Y. The property was located on a busy highway and had changed hands multiple times in recent years, so the contractor sought to create a new identity for the owners while generating interest and word of mouth.

The designers conceptualized "The Preserve," an 8-by-5-foot fountain made of South Bay Quartzite stacked stone. The fountain resembles the

shape, sound and feel of an actual melting pot, complete with bubbling water that appears to simmer at the top – as if it were truly boiling – and then cascades down the structure's tapered sides. The designers derived inspiration from the work of renowned British sculptor Andy Goldsworthy. Accordingly, the Preserve resembles the shape of Goldsworthy's famous "Cairn."

The fountain is designed to recycle water, which enters an underground, gravel-filled basin and migrates to a hidden pump before it's forced up through

the unit's center, when the process is then repeated. The fountain is equipped with a heater, which is controlled by a thermostat and warms the water in the winter to prevent it from freezing. This also allows for gas exchanges on the surface, creating steam that escapes into the night sky, just when the restaurant is most frequented. Line Voltage land-scape lights were positioned to expose the highly detailed stonework, creating unusual shadows.

The Preserve now stands along the roadway, visible from a half mile away.

ASO TOBLOHY

QUICK FACTS: "THE PRESERVE"

Annual revenue: \$1,000,000+ Number of employees: 12 Service mix: 90 percent design, 10 percent maintenance Client mix: 80 percent residential,

20 percent commercial

Project area: 40 square feet Total labor hours: 180 Subcontracted services: None

Initial project estimate: \$15,000.00

Key materials:

South Bay Quartzite stacked stone

4-foot drywell Aquascape liners

Aquascape 3000 series pump River rock (for base of fountain)

Equipment:

Bobcat S185 Backhoe (rental) Awards:

Distinction Award,

PLANET's 39th Annual Environmental Improvement Awards Program

See Page 4 for more on keeping project costs to a minimum







The biggest challenge of the project was building the structure of the original concept. The basin was excavated to a depth of 3 feet with a 15-foot circumference. The backbone of the Preserve became a 4-by-4-foot drywell, which was lowered into place with a backhoe on a high-traffic roadway. Once the drywell was secured, each piece of South Bay Quartzite was milled and cemented

PROJECT 0&A

PLD: How did you sell the job?

GID: When The Melting Pot opened a new location, Green Island Design recognized the need for immediate curb appeal - something different that would draw potential customers into the restaurant. We approached the owners with a virtual tour of the potential project: a 3-D movie of the structure and its surroundings using various motion software to show the client the finished product before it was built. (See an example of the movie at www.greenislanddesign.com.) The client fell in love with the project - 10 days before the grand opening. We needed to design, engineer and build the project within that time frame.

PLD: How did you fulfill special client requirements?

GID: We provided a strategic solution for the owners, who were mandated by the town to plant trees every 20 feet along the entire storefront. Unfortunately, the trees

scheduled for planting were so dense that they threatened to block both the restaurant's storefront and sign. Our clients feared applying for a variance to position their sign above the tree elevation would delay their opening date. We advised them to position their sign beneath the tree canopy, eliminating the need for a variance. We also recommended planting Thundercloud Plums to provide more transparency.

PLD: What challenged you during installation?

GID: We faced many challenges as we brought the project to fruition. The main challenge was the construction of the structure. An original concept, we had to engineer it from top to bottom. The basin was excavated to a depth of 3 feet. with a 15-foot circumference, to meet New York state code. The backbone of the Preserve became a 4-by-4-foot drywell, which needed to be lowered into place with a backhoe on a roadway with an extremely high traffic volume. Once the drywell was in place, each piece of South Bay Quartzite



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FG23 FG-LED23

LV23 LV-LED23 was milled and cemented. In order to achieve a uniform cantilevered effect, our designers devised a wood template that was used to measure the degree of curvature needed to execute the

convex shape. This allows the water to cascade evenly down all sides of the structure. In order to centralize the weight and load bearing capacity of the outer stones, additional rebar was threaded from one side of the drywell to the other in a star-shaped pattern. This ensured that the stones would fully support their own weight.

Although this method provided a solution to structural challenges, it prevented us from attaining a hollow watertight center. As a result, a second reservoir had to be created at the very top above the rebar. This reservoir was lined independently from the larger collection basin at the base of the Preserve. In addition, low-voltage landscape lighting was snaked from the upper pool, between the drywell and stacked stone, and out through the drainage basin at the base. This allowed the bubbling water to be illuminated directly through its center.

PLD: Looking back on the project, what would you have done differently?

Because of the strict time frame, we would've liked to have more flexibility in our schedule to design, engineer and construct the project. But it was a unique opportunity for both parties and we needed to conform to the situation.

Since completion, have you added to the project?

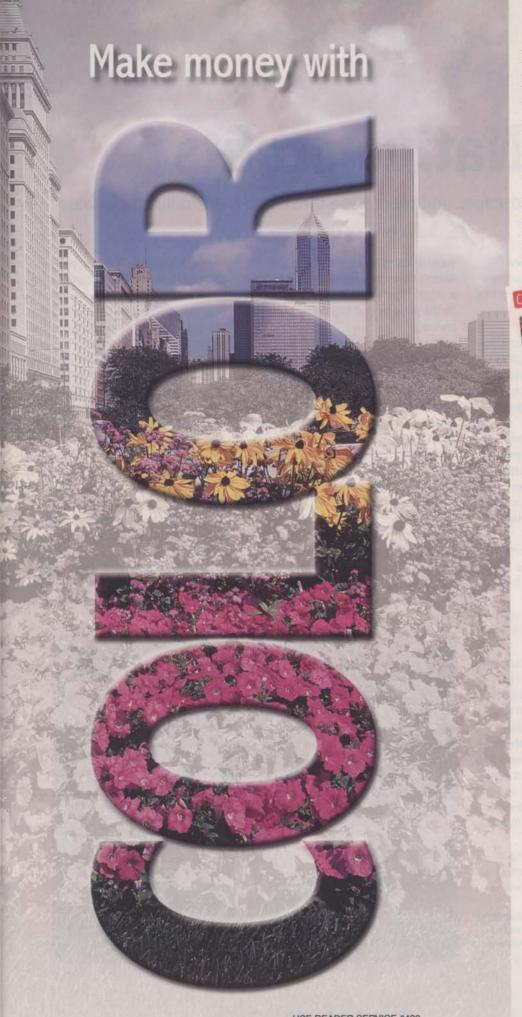
The owner immediately expressed interest in developing a proprietary patent on our design plans for future franchisees to install a Preserve of their own as a unique and recognizable symbol of their theme.

What was the greatest lesson your company learned during this project?

We learned exactly what we were capable of under pressure. We realized we could think outside of the box and develop a truly unique project for a specific clientele base. And even under deadline pressure, we were able to go from concept to completion within a narrow timeframe. **PLD**



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USE READER SERVICE #420

Native profits

Keep your landscapes and client base thriving in a dry, difficult climate

By Sue Marquette Poremba

Concern for the environment and sustainable living has many customers thinking twice about landscaping that requires extra water.

Enter xeriscaping.

From the Greek word for dry, xeriscaping requires no supplemental irrigation. The term was developed in Denver to promote water-preserving landscape – but many customers misunderstand the concept.

"Zero-scaping is a facetious term that came from pros," says Doug Bennett, Conservation Manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority. "It comes from a gross misunderstanding that xeriscaping means no landscape at all. A xeriscape isn't just dirt and a cattle skull."

Living and working in the deserts of Nevada, Bennett understands the importance of developing a landscape that is water efficient.

"In the West, landscape takes up the most water use, so we're always looking at ways to conserve," he says.

Trying to convince home and business owners to accept xeriscaping and the use of more efficient native and climate-adaptable plants can be an uphill battle.

"Part of getting people into waterefficient landscaping is showing them
that it has equal quality to the lawns they
were maintaining before," Bennett says.
"I have to show them samples of very
green, fairly densely planted landscape
to get them to consider a more efficient
landscape."

Another incentive for xeriscaping in southern Nevada is a rebate awarded to residents who replace a lawn with a

As the cost of watering unnatural or traditional landscapes becomes more expensive, customers find native landscaping more attractive water-efficient landscape. "Of course, that doesn't mean zero-scaping," he says with a laugh. "There have to be enough plants on the property that fifty percent is living greenery."

The soil quality is another important component to xeriscaping, according to Ginger Pryor, State Master Gardener Coordinator at Penn State University.

"It's one thing we stress with any type of landscaping," she says. "If you have good quality soil, you'll go a long way to improve drought stress on your plants. Good soil will hold water when it rains."

To know if the soil is good for xeriscaping, it's essential to test and understand the soil type.

"Learning the type of soil is more complicated these days," Pryor says. "You used to be able to pull a survey map out and figure out the soil based on where you live. But now, soil has changed from fragmentation of landscapes, development and soil being moved around from construction. The type of soil on the property might not be the native soil."

Pryor recommends testing the soil for nutrients and organic matter. "You need to have a high organic matter in the soil to hold water and allow the nutrients to be available to the plants," she says.

One of the principles of xeriscaping is using appropriate plants. Next to creating a design, this may be the most difficult obstacle to conquer. Xeriscaping utilizes plants that are native to the area. These are the plants, trees, shrubs and grasses that will quickly adapt to the soil and the climate. Once established, they will withstand all but the most severe weather conditions.

However, people want what they are used to.

"If you look at landscapes in Albuquer-

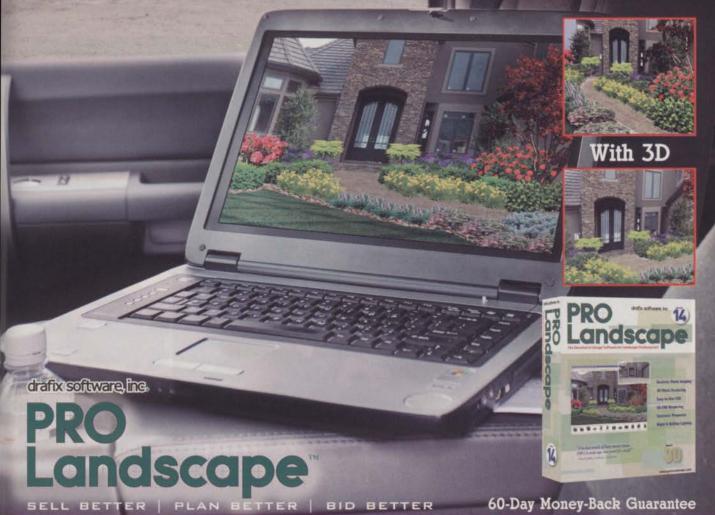


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que, they look like landscapes in Philadelphia or Des Moines," says David Cristiani, Landscape Architect and Principal, The Quercus Group in Albuquerque, N.M. "They never look like places in the Southwest."

For residential customers, it's not just a matter of moving to a new area and wanting to have a familiar landscape in the backyard. It's an ideal of what a lawn should look like.

"It's unfortunate," Cristiani says. "It makes America look like Generica."

Also, he adds, residents tend to regard the natural local landscape as something nice to look at when it's in the wild, but unattractive if it's on their property.

Cristiani says he's finding that attitudes toward native landscaping are beginning to warm a bit, mostly because residents have found the cost of watering unnatural or traditional landscapes is too expensive or their water use becomes restricted.

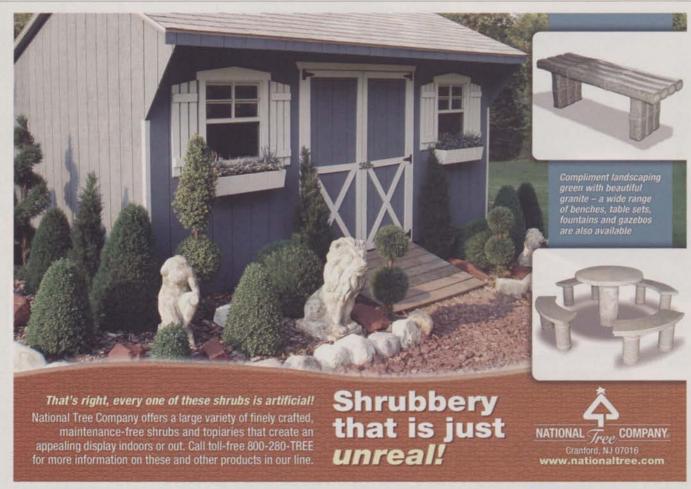
"Native plants require less water and maintenance input," Cristiani says. "These plants are adapted to the soil, the plants around them and the overall landscape. They're growing and thriving without anyone taking care of them."

Examining plant life in its native habitat also provides a better understanding of why it grows the way it does. Spac-



Native plants quickly adapt to the soil and climate and will withstand all but the most severe weather conditions

ing of the plants – which are closest to each other, what is the distance between plants of the same species, what grows high, what grows closer to the ground – explains how the plants live compatibly with the water and nutrient sources. Cristiani says emulating that natural spacing not only provides a water-effi-



USE READER SERVICE #422

cient lawn, but one that looks natural to the overall landscape.

"It gives the yard a local sense of place," he says.

However, before the xeriscaping begins, it is important to know what defines a local or native plant. Horticulture experts define a native plant as one that occurs naturally within a 25-mile radius and within 500 feet elevation.

"Elevation is something we deal with a lot in the west," he says. "Albuquerque, for example, is in the desert at 5000 feet elevation, but within a few miles from the edge of town, you are at 10,600 feet. Plants up there don't make it down."

It's also important to note the site's eco-region. From that point, it is easier to understand microclimates and soils. "Know the region's unique climate, geography and plant communities," Cristiani says.

Xeriscaping can be as lush and colorful as any traditional landscape, according to Dennis Swartzell, marketing director of Mountain States Nursery in Las Vegas. And when designing the xeriscape, the lushest, most colorful area of the lawn should be in the location where the homeowners will spend the most time.

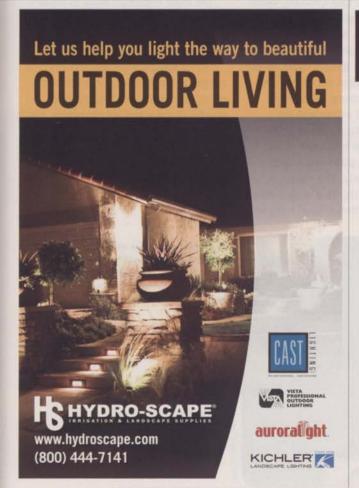
"It's your oasis," Swartzell says. "This is where you have the most waterconsumptive plants in your palette. It could include turf or high water-use plant materials like annuals. The idea is to keep those plants that required a lot of water where you are going to be living. As you move away from the oasis, the waterconsumptive plants should lessen."

Swartzell disagrees slightly with the idea of focusing on only native plants.

"Native is all relative," he says. "It's better to think of adaptability. For example, if you use plants that are only native to the Mojave Desert, there aren't many interesting plants to begin with and most of it is grown by seed. But if you've done your research, you'll find that plants from the Chihuahuan Desert, which is a little wetter and cooler, are perfectly adapted to the Mojave Desert. Using those plants. you can increase your palette threefold."

TALK BACK

tolerant cottage garden style approach. I think David's right: It's ecosystems." - Judith Phillips, landscape designer



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However, people must be careful when mixing and matching plants. "A mistake I see every day includes taking plants from Asia that are highly water consumptive with a low pH requirement and mixing those with plants from the arid Southwest," Swartzell says. "You risk putting too much water on the desert plants. It's a lot easier when the plants are from the same climate base."

Obviously where one lives will dictate the approach to xeriscaping and the irrigation needed for the plant system.

"When people back East talk about xeriscaping, they are talking about plants that can go for several weeks without any irrigation," Swartzell says. "In the Southwest, there are very few plants that can survive that. In the Pacific Northwest, all you would need is a hose with a little sprinkler system on the end. It is really adapted to the area you're in."

However, climate can change and that will have an effect on plant life, says Rick Webb, president of the Louisiana Native Plant Society.

Typically along the Gulf Coast, annual rainfall can be up to 60 inches, but in 2000, the area went through a drought.

"Climate is weather over time, and during the drought period, the trees had begun to adapt to the new climate," Webb explains. "Once the drought years were over, we saw a lot of tree stress because the trees were no longer used to the heavier rainfalls."

Part of xeriscaping, he adds, is learn-



Examining plant life in its native habitat also provides a better understanding of why these plants grow the way they do

ing how native plants adapt to the changes in climate. Like Cristiani, Webb believes that xeriscaping should not only utilize native plants, but also focus on the plants' natural growth patterns. Insects are part of the growth cycle, Webb says. Also, competition between plants can happen – the strong will survive while the weak will wither and die.

"Another thing about natural plantings is they're never in straight lines," Webb adds. "Don't plant in straight rows. Space unevenly. And install an odd number of plants. That way, if some of the plants don't thrive, everything will still fit in nicely."

The most important thing to remember, experts say, is that the xeriscape landscape is a work of art, and like all works of art, it has multiple benefits.

"Xeriscaping's water efficiency is critical to the health of our urban environment," Bennett says. "We use one quarter of the water we did before. You're building a landscape that could be there for decades." PLD

Sue Marquette Poremba is a freelance writer based in Central Pennsylvania.



Xeriscaping can be as lush and colorful as any traditional landscape, according to Dennis Swartzell, marketing director of Mountain States Nursery in Las Vegas

Spotlight on LED

Thanks to new commercial applications, the future of energy-efficient lighting looks bright By Seth Warren Rose

One of the only good things about high energy prices is the positive effect they're having on the alternative energy industry. For savvy landscapers, that positive effect could translate into new business opportunities.

With an energy-conscious public, funding for landscaping projects that take advantage of alternative energy systems is getting a whole lot easier, as the city of Liberty, N.Y. discovered when it sought to install outdoor solar-powered LED lighting in Swan Lake Park.

Swan Lake Park is one of the first public parks in the United States to specify a new class of robust, solar-powered LED streetlights for a landscape application. The economic benefits of solar-powered LED lighting were obvious to Swan Lake, but landscape contractors shouldn't over-

look solar-power lighting as a business opportunity either.

The 12-foot-tall solar-powered LED streetlights installed along the pathway at Swan Lake were supplied by SolarOne Solutions of Framingham, Mass. The fixtures employ round strings of small LEDs, providing an attractive, uniform light inside a housing that is a throwback to classic street lighting of the early 20th Century.

The fixtures are powered by photovoltaic (PV) cells that convert light energy into electrical energy. The system receives all its power from the sun. The solar panels, with drooping banners behind created by designer Amelia Amon, add a decorative touch to the pole, and offer the clearest possible message that Swan Lake Park is going green. What sets these fixtures apart is a technology called SO-Bright that makes them far more efficient and reliable, ensuring that the lights are always on at night, regardless of cloudy days or long winter nights

Of course, solar-powered lights eliminate electricity bills, but various incentives and tax credits are available from utilities as well as from local, state and federal agencies to help fund projects. In 2007, the United States solar energy industry saw record growth as a result of rising energy prices as well as from increased federal funding for local, safe and clean alternatives. (Visit www.eneref. org for a list of various solar associations and funding sources.)

For the landscaping design, Nancy Levine of Swan Lake Renaissance con-



Energy Stars:
SolarOne Solutions offers LED
lighting powered
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Photo: Hadco Lighting

tracted Tommy LaGattuta of E&T Landscaping, who, like Levine, is a longtime resident of the town. Both Levine and E&T wanted to refine Swan Lake Park and the surrounding area, which includes a small waterfall. The landscaping began simply with flowers and hanging baskets. Though simple, the initial design won first prize and \$10,000 from the Renaissance Project which was invested back into the park, landscaping and solar-powered LED lights. Sullivan Renaissance, a beautification and community development program, oversaw the project. The co-funding for the lighting project came from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) as part of a solar street light demonstration project.

Along the lake is a boardwalk and gazebo, neither of which was originally lit.
Only the road had light posts. "It wasn't

welcoming at night, and there was also a safety factor", says Levine. "But we didn't want to put up a railing on the boardwalk because people sit on the edge and fish."

At first, Levine said they never even consider the use of solar-powered LED lights. But when she and LaGattuta saw the fixtures at a local trade fair, they were convinced. According to Levine, LaGattuta's seal of approval was the assurance she needed.

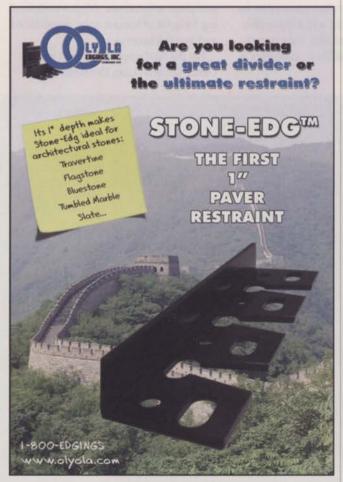
"Tommy LaGattuta said to do it, so we did it," Levine says.

LaGattuta later met with the city engineer to finalize the details, including where to place the fixtures.

Levine says the lights add beauty to the park. "The SolarOne fixtures are a very soft, beautiful light," she says. "Not glaring at all. And they light up the board walk, and all the way down to the parking lot. So it lights up the places in the park that need to be lit up but we also designed secluded dark areas of the park."

The streetlights were easy to install and the installation preserved the land, eliminating the trenching and repaving required for underground lines of conventional streetlights. The fixtures have a decorative and contemporary design, and of course, the municipality enjoys bragging rights that come with installing environmentally friendly lights. Fossil fuel-burning power plants are responsible for two-thirds of the sulfur dioxide, a guarter of the nitrogen oxide and almost half of the human-produced carbon dioxide emissions that create smog, acid rain and global warming. Solar power, of course, burns no fossil fuels.

The town's leadership was delighted to usher in Liberty's first eco-friendly lights. "In this rapidly changing world, it



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is important for municipal government to try out new forms of energy," said Frank DeMayo, the town's supervisor. "Liberty is proud to be included in a solar lighting project, which we are confident will work to the benefit of our taxpayers, our public and the environment. This is the way of the future."

Not all solar-powered streetlights work in every situation. Superior solar lighting design mandates that the system operate through the longest night, and thereby charging its battery on the shortest day. Under these conditions, the needs of the battery are not always well matched to the power characteristics of the solar panel. Winter in the northern latitudes is the greatest challenge for solar-powered lighting.

A recently developed technology is what makes the system possible. The system, called SO-Bright Maximum Power Tracking (MPT), marries the LED light output with the solar energy input and is the electronic brain. The technol-

ogy actually captures more energy from the solar panel in winter months while providing additional run-time through sunless periods.

Unlike grid-wired LED lighting, solar-powered lighting requires more planning. A key step is estimating the how many "bad", sunless days to expect. For sunnier climates such as Southern California – the company generally recommends 5 days of battery power storage, and 10 days for cooler, cloudier regions like Toronto. And when placing solar panels, consider that the best orientation of the panels is south, but also that they can be spoiled by the shadows of trees or buildings.

According to Moneer Azzam, the company's president, the MPT algorithm essentially joins the power characteristics of the solar panels and the LED lights,

ensuring that the maximum amount of energy available from the solar panel finds its way into the battery. "This advancement in solar-powered lighting control addresses charging efficiency when and where our customers need it most," says Azzam.

Six solar-powered light posts were installed at Swan Lake Park along the pathway, which is sufficient for lighting the area at night. The average footcandles where the lights are positioned on the walkway is 0.64. The lumens per fixture are 2400.

The Liberty community wanted fixtures that would enhance the beauty of the park and provide safety. But also, they wanted lights that were "Dark Sky" compliant. Dark sky policies prohibit lights that wash out the starry night sky. "The SolarOne lights are very directional.

LED lights send an eco-friendly message to those enjoying Swan Lake Park's boardwalk in Liberty, N.Y. Residents say the lights also make the area safer.

Photo: Hadco Lighting



There's no light pollution." DeMayo noted.

Selling the idea to property owners

How do you sell an expensive lighting system to cost-conscious property owners? Consider this: We've arrived at the perfect storm of economics for solar-powered LED lights. Energy prices are up and eco-friendly thinking is growing in popularity. But also, the price of LEDs may begin to drop somewhat next year. Small parks and campuses may be just the right market for energy-free lighting, even in tough economic times. According to DeMayo, the new lights showcase how Liberty is not only friendly to the environment but friendly to companies that are green themselves. "We're looking to set a tone as an environmentally conscious place – to make Liberty a 'green' community. We're going to do the responsible thing."

Outdoor activities such as bicycling, camping, fishing and snow sports, generate \$730 billion in an industry that supports 6.5 million jobs across the nation and generates \$88 billion in state and national tax revenue annually.

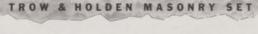
And what could be "greener" than large green areas, such as parks, often the cheapest way to safeguard drinking water and clean the air? They absorb carbon dioxide, control erosion, clean the air of pollutants and absorb flood water.

Illuminated pathways attract pedestrians to designated walkways, making it easier to patrol areas at night and reducing accidents. With no underground cabling restraints, lamps can be positioned with great flexibly. Dark spots can be lit at night without connecting to the electrical grid, creating more usable outdoor space. LED light levels are infinitely adjustable and the white light provides greater visibility without over lighting or trespassing into the night

Because of shorter days and longer nights, New York winters can pose a challenge for solar-powered lighting. Photo: Hadoo Lighting

With unprecedented Photo: Hadco Lighting energy costs, coupled with concerns about the environment, the time may be right for LED solar lighting. For Swan Lake Park, installing solar-powered LED lighting was as much about the green benefit as it was about beautifying the park. For landscapers, it's an opportunity to brighten up their business. PLD

Seth Warren Rose is the founder of the Eneref Group (www.eneref. org), which advances ecologically sensible facility ideas.



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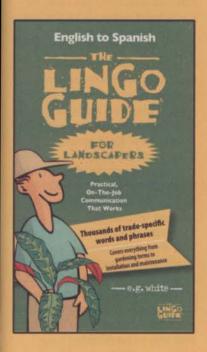
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Wisdom from Wal-Mart



Prior to taking the leap into self-employment, I spent more than 30 years in retail management with big box names such as Wal-Mart, Best Buy and Lowe's. Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton realized long ago that the key to business longevity was how well he treated his customers. In our company, customer service isn't a cliché. It's our way of life.

If the only communication your customer receives from you is a monthly invoice for mowing, you're making a big mistake. I've done landscaping projects where customers are flabbergasted at the level of communication. They know when I'll be there, what I'll be doing, how long I'll be doing it and what they can expect. If our crew is running late, they get a call or an e-mail from my Blackberry. Keeping them informed makes them feel like they're No. 1. They feel as if they're part of the project and not just part of the checkbook. It's that engagement that builds loyalty.

We ask if there are certain times of the day they don't want the lawn mowed or land care to be done. We ask if they want organic or synthetic. These guidelines will create fewer customer disappointments. Setting clear expectations gives you and the customer peace of mind. A level playing field where both parties have an equal understanding of what's happening and what will happen sets the stage for building the relationship needed to satisfy your customer's needs and maintain their business.

Selling the customer the complete solution is an often overlooked area of customer service. Often I'm called to bid on a landscaping project or land care contract. The instant I pull into the property I'm looking at topography, drainage issues, lawn conditions, weed problems and the surrounding tree canopy even though I'm only there to surmise the property for a mowing bid. In my mind I'm formulating questions to ask, ideas and concerns to address with this potential customer. Why? It's more potential business for me, but more importantly it presents to the customer your expertise on situations or problems that could occur. Problems left unaddressed could cause customer disappointments in the end.

Remember that we're the experts. Customers might not come right out and ask us about a drainage problem they have, or about land erosion issues or even a landscaping project they are considering. They expect us to see those issues and offer solutions. Even if the customer decides not to go with your suggestions, you've planted the seed for future business and shown the potential customer that you've got their best interest in mind.

In retail, the little things always seemed to make a difference with the customer. Thanking them as they leave. Clean restrooms. Polite cashiers. Landscaping and lawn care are no different. This summer I installed a small mowing strip for a family. It was a two-day project and on my way to the site the second day, I stopped for coffee. I called the customer and asked if she'd like something. Silence. She was floored that a landscaper thought of her while buying coffee and offered to buy her a cup.

How many customers are lost because we fail to do the little things that help build relationships and customer loyalty?

Survival for small businesses in today's economy can be challenging. It might involve reinventing yourself. Companies that embrace the vision of delivering a customer service product so good that customers will pay more for it will build customer loyalty and survive any economic environment. The quality of work isn't enough anymore. Customers are more knowledgeable, possess a plethora of resources and will pull the plug on a business that doesn't put them in the center. They need to feel important. They want inclusion.

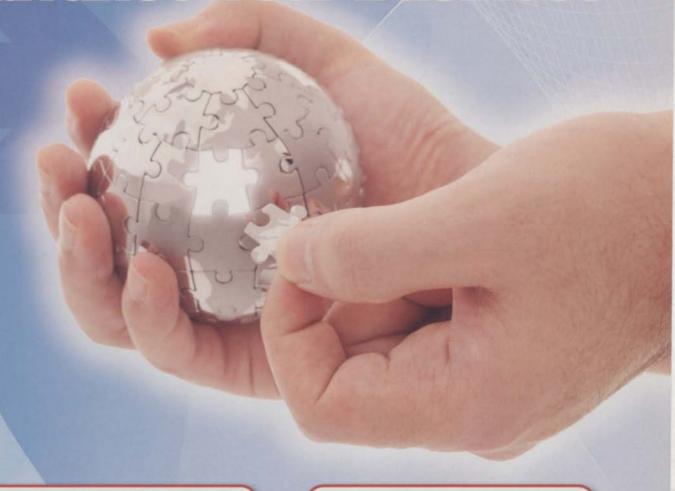
When you put the customer in the center of your entire decision making process and are communicating with and engaging them, building a relationship, doing the little things that the customer might not even notice, then you have customer centricity. It goes well beyond your every day customer service. Practice it, teach it and embrace it, and you'll be on your way to establishing long-term customer loyalty. L

Want to be featured next month? E-mail the editor at mhepp@gie.net.



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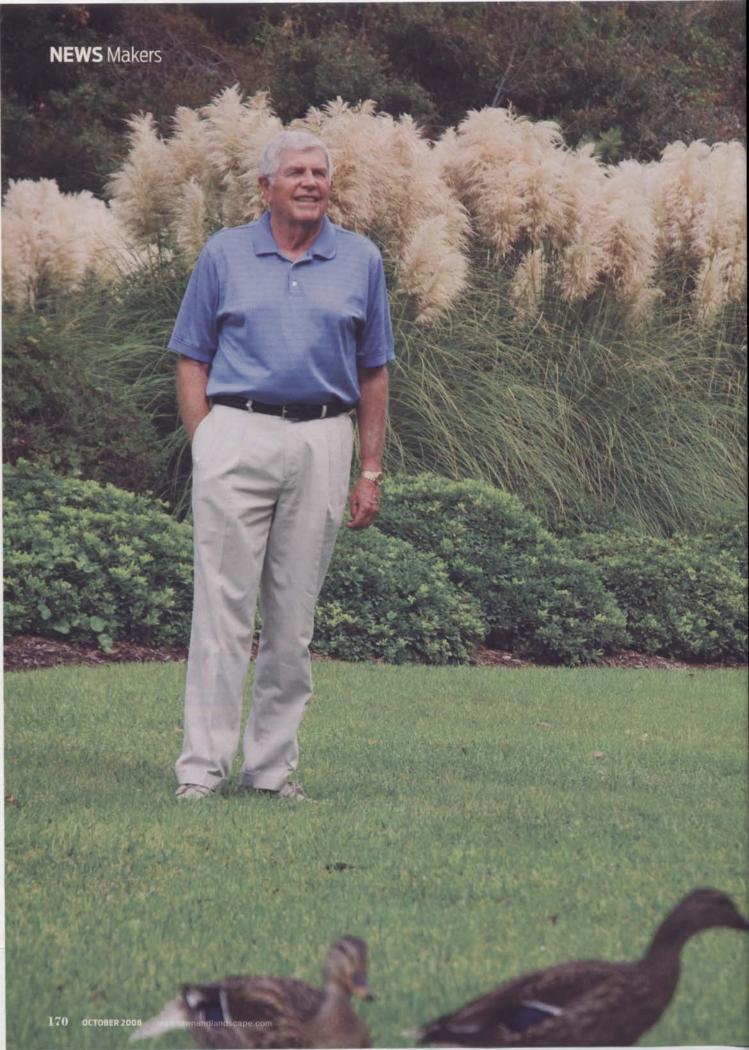
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Retired... NOT!

It's hard to get in touch with Bill Liles as he begins his third retirement

e's busy with clients, traveling to a major industry conference and bemoaning the fact that he's not playing golf or fishing as much as he'd like.

Apparently, Liles never looked up the word "retirement" in a dictionary. Probably didn't have time.

For nearly 30 years, Liles has been a fixture in the turf chemical market. He led the team that brought the old Ciba-Geigy organization from agriculture to specialty and changed business cards several times as the company swallowed up smaller fish to become Novartis (now Syngenta).

He "retired" from that business and became the first executive director of Prokoz, a cooperative formed by a group of independent turf distributors who were looking to match the buying power of national distributors like the old Lesco and UHS organizations.

Next, he "retired" from that job to help bring Arysta LifeSciences into the U.S. turf and ornamental market.

He recently "retired" from Arysta and is now – at long last – on his own, running a business consulting company and free to speak his mind about the state of the market, the changes he's seen along the way and what he expects in the future.

How did you get into this crazy business?

I was like a lot of North Carolina kids who grew up on tobacco farms and decided college (at North Carolina State) looked pretty good compared to farming. I wanted to follow in my dad's footsteps and be an ag educator, but at the time – believe it or not – ag salespeople were in high demand. I worked part-time in a men's clothing store, and discovered I loved selling and was pretty good at it. A guy would come in to buy a necktie and leave with a new suit, a couple of shirts, three ties and a pair of shoes.

So, I went to work for Ralston-Purina right out of school. A few years later Ciba



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NEWS Makers

introduced Atrazine and it was the hottest thing around. So I went to work for them and eventually became a product manager. By '81, we had the registration on subdue and wanted to introduce it into turf. The problem was we didn't know anything about the market. No one in our group had any turf background. We made some really stupid mistakes, but we learned from them and eventually built a pretty nice business.

Talk about what's changed over three decades.

First, there are more products – lots more products. The turf manager now has 50 instead of 10 product choices in most categories. The chemistry's better too. Lower dosages, highly customized programs, better formulations and better packaging. Burning used to be a huge issue and you hardly ever hear about it anymore.

Second, of course, is consolidation. There were about 20 basic manufacturers 20 years ago and now it's down to six or seven in the U.S., depending on how you count. It's good in some respects because bigger companies have stronger infrastructure, but it does minimize competition.

Then there's the "G" word – generics. There's no question they are a viable alternatives in the marketplace. If the company backs it up and the research supports it, it's legitimate. It's just like Advil. I don't know about you, but I buy whatever Ibuprofen they're selling at Walgreens or wherever because I can trust it. The good part is that it brings down cost. The bad part is that it makes companies a lot more cautious about how they spend R&D dollars. Because of patent expiration, they probably only have 10 years of exclusivity after seven years of bring a new product to the market. So anything new has to have a high enough profit margin for a decade to recoup the investment.

Finally, there's a lot more regulation. We're under attack by environmental groups more than ever. With the advent of the Internet, any blogger is an instant expert; you might not know a thing, but you can tell people not to use pesticides. Politicians won't take a stand on it, so we have to fight our own battles.

What did you learn about the turf market that was different from ag?

Ag is a high volume/low margin proposition and service is focused at the dealer level, which is highly consolidated. It's relatively low risk from a sales standpoint. Turf is low volume, high service and high risk. You can't make recommendation mistakes and you can't misrepresent your product. If you make a mistake, people lose jobs, you lose customers and you lose credibility. Precision is mandatory.

Everyone thinks that turf profit margins are higher than ag, but that's not necessarily true in the long run. The margins are higher, initially. An ag product might make 40 percent (margin) and the same product in turf might initially make 60 percent. But then you start figuring out the costs – formulations, research, better-trained sales people, packaging, tight regulations in urban markets and so on. I think the margins might be about the same in the long run – and they aren't that great overall.

What predictions do you have for the turf market in the next five years?

More regulations, higher costs and less R&D. There'll certainly be more generics. It's forcing the manufacturers to constantly examine whether they can maintain the level of service everyone's used to. The industry will eventually find a balance between branded and generic by weighing cost against service.

What things does the average turf manager usually not understand about the supply chain in our market?

Anybody in the specialty market – lawn, golf, aquatics, roadside, etc. – will face more regulations. Special interests are not going to back off. And they have the ear of Congress. They're going to expect their distributors and the manufacturers to fight those battles for them, but that won't be easy unless the customer is truly supporting them.

They need to support their distributor. That's their chief contact with the manufacturer. You can go direct, but the manufacturer is not going to know you and your business the same way. Your local rep knows you, the market and your needs. They understand the products you need to succeed. Bypassing them is a huge risk. Distributors can make mistakes – they can misdiagnose, make a bad recommendation, etc. – but the risk of that is very minimal compared to the potential for problems when you buy direct. The channel is critical.

The manufacturer's job is to support the distributor and the reps. It's actually very economical compared to some markets (such as agriculture) that have three or even four steps.

If you could jump in a time machine and go back 20 years, what would you have invested in?

I would have bought land! [Laughs.] That never goes bad.

Other than that, I wouldn't have changed much. I've always worked with really good people. Good people mean good support and a lot of accomplishment. I've been really blessed. From the LCO level, to the distributors, to the colleagues I've worked with – they've been great. I made mistakes, but they weren't consequential in the scheme of things. It was a good run.

Tell us about what you're doing now.

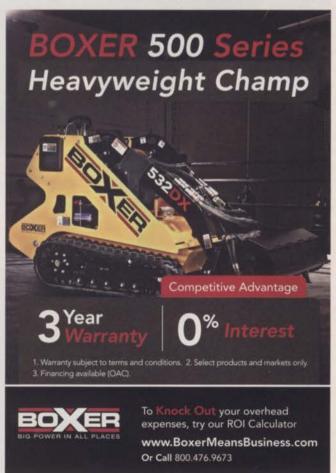
I started a T&O consulting business for distributors and manufacturers in July. I'm working with a few companies and growing. I enjoy tackling problems and trying to help people fix things. I'm going to do this, play a lot more golf and do a lot more fishing. That's my vision. Hey, I'm on a budget now, so fishing is like paying the bills: Gotta fill the freezer and feed the family!

Final thoughts?

People working in this business need to remember how blessed they are. This is a great business because of the relationships, the ethics, and the professionalism overall. To get paid to do this is unbelievable. It's serious business, but by the same token it's a lot of fun. Don't take yourself too seriously. Every job is job, but if you're not having fun, don't do it. ①



USE READER SERVICE #89



USE READER SERVICE #90

Good to Great

A solution-based partnership helps Rob Palmer and Jerry Schill each do what he does best

Seven years ago, Rob Palmer started Weed Pro Ltd., specializing in fertilization, weed control and ornamental services. He's built his business by partnering with local landscape companies such as Schill Landscaping in Sheffield Village, Ohio, to outsource their chemical needs.

Since the partnership, Jerry Schill's business has soared from \$200,000 to almost \$5 million in annual revenue. The business partners — and office neighbors — sat down with Lawn & Landscape editor Margaret Hepp to discuss how they've profited from reinventing themselves.

Jerry Schill (left), owner and president of Schill Grounds Management, and Rob Palmer, president of Weed Pro, say they're stronger working together than alone

How did your businesses come together?

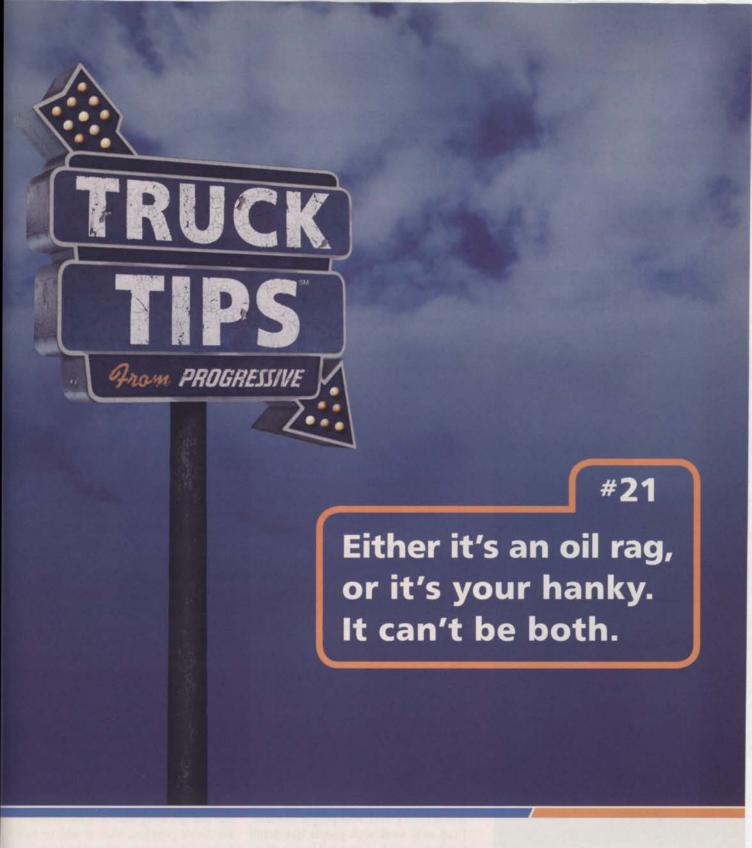
Jerry Schill: We started out doing fertilization in-house. We got into some of the lean processes, looking at ways to become more competitive in the marketplace as we expanded our footprint. But then we decided the amount of overhead and the dollars we spent managing the fertilization side of our business was getting out of alignment with what we were doing. It wasn't something we had a passion for.

But our job is to make properties look great. So, through networking – we'd known Rob for years – we were able to sit down and say: 'You offer probably the best service in our marketplace. How can we partner together?'

If you've ever read the book "Good to Great," you know about the hedgehog concept: Do one thing and be great at it. That was the philosophy we took when we approached Weed Pro to take over the fertilization side of our business. Our organizational structure allows us to interact with them on a daily basis. Weed Pro is almost like an extension of our organization without all the overhead expenses. We have a much better product allowing Weed Pro to do what they're great at than we would have ever gotten doing it in-house. We have 16 agronomists on staff at Schill that really are Weed Pro people. What we've done is we've actually used that, from a marketing standpoint, with our client base to say, "Look, we readily admit that this isn't what we're great at." It's a product we offer, but we understand that these are the professionals. Our organizational structure allows the integration of minds to collaborate and come up with effective solutions. We would never go back to doing it the traditional way.

In this economy, we provide a service that's needed on the commercial end of things. We're stronger working together than against each other. Rob's technicians know more than I do about lawn care, which is fantastic. They offer services to us. They can meet the clients with us and serve as representatives – and likewise.

Rob Palmer: From top to bottom, we've always considered ourselves a depart-



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ment. We're friends with a lot of these guys. Schill will talk to my technicians on days more than I do. When we're on properties, it's the same thing. If I've got guys who are doing nothing but fertilization, we can keep our costs minimized, keep our training focused and keep our advertising costs focused. We're not out to do a lot of things okay. We do a few things very well, and we're just focused on that. We have a fairly streamlined process and we stick to it.

Why does this partnership work so well?

RP: You can't work for people who don't have the same quality intentions you do. I'll give you an example. I've been in this position seven years and early on, you want work, you want work, you want work. So you work with a guy who says, 'Do round one and round two of fertilization, but then don't do round three though six.' What ends up happening is our trucks are on a property that doesn't look so good later in the year. The client might have had a contract that dictated four to six applications, but that landscaper was trying to save money by only having us do two. And we've been burnt. I still, to this day, seven years later, have a management company in this area that's hesitant to give me any work because I was working for a landscaper who had me do a single application. I did it, not knowing that contractor was supposed to be providing five or six applications on that property. The management company now thinks that I don't do a good job because of the way that property looked. I probably should have immediately gone right to the source and confessed the contractor's negligence, but there has to be a trust between us. What I've found in five years is that I can't work with people like that. I can only work with people like Schill Landscaping who will do all five or all six applications in a contract. Then, they can hold me accountable. I have to work with contractors who are trustworthy.

JS: I think a lot of it, too, has to do with the fact that we do what we do because we love doing it. My goal is to provide green, weed-free, wonderful-looking properties. There might be a lot of subcategories to get to that point - profitability's huge - but if we can't make a profit and provide the level of service we want to provide, there's no point in doing it. Rob and I share the same compelling vision of what a property's supposed to look like. There were times my company wanted too much, and Rob's guys said, 'Let's settle down.' Or they say, 'We're selling a complete tree and shrub program,' and we say, 'No, let's do an IPM program.' We're out doing routine visits and actually looking at things together, instead of over-applying or putting products down for economic reasons rather than agronomic reasons. Those types of solutions are hugely beneficial when you sit down with a client. Rob's guys are training us and we're training them. It's a powerful relationship.

RP: It's a win-win, because again, we hold each other accountable. I'm an independent set of eyes, and he's an independent set of eyes. If I'm doing something wrong, he's going to let me know. If we see something on their property, we're certainly going to let them know. It's a competitive world and we can all work together. It's better for all of us.

So why is it beneficial for you, Jerry, to follow through with the complete five- or six-application program in a contract?

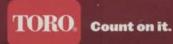
RP: That's a good question! I'd like to know the answer to that. [Laughs.]

JS: We're simply delivering what we promised. There are contractors who will over-promise and under-deliver. We've built our reputation on providing great service. That's the way we were brought up. We have properties where the applications are in excess \$4,000 or \$5,000 per application. When the economy gets tight, it's easy to pull back \$10,000 worth of application. It's easy to pull that stuff out and get away with it. Unfortunately for Rob's position, that would be bad because he has material and labor sitting around. Maybe he can get through it, but it's not what we do. We're just simply doing what we say we're going to do. It's a commitment I made to Rob. We sat down and worked out how this marriage was going to work, and he promised me super service and great solutions, both economic and agronomic, and we truly have a great partnership in doing what



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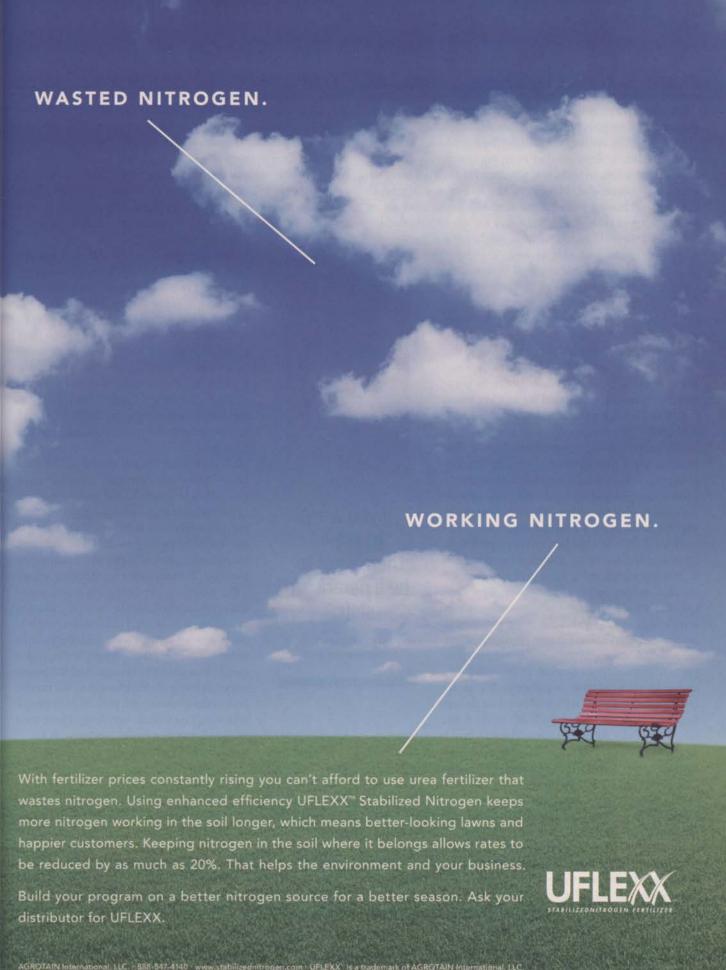
we both love to do. And, of course, there's a wholesale relationship there when it comes to the economics of what we're doing. Rob's doing more than 1,000 acres for me and because I've committed that much work to him, he's going to treat me better.

RP: One of the things in this relationship that I can offer is that I'm the largest nonnational buyer in the state of Ohio. My costs reflect that and I can pass those over to him. I'd hope that someone wouldn't have to raise their price to hire me. I'm hoping we can build some efficiency to hold the price in the neighborhood it needs to be and still be competitive.

JS: Rob does several hundred properties for us, and he knows they don't need to be managed after they're routed. His company knows that every so many weeks they're going to do the property visits. I know that if I have a problem, I can simply pick up the phone and call. There've been efficiencies - he's a great marketer for us and all the other companies he works for. Likewise, I'm a great marketer for him. I'm basically a free salesman. There are certain economic advantages. and there's enough work in this market for everybody. You have to be comfortable in your own skin to do a relationship like this. I think our company and some of the other companies Rob works for are people that could sit down at a restaurant and eat dinner and be completely comfortable together.

RP: There has to be trust there. If there's no trust, there's no relationship. There are four or five major players in every market, and hundreds of smaller players. I'd like to work for all of them. I like to have salesmen all throughout the area who aren't on my payroll.

JS: Well, and the nice thing about it is that Rob has minimum standards that he needs to enter into with a contractor. Say the top three of us are trading properties back and forth, which eventually happens. The client, our customer, understands the service levels we're trying to provide. It actually, in some instances, makes life simpler: I trade properties with Brickman, Brickman trades properties with me, and then you've got the Yardmasters of the world. That's life. The bigger players in the market understand that. We're



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all big boys. We get it. And as long as things are done on a level playing field, no one has a problem with it.

RP: That's why I've spent a lot of money branding. You see all these commercials now on television from pharmaceutical companies. Why are they advertising their product when they don't sell direct? Because they're trying to create a brand. I want the end-user to want me, whether it's through Jerry or through someone else. Hopefully, the size of our organization and our buying power gives us the ability to offer some good pricing to them. I also hope that my advertising dollars

spent, and their affiliation with us, might have some lure to the end-user as well. That's my goal. If you ask me what my goal is someday, it's that a customer would say, "Who do you use for fertilization? Weed Pro? OK, you're on the list." And I have certain contracts now where

it's like that.

JS: If you do what you say you're going to do, and you're great at what you do - the one thing you're great at is yours to lose. We're so comfortable in our own skin that we market Weed Pro in our sales presentations, and we'll bring a Weed Pro employee with us to our presentations. There are definitely advantages to that relationship if you truly believe in it. I'm not going to get rid of Rob for another contractor for a few extra cents per square foot because I know the quality of service that he's providing me is parallel to the service I'm providing.

RP: And if profit's the key, he sees a grub situation and lets me know, that way we can price it. If there's something on a property that we see that we can recommend to him, then they can then upsell. Having our high-level guys and Jerry's high-level guys on the same property is phenomenal. We don't know anything about mowing, about maintenance, how to run that portion of the business or what the gross margins should be of a maintenance company. We would fail at that. But we can stick with what we do and have our guys who are specifically trained on,

say, pine sawfly larvae. I'd guess the standard mow foreman, who knows everything about their mowers, their trucks, their trailers - they're not going to know about pine sawfly larvae, or emerald ash borer, which is a hot ticket.

JS: I thought those were pine cones out there. [Laughter]

RP: That's just the thing. I think we can help them upsell. And if we can help them sell, then we're helping ourselves sell.

JS: It's a solution-based relationship. The byproduct of all that is profitability. We don't do it to be more profitable. We do it because it's the best thing to do agronomically. The reward is the economic side of it, which is great. I sell for them. They sell for us. He does the same thing with his other contractors. That's why I think the few bigger guys are successful in the marketplace is because they take that mentality to their clients.

Why aren't there more partnerships like this?

JS: Egos. No sense in sugarcoating it. Guys are intimidated. They're genuinely scared of a conflict. The nice thing I know about Rob is that if he would ever betray a trust with me, he loses four hundred-some thousand dollars worth of work [snaps] like that. There are people who will do it. There's no doubt about it. I have to be able to know they're out there doing their part without being babysat. I think a lot of guys are scared of the perception of things. Maybe they might not market it the right way, as a solution-based program. And he works for other companies,

other contractors.

RP: I also have to trust that I'm going to get paid from him, too. That's the second priority. First, I've got to work for customers who are going to let us do the right thing - but second, I've got to get paid. If I have to cut a landscaper off because I haven't been paid, now I start to look bad and it's going to fall back on me. We had a problem here recently, a pretty little place who had me work for another contractor. I got a letter from the association terminating my ability to go back on the property. My problem now is do I call them and say it's not me, I never got paid? Well, yes and no. Do you step up and let them know? There are some grey areas and some difficulties in there. It's not transparent.

JS: You know, you've got guys who are just pioneers in our industry. We're trying to give back like those guys do. I'll be in Akron, Ohio, tomorrow with a guy who's starting his business. But there are a lot of entrepreneurs - the Wheelers, the George Hullmans - who truly give back because they want the industry as a whole to be better. I think as the people in the industry who truly want the industry to be better try to help other guys get better, you're going to see the trend change. And the people who don't adapt to the changes in the market and in the economy are probably the people who won't be with us very long. There are a

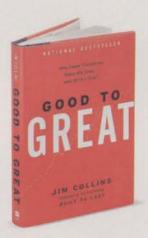
lot of people interested in being purchased right now. A lot.

RP: The money that's in the market next year is going to be crazy, too.

JS: And then there's talent that's going to be associated with that, which is the more critical part of acquisition - people. But if you want to grow, there's got to be a paradigm shift. "Good to Great" - before I read that book three years ago, I hated cutting grass.

RP: I watched what that book did to him.

JS: Five years ago, we were doing \$200,000 in revenue. We'll do almost \$5 million next year. And we didn't force it. "Good to Great," Chapter Three: the hedgehog concept - I've read it about 500 times. Every time I have a crazy idea, I have to go back and read it. Stay focused, stay focused. It works. (L)



"If you want to grow, there's got to be a paradigm shift."

Jerry Schill, Schill Grounds Management owner and president

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earch engine optimization" (SEO) is a buzz phrase that's catching the attention of Web site owners everywhere. It refers to the strategic design of a Web site and its content to get the most possible hits. A well-designed site gets premier placement on search engines, giving your green business a sales advantage and added credibility.

DOMAIN NAME AND PAGE NAMES

A short, easy-to-remember domain name that includes popular search engine key words is best. Page titles should have a unique heading that also includes common search terms. Shorter page titles are usually better than extended ones and should be fewer than 70 characters, spaces and punctuation marks. The most important words should be first. Remember that page names will be picked up as bookmarks. If they aren't short and descriptive, a visitor who wishes to return might not recognize the site in his or her favorite's

list. A site for a landscape maintenance company could include pages such as "landscape design in Jacksonville, FL", "irrigation design in North Florida" and "Jacksonville landscape maintenance".

KEY WORDS

Words impress search engines. Music, graphics, font style and color don't. Key words are words included in site content that are recognized by search engines as an important destination for users searching those for those terms. "Landscaping" could be an example of a key word that would be entered by someone looking for that particular service. However, this key search word would also return many of your competitors' sites, so it's imperative to find ways to route people to your site first. Always remember to include your region, city and state.

TEXT

The text on a site should be, first and foremost, informative and interesting. Rather than key words, it should preferably include key phrases that the average

person may enter into a search engine to find you. For instance, "sustainable, personal landscape design for the discerning Atlanta resident" would be better than "landscape design" in a list of services. It can be tempting to use a key word as much as possible in the belief that this strategy will result in a higher ranking. For example, "Our landscaping is the best landscaping in this area and the oldest landscaping business in Atlanta". This will not only be unimpressive to potential clients, but search engines are smart enough to spot if text is overdone and will likely classify your site as spam. As a result, the site would rank lower than it might have without key word repetition.

The text should also utilize key words other than the most popular ones. According to Understandgoogle.com, a business can get just as much traffic from 100 noncompetitive key words as it can from some single, highly competitive key words. Use words that refer to the nature of the business, but not ones that everyone is using, such as "landscape care" rather than "landscape maintenance". "Landscape maintenance" could also be used on the same page, but the alternative term could bring in people who don't go to the sites using "landscape maintenance".



How to make sure your company's virtual doorstep doesn't collect dust

By Laurie Prescott

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NET Profit

It's imperative that any important information you want to convey is not in the graphics section of the Web site. Search engines won't pick up these words. If you can highlight the words, they are considered text. If not, the words are either graphics or Flash software. Flash is best used for a small introduction. However, Flash navigation may keep search engines from seeing other pages on your site.

Text should be updated frequently to keep people coming back. The updated information can include awards, new customers, staff changes, etc. Updates with newly completed projects or industry trends work well.

META DESCRIPTION TAGS

Meta description tags are brief descriptions of each Web page's content. It shouldn't be longer than 170 to 200 characters and should be unique (but consistent) from page to page. Although some

search engines still put emphasis on Meta tag indexes, Google no longer does.

ALT TAGS

Alt tags are used to describe photos so that they may be recognized by search engines. The photos should be named with important key words - never with generic names such as "photo 1".

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact information should be on each page of a site and should feature your domain name and e-mail address in order to gain recognition.

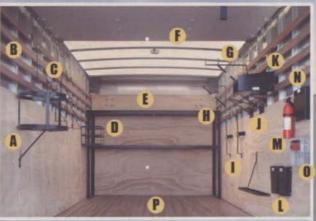
LINKS

If there is interest in linking with another site, it is important to evaluate the other site for quality and content. Usually site owners will trade links. A link with a Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau site would probably impress visitors and provide them with an opportunity to check a business's reputation. However, remember links take visitors away from the original site, so it's a good idea to place them strategically.

Search engine optimization has become something of a science. In the end, though, no amount of optimization tricks will substitute for quality content. Understandgoogle.com suggests to write intriguing, insightful content, and then promote that material to induce linking from relevant sites. In other words, write well and passionately, and the response will come. (L)

Green Schemes, a landscape design/build firm in Jacksonville, Fla., for 23 years. She is a graduate of Lake City Community College's Landscape Design program, a Florida Certified Landscape Designer and is certified by the Association of Professional Landscape





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Five Steps to Better Networking

When you make friends, you make sales. Take these five steps to increase business opportunities – and your bottom line.

1. TAKE AN INTEREST IN PEOPLE AND THEY'LL TAKE AN INTEREST IN YOU.

In 1937 Dale Carnegie published How to Win Friends and Influence People. Now, more than 70 years later, his book still appears on the bestseller list – a sure sign he knew what he was talking about.

His advice to take interest in others remains integral to effective networking. You meet new people all the time - at a business meeting, on the sidelines of your daughter's soccer game, waiting for a flight at the airport - and every one of these people represents a potential opportunity for you to grow your business. But first you need to get to know them. Your objective should always be to make friends, not to aggressively sell your products and services. Think of networking as a marathon and not a sprint; build relationships over time with the possibility of reward in the distance.

When you meet new people, ask them about themselves. Where are they from? What do they do for a living? For fun? Search for common ground. Maybe you're both Bengals fans, or maybe you both have chocolate labs. Strive to establish rapport and go from there. The rest will follow in due time.

2. LISTEN.

Always listen more than you talk. Not only will you learn more this way, but you'll make others feel more important for having been heard. When I network at events, I rarely offer any information about myself unless I'm asked

more than once, and even then I'm careful not to say too much. After all, I'm not there to talk about myself; I'm trying to meet new people who might someday be able to help me grow my business. So listen to those you meet, ask for their business cards and memorize their names immediately. This takes effort, but you'll be amazed by how much something as simple as remembering a person's name does to affect the way he or she feels about you.

3. NEVER NETWORK ALONE.

Always bring someone along with you to an event where you intend to network. Ask a friend or business associate who might benefit from the event to join you. Then, as you make your rounds, you can introduce your guest to others as a way of breaking the ice. This "security

for potential business in the future. When you behave with this in mind, you'll be more at ease, others will enjoy being around you and you'll find your network expanding on its own.

5. FOLLOW UP.

Ask for the business card of every new contact you make. The next morning, take the cards of those you think have the most potential for helping you grow your business and start cultivating them. I often drop a note in the mail telling them how much I enjoyed meeting them and include a copy of my book. You might send a copy of your company newsletter, or a newspaper clipping on a topic you discussed, or even your grandmother's apple pie recipe - anything simple that you think they might enjoy that shows your

"To succeed in business, it's not about what you know or who you know but who knows you when they need you."

blanket" will help you approach these events with confidence, and your guest will appreciate your attempts to help him or her meet new people and prospects.

4. DON'T FOCUS SOLELY ON YOUR NETWORKING OBJECTIVES.

Whether you're at an industry event, a charity outing or just your neighbor's pool party, try to have fun and relax without worrying too much about how many new contacts you're making. People can sense when your interest in them is purely mercenary. You're not there to seal any new deals, only to lay the groundwork

thoughtfulness. Then log away this person's profession and be on a daily lookout for items that might interest him or her. It really is true that it's often the small things that make all the difference.

To succeed in business, it's not what you know or who you know but who knows you when they need you. You have to work hard to keep your name out there, and networking is one of the best ways to do this.

Talk to you next month — I've got to get to a networking event. ①



MARTY GRUNDER

is a speaker, consultant and author, and also owner of Grunder Landscaping Co. in Miamisburg, Ohio. Reach him at landscapesales@ gie.net or via www. martygrunder.com.



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'09 Guide to Grubs (etc.)



New combo grub control products hit more targets than ever before – but are you paying for success or excess?

With the introduction of several new broad-spectrum turf pest control products, it's hard to tell if grub treatment is getting simpler or more complicated. These seven-in-one-blow products combine ingredients or create new chemistries to target a range of similar turf pests in a single application. But do they really work? Can you guarantee their success with confidence? Early trials suggest sustainable control for the future, yet entomologists have some words of caution.

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Under constant scrutiny from state, federal and grassroots pesticide watch groups, developers of major grub control products are thinking outside the box for a sustainable future. "It's increasingly important to find new alternatives or new ways of using existing chemistries to maintain lawn care operators' expectations," says Michael Maravich, head research scientist of Arysta LifeScience. "There's the possibility that uses of grub control products will become even more stringent, which may limit the product's effectiveness and where it's applied, among other restrictions."

DuPont has explored a new branch of chemistry for its latest grub control product. The industry's been very effective at coming up with new active ingredients, says

A letter to all commercial mowing professionals, dealers, distributors and manufacturers.

Dear Commercial Mowing Industry Professionals,

Over the last few years, there has been an undeniable trend in the commercial mowing industry toward stand-on products. I'd like to take this opportunity to share my insight regarding the recent growth of the stand-on market and encourage our continued mutual success.

As our industry grows, all of our businesses grow and vice versa. Our individual efforts to improve our businesses through our respective areas of expertise result in greater success for all of us. The stand-on trend is a perfect example of this phenomenon.

First off, I congratulate and commend each of you who have embraced the stand-on as the most productive mower category today. There are currently about six brands of stand-on mowers. If you've researched stand-on mowers, you certainly understand their productivity and profitability. For those of you who have not looked into them, I encourage you to do so this winter.

In my career, I've witnessed similar trends three consecutive times in the following three categories of mowers:

First off, I congratulate and commend each of you who have embraced the stand-on as the most productive mower category today.

- The rise, plateau and decline of commercial intermediate walk-behind from the early '80s to the early '00s.
- The rise, plateau and decline of commercial zero-radius-turning, mid-mount riders beginning in the late '90s and losing momentum over the past two or three years.
- The growth of the stand-on market, which began around 2000 and has dramatically accelerated over the last few years in spite of industry-wide commercial mower declines.

Incremental advances in technology and the resulting productivity gains have driven this evolution of the commercial mower market. As a leader in the stand-on category, we at Wright are naturally grateful that the industry has begun to embrace standing as superior way to mow. Just as our company, partners and users have profited from this trend, I believe the entire industry will profit as more of you make the shift to stand-on mowers.

Again, I congratulate and give a hearty welcome to the newer participants in the stand-on category. I hope all is well with your businesses and families these days and that you have the finest season ever in 2009!

Sincerely,

William R. Wright, CEO

Wright Manufacturing, Inc.

In 1981, Bill Wright started with a lawn maintenance business, Lawn-Wright, which grew to mow about 500 lawns per week. In 1983, he also founded a separate manufacturing division, which led to the development of stand-on mowers. In 1993, he formed Wright Manufacturing, Inc. for the purpose of manufacturing stand-on mowers and Wright shipped their first Stander® in October 1997.





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Chuck Silcox, global product development manager for turf & ornamental at DuPont Professional Products. "For the first 50 years of the chemical industry, only three target sites were being exploited," Silcox says. "Just in the last 15 years, there have been five additional sites."

Other manufacturers have reinvented existing chemistry by enhancing or combining tried-and-true formulations. Doug Houseworth, research director of Arysta LifeScience, believes combination products will become the standard in grub and other turf insect pest control. "We're at the beginning of a new era in grub control," he says. "I expect other companies

will start looking for combinations of insecticides."

It may be a new era, but it hearkens back to a different time in lawn care. Twenty years ago, organo-phosphates and chlorinated hydro-carbons provided effective, long-term grub control – with a laundry list of environmental repercussions. Once the persistence and mobility problems were identified, there was no denying the need for change, and the products were abandoned.

In the meantime, focus from specialty chemical companies has been on targeting turf pests with a single active ingredient for maximum effectiveness. Many credit the use of neonicotinoid chemistry for breakthroughs and innovation in grub control. The trend during the next five to 10 years or more, it seems, will be to combine active ingredients and chemistries to wipe out a diverse spectrum of turf pests in a single blow. But with so many new products available, how should you choose?

WISE UP

You might call them grub control's Big Five. Arysta LifeScience, Bayer Environmental Science, Dow AgroScience, Du-Pont Professional Products and Syngenta Professional Products have all launched

Eenie meenie ...

Don't pick a grub control product until you know the facts

	DuPont* Acelepryn INSECTICION	Alek LCG	MACH 2	Meridian 0.33G buccitish	MERIT 0.5 G
	Acelepryn	Aloft	Mach2	Meridian	Merit
Active ingredient(s)	Chlorantraniliprole	Clothianidin, Bifenthrin	Halofenozide	Thiamethoxam	Imidacloprid
Target lawn pests*	White grubs, billbugs, chinch bugs, European crane fly, turf caterpillars and leaf-feeding caterpillars	White grubs, ants, chinch bugs, sod webworms and cutworms	White grubs and northern/southern masked chafers, sod webworms, armyworms and cutworms	White grubs, billbugs and foliar pests	White grubs, cutworms, chinch bugs and ornamental pests
Formulations	Liquid	Granular, liquid	Granular, liquid, fertilizer	Granular, liquid	Granular, liquid, fertilizer
Web site	www2.dupont.com	www. arystalifescience. com	www.dowagro.com	www. syngentaprofessional products.com	www. bayerprocentral. com

^{*}See labels for complete pest control lists.



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Kevin Stone, Landscape Concepts Management



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new multiple turf pest control products. Each uses a distinct active ingredient and targets a different combination of turf pests, though all primarily target white grubs. Because each product varies slightly, it's tough to pick just one. Comparisons are important, but you might find yourself considering apples and oranges.

"The first thing to do is ignore price per bag," says Maravich. "The prices are going to be all over the board. Dig in, read the labels and look at rates. One bag might cover two lawns whereas a cheaper bag might have less coverage; one might last 14 days, another might last 40. There are big differences in what you get out of a product and the length of the control."

However, one commonality among all these products is the years of extensive, behind-the-scenes research that plays a major role in getting treatments to the market. "It's important to ensure your product has the approval of university researchers," says Nate Royalty, technical development manager for insecticides at Bayer Environmental Science. "A lot of effort has been put in to evaluating the efficacy of products based on research."

It's important to take into consideration which insects affect your area, says Matt Geise, field technical manager for Syngenta Professional Products. "It would be much simpler for turf managers if turf insect life cycles were all aligned to a specific date each year so only a single application of a turf insecticide would be necessary," he says. "Unfortunately, that doesn't happen. Based on weather patterns, individual insect life cycles might or might not overlap in any given season or year, making it difficult to accurately time an application for more than one insect.

"However, the relative longevity of these products does make it possible to address multiple turf insect pests, should their susceptible life stage coincide with the presence of the insecticide."

SHOOT WITH A TARGET

Because you can't treat every grub on every lawn, it would be helpful to predict what will strike and when. You can't, of course, but you can time your applications to target the broadest or most threatening range of turf pests. What's essential for your profitability - and for the ecosystem



Public enemy No. 1. Photo: Fred Baxendale, University of Nebraska

of the turf - is to apply products with a specific target in mind, and not just to try and zap all pests in a single application.

New chemistries in grub control products provide an attractive care program for lawn care operators and landscape professionals. "The new combination products certainly provide some options that should be effective against a wide range of insects," says Pat Vittum, professor of entomology at the University of Massachusetts. "But I have some philosophical difficulties with the concept. In parts of the country where Japanese beetles or masked chafers are the primary grub species, early applications of neonicotinoids - say, mid-May to mid-June - appear to work fairly well in most cases. My concern is that those early applications may not be as effective against tougher species like the oriental beetle or European chafer."

A turf manager should determine which insect species is the most problematic and apply the product to maximize its effectiveness against that species, she says. "If billbugs are the primary problem, then by all means make a spring application of the neonicotinoid - and you might get lucky and get two for the price of one."

Still, Vittum says she realizes the neonicotinoids, or even more so the combination products, can be a critical part of the insect control arsenal in lawn care. "Most LCOs do not have the luxury of making multiple applications of insecticides," she says. "They're on a budget and need to make decisions in a different manner than golf course superintendents, for example."

Decision-making is crucial to properly manage grubs, says Eileen Buss, extension



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specialist of the University of Florida entomology department, because we have a responsibility as an industry to not abuse the products we have. "To preventively treat for grubs, you're supposed to have a history of infestation at that site," she says. "If you have a new account and you're trying to sell grub control as part of your service, then preventive means you never want to get grubs at a site.

"To an entomologist, preventive means something different from practitionary. We don't ever advocate using insecticides when there's no evidence of a pest present. You should try to time your application appropriately based on history."

ROI

Applied effectively, preventative multipest turf grub control products can have additional benefits. "If timed correctly, these types of products can save a lot of time and headaches later on when resources become tight towards the end of the budget year," Geise says. "Not having to repair turf damage from 'grub hungry' critters like skunks and raccoons conserves not only time and labor, but keeps managed turf aesthetically pleasing all year long without significant additional inputs."

Maravich also agrees the lawn care operator benefits from this diminished need for labor. "To the LCO, the best way to profit is to have flexibility to apply the product when you choose to apply it," he says.

Royalty echoes, "From an economics perspective, it's a lot more efficient to make a scheduled application than to have to make an emergency call because he didn't put a proper treatment down."

It's true that multiple turf pest insecticides for grub control are much less labor intensive than traditional products. In theory, these products address both water and labor shortages by allowing a greater water-in window and requiring

fewer follow-up visits. Still, there are no guarantees when it comes to homeowner reliability. The more you educate your client, the more likely he or she will be to follow instructions.

The average homeowner lacks the understanding of the variety of pests that attack the turf, but most know what a grub is, says Royalty. "As a result (and based on the severity of the damage) it's easy for a lawn care professional to demonstrate that if you don't take the steps to treat this, this is what's going to happen."

Think of the impact of a grub control product on your customer, Maravich says. "It's important to follow up, either in person or by phone, with customers several days after application," he says. "Too many LCOs aren't paying attention."

This lack of attention can lead to a lack of profits through increased demand for time and labor – or worse, a loss of business because of customer dissatisfaction.

Another common mistake is misap-





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plication, Royalty says. "The most common mistake comes from equipment not calibrated properly. You can under-apply or over-apply. In addition, preventative products are very forgiving, but there are

certain practices and conditions that a guy should follow if he wants maximum performance. Heavy thatch can interfere. After an application, products need to be watered in."

The LCO isn't the one watering the lawn, Maravich cautions: "He's driving in, applying the product and leaving."

Take care in your applications to ensure return on investment. It's difficult to predict when grub populations will be heavy, and even more difficult to know when to react before symptoms show up. "The last thing you want is to get a call - 'What are these brown spots in my lawn?' - requiring you to go out there and do a curative treatment," Royalty says. "You can spend all your time chasing hot spots. But preventative grub control applications are effective 99 percent of the time, and it's one less thing for an LCO to worry about."

HIT YOUR TARGET

Five tips to choose the right grub control product

formers for the insects you wish to target.

Select products from established companies that offer advice on how best to optimize their product and stand behind it should you have guestions or problems.

Your time and labor is expensive. Understanding these steps before applying will save you money by doing it correctly the first time. - Matt

TUNNEL FORWARD

It might be impossible to predict complete turf pest activity in a single season on a single lawn, but R&D departments can speculate on the future of grub control - and it's good practice for future development.

"What will happen in the future is more of an emphasis on trying to predict when grubs are going to be a problem," Royalty says. "We're looking at the lawn as not

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just a white grub place. It's a year-round ecosystem with all these different insect pests. Also, we'll continue to look at the overall impact on grub control on turf health."

Vittum predicts an ongoing development trend in favor of preventative treatments. "Based on the chemistry currently available and under development, it appears that most grub applications will be on a preventive basis, and there will be fewer options for 'rescue' treatments," she says.

How should applications be made in the meantime?

"We have not yet seen any evidence of resistance to neonicotinoids in white grub populations," Vittum says. "However, with new chemistry becoming available, turf managers should consider alternating neonicotinoids with other modes of action, to extend the life of the neonicotinoids."

It's impossible to predict whether such



A turf manager should target the most problematic species. Photo: Bayer Environmental Science

alternating treatments will give way to full product integration, but Houseworth forecasts that multiple turf insect pest control will indeed overrule. "It will probably take five years for the academic and research community to fully embrace the new concept of multiple turf insect pest control and work it into their standard

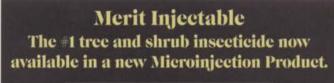
recommendations," Houseworth says. "As always with new innovations, it takes time to accept new ways of thinking and doing things. This is understandable; centers of influence mustn't jump too soon to make recommendations of new concepts until they're sure the concepts are valid. They can't afford to be wrong."

So far, they haven't been, and it's led to the generation of a new practice that seems to bode well for LCOs and landscape professionals.

"When I was in graduate school, I couldn't have dreamed of this," Silcox says. "It's amazing how we're getting the low application rates, the low toxicity file and extremely effective control."

And the future? Any miracle products in the pipeline that will hit all major pests with a single application?

"That's a next-generation product," Silcox says. "My daughter just started her master's degree in turf entomology. I'm going to leave that to her." L



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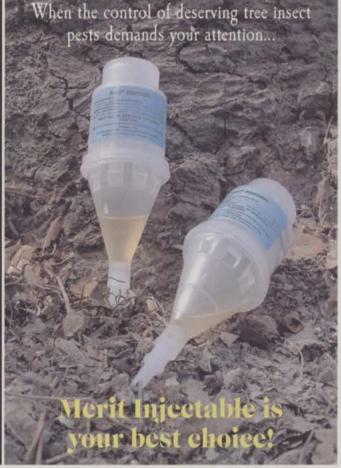
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Don't run on empty

he high cost of fuel and petroleum-based products has just about everyone upset and concerned - except those on the selling end of the pipeline. It's such a significant topic that it has become a major issue in this year's national elections. Contractors from across the country have queried me as to what they should do about these costs. Can they pass them on to their clients and, if so, how? My response focuses upon their cost estimating system and strategy. A cost estimating system should accurately identify all of your costs and allow you to pass them onto your clients in your pricing for products and services. Really, whether fuel prices go up or down is insignificant if you have a good method for pricing. Unfortunately, most contractors don't have an estimating methodology that allows them to analyze their costs accurately and make appropriate adjustments.

EQUIPMENT & FUEL BENCHMARKS

All equipment costs (fuel, depreciation, repairs, maintenance, insurance, in-house mechanics, etc.) for green industry companies normally range between 8 and 12 percent of revenue. This range includes trucks and vehicles as well as field equipment. The fuel component of this range is normally 2 to 4 percent. However, this percentage is creeping up with the rising cost of fuel. A million-dollar company would normally have fuel costs ranging from \$20,000 to \$40,000. This figure is currently breaking through the \$50,000 to \$60,000 ceiling.

The cost per operating hour (CPH) for equipment is comprised of three components: ac-

quisition, fuel and maintenance. For instance, at \$3.00 per gallon for #2 diesel, a new skid steer that cost \$25,000 to \$30,000 would have a total CPH of about \$18.00. Fuel consumption per hour for a typical skid steer runs between 1 to 1.5 gallons per hour (GPH). Fuel costs per hour would be from \$3.00 to \$4.50 per hour. On the high end, fuel would run 25 percent of the \$18.00. Here's a chart to show you how the total CPH for this skid steer changes with increased fuel costs using a consumption rate of 1.5 gallons per operating hour.

\$ / per gallon	Total CPH	Fuel consumed per hour	\$ / per hour	Fuel % of CPH
\$3.00	\$18.00	1.5 gallons	\$4.50	25.0
\$4.00	\$19.50	1.5 gallons	\$6.00	30.8
\$5.00	\$21.00	1.5 gallons	\$7.50	35.7
\$6.00	\$22.50	1.5 gallons	\$9.00	40.0

INCLUDING FUEL COSTS IN YOUR PRICING

Once you accurately calculate the cost per hour for a piece of equipment, include these costs in your bids and pricing based upon actual run-time hours multiplied by the CPH. For instance, if your skid steer CPH is \$21.00, a bid for a job requiring this skid steer for 10 hours would include \$210.00 (10 x \$21) for its cost. As the cost of fuel increased or decreased, so would the CPH for the equipment. This increase or decrease is then passed on to the clients in your bids.

TIPS, TRICKS & TRAPS

At a minimum, you should review and adjust your equipment CPH rates twice a year—once at the beginning of the year and again at the mid-way point. Here are some additional ideas for you

to consider.

• Work four 10-hour days. A construction client in New England reduced both his overtime and fuel costs for his crews by gong to four 10-hour days per week for part of the year. Previously, his crews worked a minimum of 10 hours, five and a half days per week. This strategy, though not a panacea, could reduce crew vehicle fuel consumption by roughly 20 percent.

 Add extra fuel costs into general conditions. A \$20,000 construction bid might include an extra \$200 to \$300 for fuel.

This amounts to an extra 1 to 1.5 percent.

 Put equipment costs into general and administrative (G&A) overhead.
 Some estimat-

ing systems put all equipment costs (except rental equipment) in G&A overhead and spread it evenly across all bids. This is a huge mistake. Be job specific with your equipment costs. Why should a job be charged for a skid steer if it only requires pickup trucks and wheelbarrows?

CONCLUSION

Fuel costs should be treated like any other cost in your estimating system. It will also take a lot of the guesswork and unexpected surprises out of your business. If you don't, your life will be more "exciting" – but your emotions (and your company's bottom line) will rise and fall with the price of a barrel of oil. L

This article was adapted from Jim Huston's book, How to Price Landscape & Irrigation Projects.



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Fleeting Seasons

In his 13th year as fleet manager with Landscape Concepts Management in Grayslake, Ill., Kevin Stone is now in charge of 125 skid steers – and counting

They say you don't know you've got a good thing until it's gone, but Kevin Stone could have done without the lesson. He's built the fleet of Landscape Concepts Management skid steers over the last 13 years and he was satisfied with all 125 of them. And then there were 122.

"It happens every year – someone drives off with a loader," Stone says. "This is the first year we haven't gotten them back."

Stone has just put in an order with his local CASE dealer to replace the three stolen skid steers, which the company will need for its high-volume commercial snow removal business this winter. Landscape Concepts Management president Michael Kerton had a former partner who leased his skid steer fleet to the company during the winter months until Stone approached the CASE dealer to ask about buying used rental skid steer loaders. He told the dealer they were interested in buying 10 to 15 loaders, and wanted to compare used prices to new prices.

"CASE got wind of our interest and said they'd make it much more attractive for us to buy new if we were going to buy that many," Stone says. "They made us a corporate buyer and gave us a big break. For the price of a two or three year old machine I got a new CASE loader with

a warranty and half-percent off finance rates."

The company has averaged 18 new skid steer purchases per year in the past four years, and Stone boasts that at 300 to 400 hours a year, the machines should last 20 years or more – as long as they're used just for snow maintenance. "The machines I use year-round don't have that kind of life cycle," he says.

To tend to the loaders, Stone has a team of seven mechanics who are employed year-round. Ten skid steers need attention during all four seasons, mainly used for grading, tree work and pallet moving in the summer, and then for



Hey, if it's got four wheels: Kevin Stone, who oversees a fleet of 125 skid steers at III.based Landscape Concepts Management, recently had three skid steers stolen. Instead of replacing the missing steers with used ones, Stone found new, warrantybacked steer loaders for the same price



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snow removal with the rest of the fleet in the winter. But the mechanics spend most time with the skid steer loaders in the winter. Last winter, LCM's major market – the northern suburbs of Chicago – was hit with 91 inches of snow, and the mechanics checked each machine at least once a week to make sure it was ready for every job.

"Without fail, I had no problems with machines," Stone says. "I had to fix a few hoses on snow plows. There were a handful of problems – maybe five or six over the course of a few months – but with 125 skid loaders working fulltime almost every day, it's pretty incredible."

Comfort and ergonomics are as important as reliability, Stone says, and in this category, his skid steers excel.

"The CASE cab is so comfortable, with the heat controls," he says. "The machines are quiet. Guys in 30 degree temperatures can be in there in a t-shirt. It's important. We're concerned with keeping our guys comfortable for that number of hours in the field. We want to keep them happy."

Operators are required to attend a training rodeo during Saturdays in October and November. The staff learns vital skills before they hit the winter snow, including how to change the fuel, how to check the oil, where controls and gears



Despite 91 inches of snow last winter, Kevin Stone and his team of mechanics experienced a mere handful of problems with their skid steers

are and where the fuse and heat panels are. Stone and his leadership crew put down dirt and have the operators run the skid steers with plows and pushers attached.

"Our staff will be out there in the middle of the night in the dark and if they don't know where the controls are, they'll be pretty lost," Stone says. "We send our account managers out to the rodeo, too. If someone doesn't show up, the account managers can jump in and lend a hand.

Plus they know what the operators have to deal with on a daily basis."

It's a reliable backup plan, but Stone says it's been a few years since he's had to rely on an account managers. His operating crew is as reliable as his loaders.

The company owns a range of skid steers, from the smallest 420s and 40XTs to mid-range 60XTs, 430s, 445s, 90XTs and 450s to a large 95XT, an 1840 and an 1845. His most versatile machine is the 430, which, Stone says, is a good combination for snow. The skid steer fleet ranges in price from about \$24,000 for the 420 to about \$33,000 for the 450. Each machine is enhanced with a 2-speed transmission, which the company started using 6 years ago. The transmission allows operators to travel quickly between sites; a push of a button drives the speed from 3 miles per hour to 11. "What used to take all day now takes just a few minutes," Stone says of the driving time. "Some properties might be a mile apart."

A portion of LCM's work is along Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago, and last year LCM began clearing the snow at Sears Tower. "We can just barely get in there," he laughs. "The space requirement is 6'3" and the CASE 420 is about 6'2"."

Tight spaces, big jobs: Another winter's on the way, and Stone's ready with all 125 skid steer loaders. ①



A Landscape Concepts Management skid steer plows snow after a storm



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Landscape machinery makes Warren Brelsford's business more appealing when bidding for commercial or government contracts

BY ZACK LLOYD

Steered in the Right Direction

Warren Brelsford uses CAT skid steers to help WDB Lawn & Garden meet and exceed business expectations

Like so many others in the landscape industry, Warren Brelsford has horticulture in his blood. Growing up in Bucks County, Pa., he spent his free time working at Bright Leaf Landscape Center & Florist, the family nursery. So when he decided to branch out and start his own business at the ripe young age of 18, it seemed only natural for him to carry on the family tradition.

In 1993, equipped with a clientele of 35 homeowners and a payroll that included himself and two others, Brelsford began WDB Lawn & Garden, charging \$30 to \$35 per mow. Knowing the challenges new businesses face, he never expected his startup company to be a long-term solution toward providing for his family. But the more hurdles Brelsford jumped, the more enthralled he became with his

landscaping business.

"Perseverance is honestly how I got here," says Brelsford, who studied landscaping at Rutgers University and earned a business degree from Kutztown (Pa.) University. "And I took more of a liking to lawn care. It was just more or less like a hobby."

Fifteen years later, Brelsford says he still feels that way, though his customer base and business have grown immensely. He now employs a staff of 12 at WDB and has moved into the high-end residential and commercial sectors of the industry. In addition, Brelsford says WDB has government contracts working with school districts, courthouses and library systems. Overall, he estimates 25 percent of his customers are residential and 75 percent are commercial or government.

As his company began to expand, Brelsford invested in landscaping machinery to ease the demands for manual labor and to make his business more appealing when bidding for commercial or government contracts. Until a few years ago, Brelsford worked with a fleet consisting of a New Holland L555 skid steer, a John Deere front-end tractor loader and an International Tractor front-end tractor loader, the only machine of the three he still uses today.

In 2005, when he decided it was time to expand his fleet, adding another skid steer was the obvious choice.

"They're just compact," Brelsford says.
"They're easier to work with than a big
front end loader because they're hydrostatic. All you have to do is push a handle
forward or backward, right or left, instead



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Marie Marie

TOOLS of the Trade /// Skid Steers

Skid steers ease the demand for manual labor, and CAT machinery can be acquired by purchase or rental

of turning a steering wheel as you do in a vehicle."

Before purchasing a new skid steer, Brelsford covered all his bases. He evaluated Gehl, Bobcat and New Holland products and prices before deciding that a Caterpillar skid steer was the best option for his company. He says the quality of their machine and their service agreement made it an easy decision to invest \$20,000 in a CAT 242B Series skid steer with an operating capacity of 2,100 pounds.

"If you ever have a problem with the machine, if it ever breaks down, their service is unbelievable," Brelsford says. "They'll come right out to your job site and fix the machine for you, whatever you need. And if they can't fix the machine, they'll rent one to you or give it to you until that one is fixed."

Brelsford purchased the skid steer from Ransome Rents, a CAT rental facility in Levittown, Pa.

"Ransome rents and sells, which is great for me," Brelsford says. "If I wanted to try a piece of equipment, I could rent it first and then see if I wanted to purchase it."

Brelsford says the impressive safety



features of the CAT skid steers reinforced his decision.

"I like that it has a gas pedal that can control your speed," says Brelsford. "It also has that bar that comes down overtop of you, which is great. You're not strapped into the machine. It has a safety belt, but you can just put down the bar and that keeps you safe as well."

After adding a CAT 242B in 2005, Brelsford was so pleased with its performance that he decided to add a second one in 2007, paying about \$24,000 for the machine. WDB has put its CAT skid steers to use in both residential and com-

mercial applications, renting attachments from CAT to meet all the needs of the landscaping industry. Brelsford says his company has fitted its skid steers with augers, rockhounds and jackhammers, among other attachments, for use in planting, moving material and excavating for patios and walkways.

The only complaint Brelsford has with his skid steer is that it sometimes doesn't meet the lift capacity that he would like, but he chalks that up to his decision to go with the 242B, rather than a larger skid steer, like a CAT 262C or 272C.

"I can still lift pallets, but I can't lift them straight up in the air as I can from a tractor-trailer," Brelsford says. "I'd like to get one size bigger or get a track machine."

If his business continues to grow as rapidly as it has during the past few years, Brelsford may soon be able to afford the bigger skid steer or track machine he desires. But he knows controlled growth is best to ensure WDB continues to provide a quality service.

"Don't grow too big too quickly," he cautions.

Just big enough to add another piece of machinery. ①



Brelsford purchased his first CAT 242B in 2005, and added a second in 2007

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BY STEFANIE TOTH

Calm After a Storm

Hurricane Katrina gave Charles Reymond the confidence to invest in new machinery



Trash and debris littered the streets of Pass Christian, Miss., after Hurricane Katrina swept through the small town of about 7,000 residents in 2005. While many saw the storm's devastation as a reason to stay away from the region, Charles Reymond, owner of All Seasons Lawn & Maintenance Inc. saw an opportunity for growth.

"I got to start the clean-up process and make a difference," Reymond says. "It helped me kick start the other end of the business, such as removing and planting trees and irrigation."

Reymond's business began in 1999 as a maintenance company. Before Hurricane Katrina, he had 235 accounts, both commercial and residential. After the storm, customers who were able to rebuild in Pass Christian began calling All Seasons for help – and Reymond's client base began to skyrocket.

The Mississippi maintenance man always wanted to expand his business to include landscaping, and hurricane cleanup efforts became his inspiration. But the task of cleaning and rebuilding dozens of homes was a first priority.

"Most of my clients had houses that didn't get blown away, but flooded," he says. "And when it flooded, water soaked the drywall and carpets. We had to remove all of that."

Every damaged item found, including televisions and personal items, needed to be removed and hauled elsewhere. With the addition of 30 laborers, Reymond and his crew began to gut five or fix houses at one time. But Reymond knew he needed

Charles Reymond, owner of All Seasons Lawn & Maintenance Inc. saw an opportunity for growth in the wake of Hurricane Katrina

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TOOLS of the Trade /// Skid Steers

more than just an army of dedicated employees. Heavy equipment would drag away decades of memories, but it would be essential to All Seasons' success.

"When most of the hurricane victims left, they took their few possessions that could fit in a car," Reymond says. "We had to go through the entire house and literally take out every nail."

High water levels from the hurricane also left streets flooded, making it impossible for vehicles to drive freely. So, Reymond decided to purchase a Bobcat S205 skid steer from a surviving local dealer in Biloxi, Miss. The new skid steer cleared televisions, refrigerators, washers, sinks and other objects from more than 100 homes.

"All of that debris would go out the windows and doors of the house," he says. I used the Bobcat to move it and FEMA picked it up."

From that first Bobcat purchase, All Seasons grew into a million-dollar land-scape company. Reymond continued to use the S205, but quickly felt comfortable enough to add a Bobcat T190 model to his landscaping fleet.

However, he quickly learned purchasing new machines has its benefits and drawbacks.

For example, Reymond now cautions against using the S205 model in wet conditions because of its rubber tires.

"When it rains continually for several days, skid steer operation can be difficult," he admits. But there's also a decided advantage to using the skid steer. Reymond likes the S205 because it is capable of driving over concrete and asphalt without causing damage. In addition to using the S205 for debris removal, Reymond turns to the S205 for removing old sod and spreading new topsoil.

Yet after mastering the S205, Reymond soon ran into another dilemma. The machine was too large to fit between homes and in smaller spaces. So, in May 2007, he purchased a MT55 model, which Reymond says provides the versatility he needs to move rocks and trench without damaging existing structures.

"It gets in areas where other Bobcats can't," Reymond says. "It cuts down on labor and gets jobs done more efficiently and faster. You don't have to worry about scratching the side of a house."

Reymond is satisfied with his business and equipment expansion, but jobs such as drain work require even more powerful machinery. For these specialty jobs, he rents a Caterpillar 303.5 mini excavator. But for someone who needed a stormy kick-start just to break into the landscape business, larger equipment and bigger challenges are now welcome. ©

Customers who were able to rebuild in Pass Christian, Miss., began calling All Seasons for help – and Reymond's client base began to skyrocket. Photo: Julie Long Photography





Building a College Relations Program: Part I

've spent more than three decades seeking, hiring and developing high-potential college graduates from more than 20 universities across the country. But before I divulge any infinite human resource wisdom, I'd first and foremost like to get the notion of college "recruiting" out of reader vocabulary. Instead, think of the program as being a relation-building process. And prior to launching a well-managed, multi-step relations program, you should have one clear sense of purpose: To be perceived by administration, faculty and students as an excellent place to establish a long-term, satisfying and rewarding career.

The overall strategy to gain this level of perception requires you to be visible, to participate in key events, to support targeted opportunities where your company will be viewed as an industry leader and to offer expertise in planning and landscaping technology.

STEP ONE: PREPARE

There is a sequential order to program building, and a solid foundation is essential for success.

Establish your needs. Ask yourself, "What type of graduate do I need? A team leader? Someone for sales or operations? A designer?" Determine how many you need and when.

Identify your target campuses and departments. Know which departments at specific colleges harbor potential candidates.

Understand the system. Visit the college or university's career center and relevant departments, both on the Web and in person. Learn how job placement works.

Know the competition. Research your competitors and recognize how your company is different.

Know your company. Prepare a stump speech and know your "wow" jobs, training and development programs. Be familiar with your internship program, your existing grad successes, your company job descriptions, salary ranges and benefits summary.

Know your system and tools. Build a flexible career booth. Have a needs assessment list, brochures, career path maps, training and development information, internship outlines, job summaries, interview questions and rating systems,

Focus on the students. Identify the stars, learn from the students and establish contact tracking system.

If you're starting out, first choose one college (start with alma maters of current employees) then move up to a maximum of three until you are fully skilled in the college relations process.

Find out who does what at each college. Is the college driven by a career center or is it department driven? (Perhaps a little of both?) Professors help those who help them. Learn how and where you can be an asset. Build a relational bank account: Make deposits and withdrawals and don't be overdrawn.

Get your act together with a system of collecting recruit information and following up with candidates. The best relationship builder wins the recruiting game. Keep in touch regularly with candidates via e-mail and phone.

STEP TWO: MAKE YOUR GAME PLAN

Keep in mind that a relations program is very similar to a marketing/sales campaign and not all events are direct transactions. Some are promotional, some show support and some are actually direct hits.

Know what type of event you're attending, based on the sponsor.

Career center. Try attending job fairs, career symposiums, spring board job fairs and interviews.

College/university. Consider coming to an open house, homecoming, annual parade or a new building dedication. Volunteer to be on an advisory committee.

Academic department. Drop in at banquets, speak with classes and participate in competitions. Be a part of club meetings, advisory boards and fundraisers.

After you identify the appropriate events, put a game plan together. Gather the information, insert everything on a master calendar and decide which events have the greatest strategic leverage.

Investigate the departments you want to draw from and determine what events they place the most importance on. Focus on more department specific events rather than overall college-based. Your recruits will be easier to identify and you won't have to bother with as much screening at the booth. Job fairs are more about marketing than sales, and you will spend most of your time promoting.

You should have a minimum of four and as many as six or seven touch points with your target college. Remember, it's not all about the job fair. It's about being involved and perceived in a positive, professional manner.

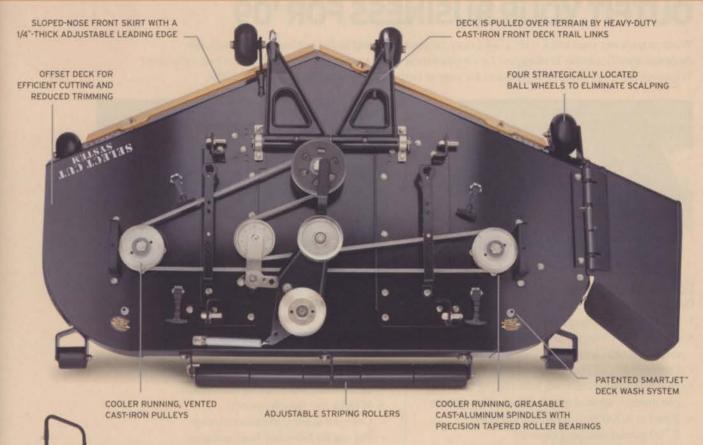
So, there are the first two steps. In Part II, we'll review setup, screening and follow up. L

View Bill's college relation toolkit at www.lawnandlandscape.com.



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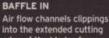
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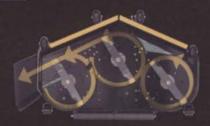


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This configuration allows for maximum air flow and discharge. Ideal for dry or thick growth, especially southern grasses like bahla.



into the extended cutting edge of the blades for a finer, cleaner cut. Ideal for most turf types, especially northern grasses such as fescue, rye and bluegrass.



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- Design features festoons of fruit bound with ribbons and swags
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- Increased power now ranges from 66 hp to 92 hp
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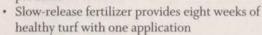
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1036



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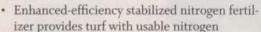
PT-80

ASV, Inc.

- · Rubber track loader with 80.5-hp en-
- Features 18-inch wide tracks and patented posi-track undercarriage technology
- Machine's 8,972-pound operating weight can be distributed to 3.5 pounds per square inch of ground pressure
- Two-speed direct drive allows operators to select low gear (for maximum torque) or high gear (for faster travel speeds up to 11 mph)
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PT-30

ASV, Inc.

- · Compact, 33.7-hp truck loader that is 48 inches wide
- · Works in confined spaces, yet productive enough to replace an entire crew of hand labor
- Uses patented posi-track undercarriage technology
- Machine's 3,350-pound operating weight can be distributed to less than 3 pounds per square inch of ground pressure
- · Can be equipped with 11-inchwide tracks or optional smooth turf tracks for finished service protection



ST-50

ASV, Inc.

- · A 50-hp tracked utility vehicle that runs on rubber tracks
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- · Has towing capacity of 5,000 pounds and a rear deck carrying capacity of up to 4,000 pounds
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- · Automatically regulates watering for better plant health
- · Ensures optimal soil moisture at root level
- · Set-it and forget-it technology allows for weather and seasonal change
- · Helps save water volume and eliminates environmental concerns such as water logging or water runoff
- · Installs in minutes
- Ideal for any lawn, turf or garden with automatic irrigation



SHOULD CE

CALLING ALL LAWN CARE BUSINESS OWNERS!



"If you attend one conference and show this year, this should be it!"

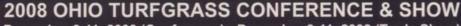
The OLCA Lawn Care Business Management Track at this years OTF Conference is focusing on Sales and Marketing.

Conference and Show Features:

- As partners in the Ohio Turfgrass Conference & Show, OLCA members receive the same discounted registration fees as OTF members.
- · The largest regional turfgrass show in the country.
- Breakfast Networking Roundtables for lawn care and sports turf managers.
- · Real facts & figures.
- Owners and lawn care marketing specialists.
- Growing your business through tough economic times.

To learn more about the Ohio Lawn Care Association and the many benefits of membership, visit www.OhioLawnCare.org or call 800-510-5296.





December 8-11, 2008 (Conference) • December 9-11, 2008 (Trade Show)
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CoreTect Tree and Shrub **Tablets**

Bayer Environmental Science

- Combines active ingredient in Merit insecticide with fertilizer to help nourish and protect trees and shrubs from
- Available for use during tree and shrub installation or on established plants
- · Allows plants to better survive harsh environmental conditions

Truck Mount Series Reel Models

- · Have increased capacity of 75 feet of 34 -inch I.D hose and 50 feet of oneinch I.D hose
- Feature new dual bearing axle support system that creates ultra low friction
- · Built for toughest work conditions
- · All T-series reels are spring-motor operated
- Available in chip and weather-resistant blue CPC powder coat finish





Caterpillar

 Rubber-track loaders feature steel-embedded track and steel undercarriage components for maximum life

- · All models deliver solid traction and reduced wear on sites with sticky, rocky soils
- · Units combine a freshly engineered suspension-type undercarriage with chassis of their multi-terrain loader counterparts, the 277C, 287C and 297C
- · All models feature two-speed drive systems with a maximum speed of 8.5 mph



· Four-wheel-drive independent suspension distributes weight evenly to keep all wheels on ground

Hilliard bidirectional differential delivers ondemand four-wheel-drive in both forward and reverse

Two-speed transaxle distributes even traction to both wheels when going straight and provides automatic differential action to rear wheels when turning

Front suspension with MacPherson struts provides 5 inches of travel at each wheel

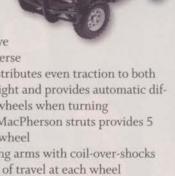
- Rear independent trailing arms with coil-over-shocks provide almost 5 inches of travel at each wheel
- Four-wheel hydraulic disc brakes
- Has three-year drivetrain limited warranty and a oneyear limited warranty



CT335, CT440, CT445 and CT450 **Compact Tractors**

Bobcat

- · Available in three packages: economy, standard and standard with cab
- All have independent PTO that can be engaged while tractor is in motion
- Cab models are radio-ready and come with standard heat and air conditioning, curved glass to reduce glare, doors on both sides and a window on bottom rear of cab
- A remote three-point hitch adjustment lever allows operator to raise and lower three-point links at rear of tractor
- Bob-Tach quick attachment mounting system allows operators to change and use multiple front-end attachments quickly and effortlessly
- Features four-wheel-drive for traveling in rough terrain
- Standard features include spark arrestor muffler, horn, brake lights and fully retractable seat belt











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for turf and landscape professionals.

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December 8 – 11, 2008 (Conference) • December 9 – 11, 2008 (Trade Show) Greater Columbus Convention Center • Columbus, Ohio





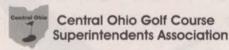
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- Lawn Care Business Management
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HM315

Caterpillar

- Mulcher designed for high productivity when teamed with the Caterpillar C-series and earlier skid steer loaders and multi-terrain loaders equipped with XPS hydraulics
- Has 57-inch cutter head and overall width of 72 inches
- Features dynamically balanced high-speed rotor with 34 tungsten-carbide teeth
- Three sets of counter-rotating knives mulch materials



DuPont Professional Products

- New class of chemistry provides turf pest control at low application rate
- Controls white grub species and other pests such as annual bluegrass weevils, billbugs and caterpillars
- Controls multiple pests with single application, eliminating at least one treatment to control surface feeders
- · Low water solubility
- Reduced-risk classification from the EPA
- Liquid formulation available now, granular formulation and fertilizer available in 2009







CDS-John Blue Co.

- · Offered in three models
- · Capacity up to 5 gpm
- Models available with or without quick connect ports, which include a clear site glass strainer and five hose barb quick-connect fittings
- Pumps come standard with four-piston diaphragm and ½-inch NPT Port
- · Weatherproof tested and backed by two-year warranty

BOOTH 4204 Ergo-Action 3/4-inch Forged Bypass Pruner, Model BP 3640

Corona Clipper

- Forged high-carbon steel forms a stronger, more durable cutting tool
- Sharpenable, forged steel blade for long service life
- Angled, ergonomic pruning head for added comfort and reduced hand stress
- · Contoured handles with non-slip grips

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1. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one) 1. Landscape Contractor 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service) 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service 5. Irrigation Contractor 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) 2. What services does your business offer? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY) 1. Landscape Design Landscape Installation 2. Seeding or Sodding 3. Turf & Ornamental Installation 4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation 5. Irrigation Installation 6. Landscape Lighting 7. Hardscape Installation 8. Water Features Landscape Maintenance 9. Landscape Renovation 10. Turf Fertilization 11. Turf Aeration 12. Tree & Ornamental Care 13. Tree & Stump Removal 14. Irrigation Maintenance 15. Erosion Control Pesticide Application 16. Turf Disease Control 17. Turf Insect Control 18. Turf Weed Control 19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application Other 20. Mowing 21. Hydroseeding 22. Snow Removal 23. Interior Landscape Services 24. Structural Pest Control 25. Holiday Lighting 26. Other 3. What is the service mix %? Mowing/Maint Design/Build Chemical Application 14. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?	5. Is Chemical Application work 1. Outsourced 2. Done by own employees 6. What are your company's approximate annual gross revenues? 1. Less than \$50,000 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999 7. \$700,000 to \$699,999 9. \$2,000,000 to \$69,999 9. \$2,000,000 to \$6,999,999 10. \$4,000,000 to \$1,999,999 11. \$7,000,000 to \$6,999,999 11. \$7,000,000 or more 7. What percentage of growth do you anticipate this year? 8. What year was your business founded? 9. What is your business mix? (%) Residential Commercial Other 10. Is this a Headquarters or Branch location? 11. Headquarters 22. Branch 33. Single Office 11. What best describes your title? 14. Corporate Officer 55. Partner 66. Manager 77. Director 88. Superintendent 99. Foreman 100. \$pecialist 111. Agronomist 112. Entomologist 113. Horitculturist 114. Plant Pathologist 115. Consultant 116. Technician 117. Serviceman 118. Other (please describe)	12. Which of the following types of and/or services are you conside adding/upgrading in the next of the control	lering 12 months? achments, etc) achments, etc) s, tanks, hers, edgers, hers, edgers, delous) e delous) e ders, deres, ders, d	PESTICIDES & CHEMICALS 11. Generating revenue by adding lawn care services 12. Best practices: chemical applications 13. Hydroseeding versus sodding 14. Fertigation 15. Organic/eco-friendly lawn care options 16. Chemical lawn care as add-on services CONSTRUCTION & INSTALLATION & DESIGN 17. Simplifying installation jobs 18. Installing pave stone 19. Software solutions for design projects-designing with technology 20. Design "how to's": Best practices for proper installation 21. Design/build/install as add-on service 22. Water features 23. Tips on selling design/build projects to home owners IRRIGATION 24. Basics of irrigation installation & maintenance 25. Weather-based controllers 26. Dealing with water restrictions 27. How to become a WaterSense Partner 28. Irrigation as add-on service HORTICULTURE 29. Best practices for dealing with drought 30. Soil treatments for best plants 31. PGR's 34. Bedding & installation 32. Software for planning 33. Seasonal planting guidelines OTHER 35. None of the above 36. Other (please specify) 14. Which of the following equipment do you have in inventory? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY) 10. MOWERS (riding, reel, walk-behind, zero-turn) 20. MOWER ATTACHMENTS (bucket, cab, dethatcher) 30. HAND TOOLS (shovels, saws, trimmers) 40. POWER TOOLS (blowers, edgers, chain saw) 50. APPLICATION EQUIPMENT (filters, pipes, pumps) 60. CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT (filters, pipes, pumps) 70. IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT (filters, pipes, pumps)
FREE Product Inform Write the appropriate reader service numbers in the for more information.		Complete the subscription ar information form, fold, and m	nail back to	pipes, pumps) 80. TRUCKS and TRAILERS 90. NON-EQUIPMENT (pesticides, fertilizers) 99. OTHER
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- · Service additions enable lawn and landscape contractors to partner with single source for print and online marketing needs
- · Helps business owners achieve consistent, professional image more quickly and cost-effectively

BRD-280 Bed Re-Definer

ECHO Incorporated

- · Designed to shape flower bed edges that have rounded over time and to give grassy areas well-defined bed edges
- · Has 59-inch straight shaft with flex-cable drive
- · Features oversized, high-impact plastic shield with guide marker, adjustable support wheel and three-finger metal blade with carbide tips
- Power-boost Vortex engine







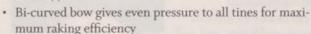
Walk Behind Aera-vator

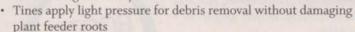
First Products, Inc.

- · 30-inch width for smaller lawns, 40-inch width for larger commercial properties
- · Aerate and seed in both forward and reverse with optional seeder attachment
- · Powerful 21-hp Vanguard engine
- · Two shaft widths for increased versatility
- · Ride-on platform to help reduce fatigue
- · Transport wheels for easy loading and unloading

Fixed Tine Leaf Rake, Model RK 62001

Corona Clipper





- 25 extra-wide tines
- 54-inch long wood handle
- Double crimps hold tines in place
- Tempered spring steel for greater durability and longer service life

FINN MTS (Material Transfer System) FINN

- · Designed for quick, efficient movement of bulk materials such as soil, aggregate and mulch
- · Reversible floor and dual discharge doors allow for easy unloading from either side of unit
- Fills a wheelbarrow in less than four seconds
- · Large, wide-opening rear door and main floor conveyor allow for quick material dumping





XTreme Series Line **Trimmer Rack**

Green Touch Industries

- · Solves problems of worn and broken trimmer components, spinning in the rack and theft
- Set of lightweight aluminum blocks attach directly to the trimmer shaft to prevent wear
- · Square aluminum block attaches near engine to eliminating spin-
- Shielded lock and locking components for theft protection



60D Compact Excavator

John Deere Construction

- · 54-hp compact excavator excels in close quarters
- · Features rugged and fuel-efficient interim Tier 4 engine
- · Tilt cab makes it easy to inspect and service hydraulic hoses and other components
- · Standard quick coupler and boommounted auxiliary hydraulics accommodate variety of buckets and worksite PRO attachments
- Tungsten-carbide coated surfaces and oil-impregnated boom, arm and bucket bushings deliver long-term durability
- · Has operating weight of 13,653 pounds

Skid Steer Loaders with EH **Joystick Controls**

John Deere Construction

- Optional electro-hydraulic joystick offers effortless and precise
- · Turbocharged four-cylinder and five-cylinder diesels
- · Impressive tipping load and rated operating capacities enable 300-series skid steers to precisely place pallets and master a variety of handling tasks
- · Clear sightlines to the cutting edge, bucket corners, Quik-Tatch coupler, sides, rear corners and directly behind





Electric Zero-Turn Mower

Hustler Turf Equipment

· Hustler introduces an electric zero-turn riding mower - an industry first. The company introduced the world's first zero-turn mower

Electric mower should improve cost efficiency and energy efficiency





2009 N-Series Low Cab Forward Trucks

Isuzu Commercial Truck America

- · Front suspension, spring rates, steering and cab mount bushings tuned for more comfort and improved ride
- · New optional limited-slip differential distributes torque evenly to wheels
- · Diesel trucks now 50-state 'clean idle certified'
- Wheelbase choices (as large as 212 inches) handle bodies from 10 feet to 24 feet
- · 5.2-liter turbocharged, intercooled diesel delivers 205 hp and 441 lb-ft of torque. Engine mated to an Aisin heavy-duty, six-speed automatic with double overdrive
- 6.0-liter V-8 delivers 325 hp and 360 lb-ft of torque. Engine mated to a hydra-matic four-speed automatic with lockup torque converter and overdrive

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Outdoor LED Lighting, Professional-Grade **Transformers and Tools**

Kichler Landscape Lighting

- · LED accent lights, underwater lights, deck lights and a variety of step and brick lights
- · All lights offer pure white light, easy installation and a prolonged lifespan of 40,000 hours (four times longer than previous landscape lighting technologies)
- Professional grade transformers and tools ensure landscape installation is completed easily and safely

BX2660 Sub-Compact Tractor

Kubota Tractor Corp.

· All-purpose work machine tackles mowing, landscaping and hauling

· Features a 25.5-hp, three-cylinder Kubota diesel, a two-range hydrostatic transmission, four-wheel-drive and simple one-lever loader operation

- · Allows loader and mower to be attached simultaneously
- · Comes standard with deluxe reclining seat, cruise control, digital tachometer and hydrostatic power steering
- · Weighs 1,289 pounds and is 95.5 inches long, 44.5 inches wide and stands 70.4 inches tall



NutriLife

Lebanon Turf

- · A proprietary fertilizer catalyst that increases fertilizer efficiency and turf response
- · Aids in the absorption of nutrients via leaves, shoots and roots
- Reduces the nitrogen required to grow quality turfgrass by two percent or more

LSN (LebanonTurf Stabilized Nitrogen)

Lebanon Turf

- · Unique fertilizer technology moves quickly into soil, reducing nitrogen volatility
- · Provides long-lasting, cost-efficient source of nitrogen without flush growth
- · Cost-effective in both cool and warm season turf





Mauget Liquid Loadables

- · Imicide (insecticide), Fungisol (fungicide), Stemix Plus (fertilizer)
- Now for use in other liquid loadable systems
- · Available in quart bottles
- Competitively priced and recommended for production application
- Newest insecticide Dutrex (a combination of Abacide 2 and Imicide) coming in 2009



Pave Tech/Hardscape Outfitters

- · Adjustable string line collar
- · Allows string line to be removed and put back up without losing proper height
- · New collars offer deeper gripping teeth, allowing multiple string lines to be attached to one groove
- Two sets of teeth allow for easier, quicker and more secure string line locking
- · New orange color makes stakes more visible and dropped collars easier to find
- · Fits any 3/8-inch to 1-inch diameter stakes



Shindaiwa, Inc.

- · 79.2 cubic centimeter displacement, 4.2-hp engine
- Shindaiwa high-torque, two-stroke engine design
- Two-stage air filter with extra large surface area and two-screw filter cover
- Newly designed intake cover minimizes overheating from leaf blockage
- Comfortable, quick-adjust double padded harness and ergonomic backpack frame
- Features convenient pistol grip handle with 'handsoff cruise control operation and 'hush' mode switch

New 3-Year/3,000-Hour Warranty

Yanmar America

- · Increased warranty on line of excavators, loaders and backhoes
- Warranty covers all elements of machinery.
- · Warranty does not cover normal maintenance procedures or wear items such as tires and brakes



Speed-Feed Trimmer Head

Shindaiwa, Inc.

- · Average time to reload line from package to trimmer head is 30 seconds or less
- · No trimmer head dismantling
- Spool holds about 25 feet of .095-inch line, maximum line size of .105 inch
- · Large bottom cover taps on ground to advance line
- Fits all straight shaft Shindaiwa trimmers and brushcutters
- · Adapter hardware available to fit up with most competitive models



BOOTH



SLT Pro 12GL

Super Lawn Trucks

- · 12-foot enclosed dry freight truck body provides a warehouse on wheels, mobile billboard and added security
- GMC Savana cutaway cab and chassis with a 4.8-liter V-8 (offers 15 city/18 highway mpg)
- GVW rating of 9,600 pounds and payload capacity of 5,263 pounds
- Starts around \$32,000
- Complete tool organization system and on-board fuel station transport system eliminates need for gas cans
- Offers same security, safety, efficiency and marketing benefits as SLT's medium-duty trucks













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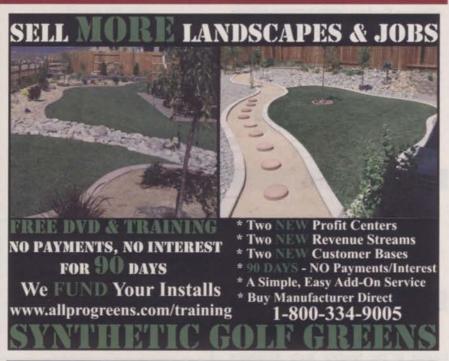
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Snow Subcontractors:

Lipinski Snow Services Inc., one of the Nations largest Snow & Ice management firms is seeking qualified service providers for snow plowing and ice control for the 2008-2009 winter season and beyond. Contractors must have prior snow experience and be fully insured. We are currently seeking turnkey firms that can provide any of the following services:

- · Snow Plowing
- · Wheel loaders, backhoes or skid-steers to push containment plows/pushers
- · Shoveling crews with supervision
- · De-icing operations
- · Regional Managers

If you are located in NJ, PA, OH, NY, MA, CT, RI, NH, VT, ME, DE, MD, VA & DC, and are looking to partner with an industry leader please contact us regarding sub-contracting opportunities. Log onto www.lipinskisnowremoval. com, click on, be a subcontractor, fill out the form and submit.

Or contact Pete Haran at 888-220-2570.



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APPLICATING/LAWN MAINTENANCE COMPANY

Located in the Beautiful Rocky Mountains! Owners retiring after 20 years in business. Well established company in a booming & fast growing market. Good quality equipment-Excellent Reputation-many multi-year contracts. Owner will help train. Lawn Spray-Tree Spray-Deep Root Feed-Pest Control-Noxious Weeds-Lawn Mowing/Irrigation maintenance program. Gross over \$569K/ in 7 months.(May - October.) Serious Inquires only. Call 970-904-1890

BUSINESS/EQUIPMENT/PROPERTY FOR SALE

Located in south central NJ, Landscaping / Maintenance company, accounts, equipment, real estate: 3 acre commercial building lot, 1-1/2 acre lot with 4,000 sq. ft. house, inground pool, and 2,600 sq. ft. building. Both lots have road frontage and all amenities. Large asphalt and stone parking / equipment storage.

\$2,000,000.00 Hank 609-517-3063.

LOOKING TO SELL YOUR BUSINESS?

We have experience selling businesses in the green industry on a national level. Contact Ed Kozak Midwest Venture Resources, Inc.

630-705-3055

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTING BUSINESS

Established 12 years in the still booming SW Chicago Suburbs. Turnkey operation with \$260,000 of equipment included. Client base strictly high-end homes, no maintenance work. 2008 Gross Revenue to date exceeding 2007 in

excess of \$1.40 million. Owner's net near \$300K. Asking \$725K.

Contact Ed Kozak/VR Business Brokers. 630-705-3055.

Additional nursery acreage available.

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LAWN MAINTENANCE COMPANY **EAST COAST OF FLORIDA**

25 Year old company servicing high end HOA/POA's. Sales exceed \$5 million, owner would be willing to stay on. Call John Brogan Acquisition Experts, LLC.

772-220-4455

BUSINESS FOR SALE

Landscape Nursery owner retiring after 28 years. South Central PA. Prosperous thriving business with growth potential. 1-1/2 acres (includes nursery stock, 3 buildings, and equipment. Turn key operation. Loyal dedicated customer base. Serious inquiries only. Email to: Kennedy d@comcast.net

FOR SALE

Well respected, 27 year old lawn care company with nearly untouchable 96 to 97 percent retention rate, season to season. 1.000 Accounts, South and West suburbs of Pittsburgh. Contact Lawn Care, P.O. Box 16081, Pittsburgh, PA 15242.

SNOW REMOVAL BUSINESS

Turn-key maintenance/contracting/ snow removal business available, Chicago market. Gross \$1.8 million, net \$237K. Mgrs will stay on. Asking \$750K.

Ed Kozak/VR Busniess Brokers 630-705-3055

PLANT HEALTH CARE CO. LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

Leading Co. est. 22 years with multi-thousand residential and commercial customer base. Includes 10 truck state of the art spray fleet. Turnkey operation with fully trained sales and operational staff.

Annual Gross Sales of 1.9 million+ over the last 3 years. Tremendous growth opportunity for larger company seeking immediate impact on Long Island market, especially with the growing West Nile Mosquito concerns.

Priced to sell at 1.95 million. E-mail responses with company information to RJL2813@aol. com. Principles only!

NURSERY/GREENHOUSE/ LANDSCAPE BUSINESS FOR SALE

Located on 53 acres in upstate NY's finger lakes region. 20 years in business, we are a retail nursery, greenhouse, landscaping, maitenance and hardscape company. Also includes distributorship of high end block and paver company. 3200 sq. ft. colonial home on 3 1/2 acre pond, In-law apartment 40'x 100' pole barn with heated shop. Turnkey operation with \$200,000. of equipment and \$170,000 of hardscape materials included. Excellent reputation with unlimited growth potential.

Asking price is \$ 1. million 315-536-9149

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2-40x80 Bldgs w/shops — 2 Homes
269-695-5505

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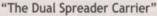
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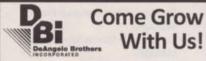
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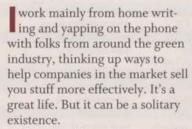
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Industry journalist Pat Jones presents both sides from his sometimes twisted point of view

One Guy, Two Points of View



The dog will come hang out with me. My wife, a gourmet baker, will stop by to have me taste her latest cupcake or candy recipe. (I've gained 15 pounds since she started her business.) But other than that, I mostly sit, think and talk to myself.

A lot.

I'm not schizophrenic (Yes you are!) but these arguments have gotten more frequent and can sometimes even be entertaining (Says you!). So, in the interest of my own mental health, I've decided to play Devil's Advocate. With myself.

Just don't tell him that.

Self: I'm mainly involved in the golf market, and that segment of the industry is flat. Seems like the landscape market at least has been growing during the past few years. Why all the pessimism?

Devil's Advocate: Because the real estate market has tanked, you moron. Lawn care and design/build are tied closely to new home sales and commercial construction. No new properties means no growth.

Self: Yeah, but isn't it pretty much understood that down markets are the best time for smart businesses to get aggressive and take clients from others who get too conservative and hunker down? My motto is, 'When the going gets tough, the tough steal market share.'

DA: In my book, being conservative is smart business. You've got to manage back costs, trim overtime to the bone and work to keep the accounts you have instead of throwing money at a bunch of expensive advertising and pie-inthe-sky stuff that will never pay off. Batten down the hatches and ride out the storm until things turn around.

business just comes down to dollar signs instead of a brand.

DA: Fine, but the high bid never wins. This is all about money, and we have to compete with some idiot who throws a push mower and a couple of bags of Big Box fertilizer into his pickup and calls himself a contractor. They'll undercut you every time.

Self: So what? Let them have that business. People who only want the low bid are usually the worst customers to service. They'll

"You have to take a hard look at your business and figure out what's most profitable and rewarding for you."

Self: That might take a couple of years and, at best, you'll be right where you are right now. Why wouldn't you take the time to identify weak competitors in your area and cherry-pick their best clients? Why wouldn't you invest in training so that you can start offering higher-margin services like irrigation and design/build? Why not be the predator instead of the prey?

DA: If someone comes after your clients, you should just lower the price. People want to save money right now. You've got to do what it takes to compete – and if that means taking less margin, so be it.

Self: No one wins in a price war. I've seen it in the golf business – courses discounting green fees down to nothing – and all it leads to is commoditization. Pretty soon, the quality and value of your

nickel-and-dime you to death. You have to take a hard look at your business and figure out what's most profitable and rewarding for you. Go find more accounts like that and get rid of deadwood clients who probably cost you money to serve.

DA: I'd never walk away from an active account.

Self: Then you're a bonehead.

DA: I'm a bonehead? You're the one sitting alone arguing with yourself. You should seriously consider seeking professional help.

Self: Hmmm...maybe you're right. You know, Einstein once said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

DA: So, talk to you again next

Self: Oh, alright. Call me crazy, but what the heck. ①



pat Jones is a veteran journalist and marketing communications consultant in the turf/golf industry. He can be reached at psjhawk@cox.net.

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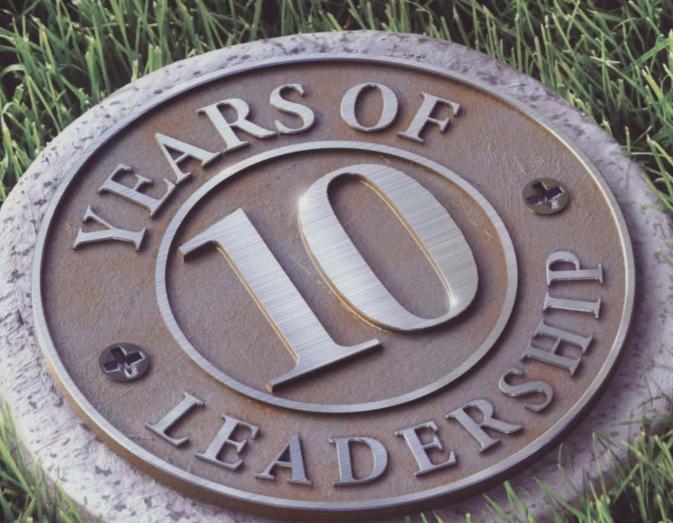


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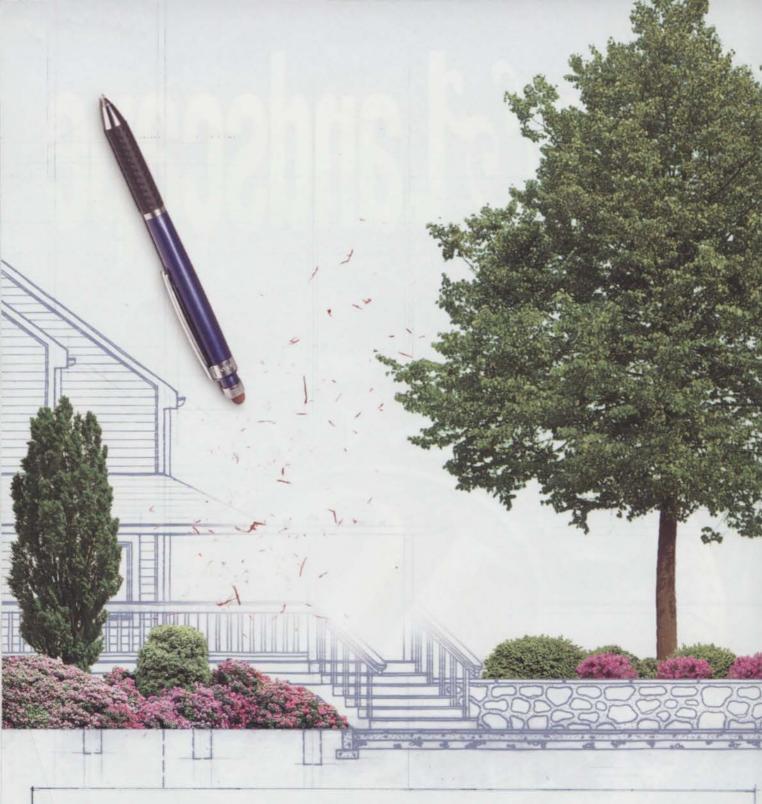
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Branding Your Business

Successfully branding a business emboldens companies to compete on a level that transcends a fancy logo, hollow slogan or posh marketing. The green industry professionals behind thriving businesses have figured out not only what separates their operations from the market competition, but how to communicate this uniqueness and create an emotional connection with both existing and new customers. After all, consumers define the brand; it's not what you say it is, it's what they say it is.

Consumers are exposed to approximately 5,000 marketing messages every day. Your brand should celebrate your company's strengths. Consumers only pay attention to those messages they can relate to – for example, trust, quality

and reliability in lawn care services – so unless you stand out, you're wasting your time and money.

In an extremely competitive green industry, one of the most important things you can do to brand your business is to integrate your brand strategies at every point of public contact. Since a solid positioning will be lived throughout an organization, involve your team from the very beginning of brand development. Begin by asking them how they view the brand, especially if they have frequent customer interaction. Every employee must embrace the personality of your organization – your competitive rallying cry – in every action and behavior, from leadership to marketing to customer service.



Neil Cleveland

There may be dozens of other lawn care companies in your market, so you must find your niche. For example, are you one of the largest national lawn care companies with thousands of satisfied customers? A small business owner paying special attention to customer service? A start-up company using innovative technology to save the customer money on the backend? It's not just one element, but a collection of experiences, that shapes a customer's perception of your business.

Although robust company brands are essential for growth, we at Bayer Environmental Science urge you to also consider how your brand reflects on the green industry as a whole. As an example, think about a careless LCO who misdiagnoses a property and responds indignantly when the problem persists. Compare that to an LCO who kindly responds to customer concerns and consults his or her local extension office to properly identify and treat the problem. The customer will probably never re-hire the former company. But, worse yet, he or she may be inclined to associate that negative experience with the entire green industry, sharing that incident with family, friends and neighbors. On the flip side, the customer should only have praise for the latter company and respect for the collaboration among professionals.

We at Bayer hope that with continued education and preparation, we can work collectively toward a greater green industry brand. As always, when you're Backed by Bayer, you're getting all of the science and support that comes with it. So you know when you're buying from Bayer, you're not just getting trusted results; you're investing in the future of your industry.

As we strive to educate an inquiring public, we must continue to put our best face forward as an industry. Bayer is proud to support organizations such as PLANET, RISE and Project Evergreen that are assisting professionals in unifying the industry. Now more than ever, consumers are taking an active role in defining brands. Consider how your brand is helping to make a positive impact on the green industry as a whole because, together, we need to continue to be seen as indispensable and responsible caretakers of the community and environment.

Neil Cleveland

Director, U.S. Green Business Bayer Environmental Science "Innovation is the ability to see



change as an opportunity - not a threat." - Anonymous

Starting to feel like your brand blends in with every bland brand on the market? Differentiation and innovation highlight tomorrow's top branding strategies.

BY NICOLE WISNIEWSKI

hether one is an occasional walker, a marathon runner or just likes to be comfortable, everybody today owns a pair of tennis shoes, particularly young adults. They have the tennis shoe lifestyle – running

off to school and then to sports practices and activities, then to work and, finally, home. Spend a busy day in the shoes of a college student and you quickly realize comfort is a top priority. Add to that the fact that teenagers rely on these shoes to go with everything and one can see why funky colors and cool style have become a big part of tennis shoe manufacturing.

But which brand a sneaker wearer owns isn't as easy to deduce. There are so many brands of tennis shoes on the market today, one may guess at least three times before getting the right answer. Nike. Reebok. Adidas. Saucony. Asics. Puma.

So, what does a shoe manufacturer do to bond teenagers to its brand? They put their colorful shoes on admired, attractive, active celebrities or athletes and spread lively messages of "standing out" and "winning" in magazines and on television. After all, this is the time in a young adult's life when reaching for the highest level of success is a foundation for future career goals.

Sure, the first time one sees such an ad, it's catchy and attracts attention. But fast-forward a few years later and now every shoe brand is doing something similar – all vying for the same 18- to 34-year-old.

These manufacturers are creating what *Blue Ocean Strategy* authors W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne call a "red ocean" – a place so muddled with cutthroat competition that its turquoise waters became bloody. A place where rivals fight to grab a greater share of existing demand. A market space that crowds while prospects for profits and growth reduce. An environment where products risk becoming commodities. A spot where true innovation lies unnoticed deep beneath the dark sea.

Many product manufacturers and service providers stay comfortable in such a situation with reasonable profits, especially as long as the main buying market thrives. But what happens when those buyers dwindle or their needs change quickly and dramatically? Such an instance happened in the 1990s when the number of 18- to 34-year-olds in the United States fell by more than 8 million, putting a huge dent in the sneaker market. Many tennis shoe manufacturers scrambled to fight for the remaining members of this group, adding even more crimson to the tide.

But one shoe maker changed its gears, turning its attention toward a loyal growing base of customers who up until this time had been ignored – Baby Boomers moving into midlife. That company was New Balance.

To appeal to this new customer focus, the company touted its five shoe widths vs. the industry standard of three – a competitive advantage for aging customers whose feet don't always fall into this narrow set. Then, according to Fast Company's David Wolfe and Robert Snyder, New Balance CEO Jim Davis gave new meaning to the company's



signature tagline – "Achieve new balance" – by creating ads that resonated with the middle-ager's budding need to find life balance after the hectic years of early adulthood when unbalanced work devotion dominates lifestyle.

For example, one ad showed a man running along a curving mountainside road overlooking a

shimmering sea, as the headline read, "The shortest distance between two points is not the point." Another ad, directed toward the middle-aged woman, read: "One more woman chasing a sunset. One more woman going a little farther. One more woman simply feeling alive. One less woman relying on someone else."This self-reflective messaging contrasted boldly with other sneaker makers' suggestions that peak performance, winning the game and getting there first was everything. They emphasized man with nature - not man vs. man - and "promoted the idea that one's worth is not measured by superiority over others but by the measure of fidelity to one's true inner self," say Wolfe and Snyder.

How well did New Balance's new brand of marketing fare? While a company like Nike – known for its contrasting "winning" messaging – has not had measurable sales growth in sneaker lines domestically since 1997, according to Fast Company, New Balance has averaged an annual sales growth rate of 25 percent or more since making the ad switch in 2002. The irony? In recent years, while the brand's popularity has continued growing with Baby Boomers, it has also been enjoying strong growth in younger markets.

To realize these "new" profits, New Balance didn't create a novel product. They didn't dramatically alter their shoe design. They didn't change the composition of the standard sneaker. Instead, they marketed uniquely, appealing to a new audience. Instead of selling sneakers, they sold an experience.

New Balance followed a "blue ocean" way of thinking. Blue oceans are defined by untapped market space, demand creation, and the opportunity for highly profitable growth, according to *Blue Ocean Strategy*. This way of doing business allows a company to appeal to a whole new group of customers, expanding existing industry boundaries. In essence, a blue ocean strategy says, "the only way to beat the competition is to stop trying to beat the competition."

Instead of following what its competitors were doing and hiring famous athletes to tout its brand or using aggressive messaging, New Balance tried something completely different. And it worked,

The blue ocean strategy concept served as the inspiration for the 2008-2009 Pro-

Branding Expert Brad VanAuken lists 21 prognostications on how new branding trends are changing tomorrow's business world.

- · Building emotional connection will be key.
- Brands will focus more on creating/engineering the total customer experience.
- · Customer-relevant innovation will be a key success factor.
- · Outstanding customer service will also be a key success factor.
- Hiring the right employees and creating the appropriate culture will be essential.
- More and more, brands will co-create the customer experience with the customer.
- · Brands will need to "stand for something" to survive.
- Strong brands will not only "stand for something," they will also provide forums for people who believe in what the brands stand for.
- Organizations whose employees become consultants to and friends and partners with their customers will be the most successful.
- · One-on-one marketing will become more important.
- The Internet will also become increasingly important as a brand building vehicle.
- For larger organizations, customer relationship management (CRM) will become a critical success factor.
- Fast, flexible and agile organizations will increasingly "win" in the digital age.
- With the explosion of virtual and morphing organizations and everchanging business alliances, the brand essence and promise and the organizational culture may increasingly be the only elements that create a sense of "entity" for organizations.
- The viral spread of information will increasingly expose organizations for what they really are – integrity and consistency will be key.
- Managing "buzz" will be an important brand management activity.
- CEOs will become increasingly involved in brand strategy formulation.
- Organization mission, vision and core values will increasingly be formulated along with brand essence, promise and personality.
- An increasing number of organizations that have grown through mergers and acquisitions will significantly simplify their brand architectures and reduce the number of brands in their portfolios.
- More people will come to understand what brands are, what they can do and what they can't do.
- Fewer people will have a blind faith that strong brands can solve all organizational problems.

fessional Landcare Network's Crystal Ball Committee. Their mission: To present lawn care and landscape contractors with a look at marketing's best practices today and give them guidance for marketing into the future, using blue ocean strategy as a means for inspiring creativity and innovation.

Today, some industry professionals look at branding as an afterthought. They think of marketing as advertising or fliers that are secondary to the real business of providing services. But a clear marketing strategy can guide a business into highly profitable niches, expand its range of services or geographical areas and even mean the difference between profitability and failure. A good marketing strategy enables a company to target the best-paying customers, establish long-term relationships and generate new income sources. As Clare Ross, management consultant, author of Beyond Strategic Planning, and the Crystal Ball Committee Report #28's resource and moderator, suggests: "The future component of leadership is the

Though these items sound like differentiating factors, in reality, they are extremely generic in today's business world, Ross says. "These days, focusing on a landscape firm's core business isn't enough. If you see yourself as a seller of professional services, you've got it all wrong and are doomed to look like all the other firms that think likewise," he explains. "This sameness can be pretty boring when clients have to sit through this kind of drawn-out exercise, whether it's reading a dozen proposals or listening to like-sounding presentations. For this reason, it's not surprising that clients have a hard time seeing any meaningful differences between the teams they are considering for their projects."

No wonder, in some markets, the only distinguishing factor left then is price. Reenter blue ocean strategy. A company without a brand that differentiates itself from the competition suffers a commoditization of services, which results in increasing price wars and shrinking profit margins. "As brands be-

keting vehicle as if it were a magic pill that would attract clients to its firm and fill its job schedule, the bad news is this sort of trickery simply doesn't and will never exist, Ross says. "Responding to RFPs where you have no relationship with the client is one good example of playing the long shot," he insists. Whereas this type of reactive marketing is a necessary component to successful marketing, Business Comes to the Expert authors Brenda Richards and Kathleen Soldati say a company's main focus should be on improving its proactive vs. reactive marketing.

This step in the marketing process is called branding, and properly classifying its business objective can mean all the difference in a company's marketing efforts. "Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be," says Entrepreneur.com's John Williams. "Your brand promise should be evaluated before anything else because it's the foundation for all your marketing."

"In overcrowded industries, differentiating brands becomes harder in both economic upturns and downturns." — Blue Ocean Strategy

ability to steer the marketing effort toward future success. This role involves a high level of understanding of relevant trends, the ability to interpret them and the capacity to engage in legitimate long-range planning."

Being original and inventive in one's marketing efforts is only part of the battle. "Operating in a reactive mode or doing what worked only last year is not enough," Ross insists. "New solutions, new approaches and innovative ideas will be needed to help firms invest in their own futures and break away from the shackles of past constraints if they are to be successful and prosper and change to meet new demands and needs.

REDEFINEYOUR BUSINESS. What makes a business stand out? Its employees' combined years of experience? Its attention to quality work? Its systematic approach to finishing jobs on schedule?

come more similar, people increasingly select based on price," say *Blue Ocean Strategy*'s Kim and Mauborgne. "People no longer insist, as in the past, that their laundry detergent be Tide. Nor will they necessarily stick to Colgate when Crest is on sale, and vice versa. In overcrowded industries, differentiating brands becomes harder in both economic upturns and downturns."

That's where "marketing's job is to facilitate the prospect's decision-making process and cause them to say, 'I would have to be a fool to do business with anyone but you – regardless of price,'" explains Jack Hoffman, president of marketing consulting firm Milestone Solutions.

It's important to note that when referring to differentiation, this does not mean creating a distinctive or better version of a standard marketing tactic. While every business at one time or another has treated a specific marA strong brand is focused, consistent, emotional and must capture and keep people's attention, according to Marketing Success, adding: "The strategy behind a brand must inspire interest, engage curiosity and build on a business' reputation and image. It must make the most of the right communication mediums and be planned, reviewed and measurable."

What's more, when it comes to marketing, the facts about a landscape business — even if they make that company superior to the competition—are not as important as how that firm's clients perceive its people and services. Ultimately, marketing is a battle of perceptions — a simple truth that trips up entrepreneurs every year, according to marketing strategist and author Jack Trout. "Marketing people are preoccupied with doing research and 'getting the facts,'" he says. "They analyze the situation to make sure the truth is on their side.

Then they sail confidently into the marketing arena, secure in the knowledge that they have the best product and that, ultimately, the best product will win.

"This is an illusion," he insists. "There is no objective reality. There are no facts. There are no best products. All that exists in the world of marketing are perceptions in the minds of the customer or prospect. The perception is the reality. Everything else is an illusion."

Ross agrees: "Don't focus on your capabilities or services but on the problem to be solved inside the client's mind."

Consequently, the way to win value is to come up with out-of-the-ordinary solutions. Business owners who think this way see themselves as problem solvers and solution providers. They view themselves as consultants solving their client's business problems and providing exceptional value.

So what do clients really want to hear?

On the residential side, it could be selling solutions to typical homeowner problems instead of selling services. What do homeowners who work all day want on evenings and weekends? Simply, they want time with their families. For many, this does not involve maintaining their yards. A contractor with benefits of both the free time and the bragging rights with neighbors who think the homeowners did all the work themselves.

Another example comes from High-Grove Partners in Austell, Ga., which calls its landscape professionals "Visionaries in Landscaping," a phrase alone that paints a scenic backyard picture in clients' minds. Their slogan reads: "We promise that your landscape will be the first thing you see and the last thing you worry about." The company assures a site worth gazing dreamily at, while eliminating any worry from the customer's mind.

These examples show three similar yet unique ways a company that focuses on residential customers can create a brand that appeals to its specific client base.

When it comes to commercial clients, typically they want to hear how a landscape team plans to make the organization more profitable, more efficient or more successful. Commercial clients want to see how a firm's array of services can help them cut costs or produce more. A property manager, specifically, may want to know how a crew can make his job easier and make him seem more productive to the building owner - a personal benefit.

For instance, on the commercial side of C&C Yard Care's business, they use this copy:

value-that's where profits are generated," Ross says. "If you can pinpoint ways to improve this interaction, you're delivering content that can translate directly to the bottom line. Leverage that information into working knowledge insight that creates value."

Ross illustrates an example of how this sort of branding can drive profits by sharing the story of James Nakaoka, a West Coast-based architect, "When I first met him I asked him what he did for a living. He replied that he was an architect specializing in the design of retail facilities," Ross says. "I said, 'Oh, the work that gets \$1.25 per square foot as a design fee?' He said: 'I actually get fees two to three times higher than the competition.' 'Tell me more,' I said."

Nakaoka went on to explain that a major upscale retailer approached him to see if he would be interested in designing a new store, mentioning he already had a \$500,000 proposal from another architect for the job. Before he got back to the client with an answer, Nakaoka compiled more information from the client about the company and job, including customer demographics, average store transaction size, and gross and net margins.

After analyzing the client's business and financial data. Nakaoka concluded the client

"The strategy behind a brand must inspire interest, engage curiosity and build on a business' reputation and image." - Marketing Success

a relevant client base can market his or her business to capture these customers.

Examine, for example, the Web presence of Vancouver, Wash.-based J's Customer Projects. Their marketing copy reads: "Everyone wants a well-manicured yard, but do you have the time and equipment to make it happen? We can take care of it for you and give you back your weekend."

Spokane, Wash.'s C&C Yard Care takes it one step further with this slogan: "Relax and enjoy your weekend time. We work hard, and you can take all the credit."

While the first catchphrase promises to give homeowners back their weekends, the next actually tells them they can reap the

"Today's business climate is highly competitive, and every single detail must be attended to in order to give your business an edge. Presentation is paramount, and we will help you work on a way to play up all the right aspects of your property. We guarantee that your patrons and clients will be impressed and come back for more of your business."

A contractor can even take this further by learning what a potential commercial client's business is all about - what that firm makes/ provides its customers, how it operates, what its goals and objectives are, what it values, how it approaches the market, etc. Concerning commercial customers, "the relationship between your client and their customers is the nexus of

could not make a profit in the new store given its average transaction size, gross margins and number of transactions needed. In fact, the store was likely to lose money.

"Nakaoka told the client he wasn't interested in designing a project that was designed to fail," Ross shares.

Based on this information, the client made the decision to contract for additional space and focus store design and marketing on increasing the average transaction size of its customers. Nakaoka was hired at a fee of \$1.5 million to design the new facility - three times the fee proposal submitted.

Nakaoka knew how good design could impact a company's bottom line, so he shared this information with the client. Today, Nakaoka doesn't market his company as one that sells design services. Instead, he markets his company as one that helps his clients make money, differentiating his firm from the competition. "A clear understanding of the client's business and how he could add tangible value to it saved his client from certain failure—now that's differentiation," Ross points out.

Nakaoka is not the first business owner to realize that branding is not about a company's product or service. Take Harley Davidson, for instance. Some people think the business sells motorcycles, but a company executive maintains, "What we sell is the ability for a 45-year-old accountant to dress in black leather, ride through small towns and have people be afraid of him."

Or examine the visions of United Parcel Service and FedEx. They do not just deliver packages anymore; they provide consulting services. And 80 percent of General Electric's revenue today comes from services – not the products it manufactures.

And when BlackBerry entered the highly competitive cell phone market, the brand made a clever move by allowing non-BlackBerry devices to offer e-mail services using the BlackBerry Connect Software. BlackBerry sees itself as more of a technology company rather than a device company, which means customers who opt for smart phones from Nokia or Sony Ericsson access their e-mail using the BlackBerry technology. They eliminated the competition by providing a service that consumers who buy the competition utilize.

Conversely, if Southern Pacific Railroad had marketed the fact that it was in the transportation business and not the railroad business, there would probably be Southern Pacific Airlines or Southern Pacific Cruise Lines today, Hoffman points out. Instead, the company is out of business.

One warning: When redefining their businesses, the one mistake many companies tend to make is positioning their companies too generally, trying to be all things to all people.

"They are fearful of defining themselves too narrowly and losing opportunities," says Q2 Marketing's Pamela Girardin. "But this toobroad strategy almost always ends up being 'nothing to nobody.' Contractors need to clearly define what they do and who they do it for."

One example of such a company is Plain City, Ohio-based Builderscape, When Ron Matthews formed the company in 2004 by bringing together several businesses he operated with a brother-in-law who passed away, branding became important. The company previously operated as Matthews & Associates—a name that was too broad and didn't represent the services it provided. Builderscape touches on the elements of the full-service landscape company and the fact that it also provides construction services like room additions and in-ground pool installation.

And especially in a soft economy, a brand that speaks to the client's specific needs is still distinctive enough to stand out and attract even harder-to-reach clients.

PUTTING IDEAS INTO ACTION. Inspired with examples from outside and inside the industry, landscape professionals can now determine whether their current brand is sound or needs revamping.

Start with a simple exercise, suggests
Terri Langhans, author of *The 7 Marketing Mistakes Every Business Makes and How to Fix Them.* 1) Describe your services.

2) Narrow at-

tributes or attraction factors down to one or two. 3) What is the benefit, the need or the want that is satisfied by those attributes? 4) Why is that benefit important, personally, to the target audience?

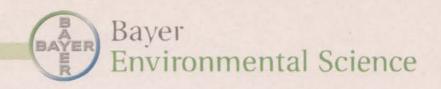
Examine this consumer product example: "Joy dishwashing liquid (description) has real lemon (attribute) that cuts grease and leaves dishes shinier (benefit). What a nice reflection on you (connects to what a customer cares about)."

"Connect to what people want – not what you do," Langhans reminds contractors.

But before you write a promotional word, "do a 'help or hinder' once-over," Langhans stresses. "Make a list of what's helping you attract business and what's getting in the way," she says. "Figure out what obstacles you can quickly fix or remove. What can you enhance or spotlight? Until the help-or-hinder homework is done, working on promotion is premature."

This article was excerpted from The Crystal Ball Report #28, which was produced by Lawn & Landscape for The Professional Landcare Network. To purchase the full report, which should be available by the end of the year, visit www.landcarenetwork.org.

in a reactive mode or doing what only worked last year is not enough. New ideas will be needed to help firms invest in their own futures, be successive ful and prosper." — Claire Ross, Beyond Strategic Planning



Growing With the Flow



n 2006, the Community Association Institute estimated that there are more than 286,000 association-governed communities in the U.S. These communities include homeowners associations (HOAs), condominiums, cooperatives and other planned communities that account for 57 million U.S. residents.

As more neighborhoods embrace HOAs, lawn care professionals are realizing the inherent value of developing relationships with these associations.

LEADING THE WAY. The Brickman Group, a Gaithersburg, Md.-based national maintenance company with more than 100 branches in 23 states, says 15 percent of its business comes from HOA contracts.

"Servicing well-regarded, high-visibility association properties is also a great way to develop a reputation as a premium provider, which is key to winning additional new business in the community," says Rob Brown, project director for the Harrisburg, Pa. branch.

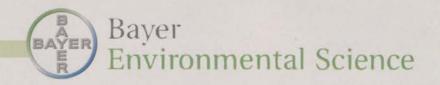
Brown recommends identifying and researching association management companies in your service area and developing a capabilities portfolio including company history, pricing, areas of expertise and client testimonials.

"With millions of Americans purchasing

services through HOAs and associations gaining popularity, even a 40-unit community can grow to 400 to 500 units in no time," he notes.

Using products that are a natural extension of your operation's quality service guarantee is a good way to manage HOA expectations. Specifically, Brown cites Brickman's use of Merit[®] insecticide for grub control and ornamental treatments.

"The Backed by Bayer™ promise is in line with our company guarantee. If there's a problem, we know our local Bayer representative is willing to help. That's the same kind of commitment we offer our clients." – Tim Londergan



Attack of the Killer Beetles



eminiscent of a science fiction movie, some U.S. regions are under attack from a foreign invader. An exotic beetle is annihilating ash trees from Wisconsin to western Pennsylvania to West Virginia, and the infestation is spreading quickly. Public officials are hurriedly trying to decide the best plan of action. Then along comes Dave Clanton, owner of Clanton Tree Service of the Chicago area, to save the day for homeowners in Illinois. Clanton's new nemesis – the emerald ash borer (EAB). His secret weapon – Merit[®] insecticide from Bayer Environmental Science.

His main goal is to inform people about the threat of EAB and the benefits of preventive treatment with Merit. Along with customer testimonials, his newsletter includes frequently asked questions, current legislative updates and progression maps showing the spread pattern.

"I think all anyone needs to do is look at these maps to realize this insect is an imminent menace. There's nothing to argue. It's moving – and fast," he says.

Clanton bases his treatments on research from Michigan State University, which found that imidacloprid basal drench can save trees with less than 50 percent dieback. For larger ash trees (5 to 6 inches in diameter or larger), he injects full-dose treatments of Merit into the ground. One application of Merit Tree Injection provides yearlong control, faster curative action and the flexibility to use the pesticide where drenching is not feasible.

A PUBLIC AFFAIR. Clanton is not only determined to educate homeowners, but local officials as well. He has gathered an inventory of ash trees in the Northern suburbs and hopes to treat trees in public parks. His recommendation for public properties, especially the ash trees along the parkway, is to treat the larger trees. Treating every tree may not correspond with township budgets; however if the larger and more valuable trees are cut down, it would take 50 years to replace them, Clanton says. Removal and replacement of ash trees can cost between \$750 and \$1,000 each.

As the protagonist in any blockbuster would, Clanton takes his responsibility seriously. "Knowing these ash trees are going to die without treatment was all I needed to know," he says. "One at a time, they can be saved." – Meredith Setzman





In a tough economy, it's tempting to cut "unnecessary expenses" like branding. But refocusing your efforts now may be just the thing to put you ahead of the competition.

BY CONNIE KOTKE

ince December 2007, consumer spending - a bellwether of economic health - has dropped dramatically. From the wealthy to the poor, fuel and food take a bigger bite out of everyone's budget. As a result, some landscape contractors are seeing homeowners forgo professional maintenance and commercial property managers scale back the extras that were once a standard part of the package.

If you don't have deep pockets, your first reaction is to slash expenses - particularly on things that don't run daily business. Branding and marketing are too often the first to go in lieu of meeting payroll, buying fuel and keeping up with equipment repairs. After all, you've got a brand and a logo, a Yellow Pages ad, and maybe a slogan printed on the side of your truck. In the short run, cutting this budget feels like the right thing to do.

But when things are changing dramatically on the outside, keeping the status quo on the inside is risky. Customers have short memories. They're especially fickle when money is tight and price becomes a primary decision factor. If they aren't loyal to your company - and don't believe you're changing with the times - they'll go somewhere else without batting an eye. Now more than ever, your brand needs to be top-of-mind with customers and prospects.

STEP NO. 1 - PAY ATTENTION TO THE SIGNALS. Let's say you went with your instincts and canceled most of your advertising, association memberships and community sponsorships. In addition, your brand promise is all about creating a pristine, well-manicured landscape where no detail (or expense) is spared. Nothing may change for awhile, but how will you know if your brand starts to slip?

If you answer yes to even one of these questions, it's a good bet your brand isn't working for you:

- 1. Do you have a harder time "closing the sale?
- 2. Have you heard more negative comments from customers recently?
- 3. Do you have to lower your price or make a deal to keep existing business?
- 4. Are customers reluctant to try a new product or service?
- 5. Do competitors seem to have new ideas first?
- 6. Do you have to explain specific features or benefits more than before?

The key is to think of branding as a long-term strategy. It should be done thoughtfully, strategically and consistently - regardless of the business climate. And while it's sometimes difficult to measure, studies show that investing in your brand drives increased sales, market share and customer loyalty.

Instead of simply riding it out until the economy turns around, why not come out slugging with something fresh and creative... something to propel you ahead of the competition while they're laying low... something to make your brand more visible - without breaking the bank?

STEP NO. 2 - DO THE MATH. While you may be engaging your emotions to this concept, your mind may still be skeptical. Let's look at this concept of spending precious time and money on your brand from a practical, mathematical perspective.

First, assume that every time you connect with customers (through a personal sales call, a telephone inquiry, a community event or out in the field), their experience is favorable. It's consistent. And it occurs frequently enough for them to remember you. All these interactions create value in a customer's mind - something we call brand equity.

15

This is an important concept - one substantiated by the numbers. In 2007, a survey conducted by The Association of National Advertisers found that 75 percent of respondents viewed brand equity as very important to their company's success - an intangible ingredient that sets them apart in a highly competitive marketplace.

If brand equity is what people think about your product or service, this ultimately translates to what they're willing to pay for it. It's not a dollar value on your balance sheet. It's an emotional factor that enables you to protect your margins, charge a fair price and have greater elasticity to weather a changing environment.

Second, assume the more brand equity you've built, the better your odds of maintaining market share. This is especially true when competitors sell on price alone, which happens all too often in a down economy. Your brand serves as a strong shield to deflect competitor attacks. As customers become loyal followers, they understand and believe your promises. And you become their trusted ally, not just an anonymous bidder for their business.

STEP NO. 3 - GO AHEAD, BE DIFFERENT. The key to a strong brand is owning a single, relevant benefit in the minds of your customers. It's solving a problem they care about most. Delivering something they perceive as having value. Addressing the issues they face in their world today.

Without question, this world has changed and your brand must respond. It might mean tweaking your promise to provide a different level of performance, quality or experience than you did in the past. It may require bundling your services and products in a new way to provide greater choices. It might mean going the extra mile even if you're not compensated for it - just to retain their loyalty. Or, it may require expanding your service offerings into bold new areas.

Follow your gut. You know your market best. What's important is to differentiate your company from others who are playing in your sandbox. Find a way to make your brand meaningful and memorable, fresh and relevant. But keep it real and make sure everyone on the team understands and believes in your strategy. The worst thing you can do is promise one thing and deliver another.

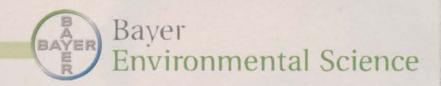
STEP NO. 4 - TAKE ACTION. These six steps can mean the difference between you or your competitor getting the sale.

Put your best foot forward. Always lead with distinctive brand traits that give you an edge over the competition whether it's efficiency, flexibility or value. Each time you communicate with customers, your logo, colors, slogan and key brand messages should be front and center - on promotional fliers, ads, your Web site, vehicles, and even the shirts and caps employees wear in the field.

- Aim for the target. It's too expensive and time-consuming to reach every possible customer in your market. Use your brand as a filter to define the customer segments your company serves best... those who are most likely to appreciate what your brand has to offer. There are plenty of powerful online research tools and databases to help refine your prospect list and better target your branding efforts.
- Appeal to emotions. Refine your brand promise to tap into what motivates customers from the inside - whether it's self esteem, a desire for perfection, or even lack of motivation. Remind them how you maintain the beauty, convenience or quality of life they've come to expect... and deserve.
- Share stories with your customers. How are they (and you) dealing with the economy and a changing world? You'll gain valuable insights to use in your brand efforts. And, you'll open the door to speak confidently about how you're positioned for success now and in the future.
- Be visible. Here are some cost-effective, proven ways to stay top of mind with your most important target market:
 - · Business Sponsorships: Partner with professional organizations in your region for opportunities to speak (share your knowledge about landscape care and changing trends), participate in exhibitions or host networking events.
 - Community Relations: Purchase small ads in school sports programs, donate auction prizes, or lead volunteer groups.
 - · Media Relations: Establish yourself as a thought leader and trendsetter. Offer to write how-to articles or columns on lawn maintenance for local newspapers. Submit your name to editors as a reliable source for interviews. Distribute press releases when something newsworthy happens.
- Manage your brand. If you don't, someone else will including competitors and the media. Here are some ways to protect your brand and ensure you deliver on your promises:
 - · Set clear expectations for employees. Conduct training and document policies and procedures that support the brand.
 - · Employ people who share values. If your brand is about being helpful and knowledgeable, your staff should be too.
 - · Be a good role model employee performance and attitude starts at the top with you and your management team.
 - · Monitor trade publications, industry Web sites and public blogs to see what others are saying about your brand.
 - · Ask customers for feedback regularly. Always report back on improvements so they know you listened.

Strong brands survive, even when the economy's in a tailspin. By staying focused on core customers, differentiating products and services from the competition, and courageously taking action in a changing environment, your brand will do its part to keep your business vital and growing. &

Connie Kotke is principal of Nautilus Communications, a branding consulting practice. Kotke has more than 15 years of experience in leading strategic communications for several organizations, including The Toro Co.



Growing in One Space or Another



things grow. In addition to watching plants grow, Noriega also enjoys watching his employees, business and industry grow.

Noriega is president of Mariposa Horticultural Enterprises, a full-service lawn care business based just outside of Los Angeles, with two additional offices in Fontana, Calif. and Glendale, Ariz. Employing more than 400 people during peak season, the company has approximately 500 customers offering three primary services: landscape maintenance and installation, and tree care.

THE EMPLOYEES. Training and safety are top priorities. All new employees are thoroughly trained on basic services but are also offered continuing education programs and Certification Landscape Technician (CLT) courses.

Additionally, employees are divided into teams to compete for the best safety record, earning extra vacation time and quarterly barbecues should they maintain perfect records.

"Developing and training employees is not only an investment in the employee, but also an investment in the company. Happy employees result in happy customers, and a business can't survive without either," states Noriega.

THE LANDSCAPE. Many properties in southern California suffer from crabgrass and *poa annua*. Both weeds are unsightly and interfere with the ideal, spotless landscape bed coveted by most customers. "We have used Ronstar" G herbicide as our preferred preemergent product for many years. The application is simple, and the results are consistent," notes Noriega.

Mariposa's Ronstar G program typically includes bi-annual applications – once in the fall and then again in late winter – applied at a rate of 2 to 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

After five decades of cultivation, Terry Noriega cannot imagine what will take root for Mariposa Horticultural Enterprises in the future. With a commitment to his employees, services and customers, there may be no end to Mariposa's growth. – *Molly Wilson*



How Strong is Your Brand?

DV CONNIE VOTE



ood brands are a lot like good friends – close companions who add spice to our lives, share our values and make us feel good about ourselves.

When they're with us, even the most mundane activities are memorable. But we all know what it's like when good friends let us down, don't keep up their end of the bargain or forget about a promise they made just days ago.

Brands let us down, too, when they don't keep their promise. Most of us remember when Coca Cola decided to switch to a sweeter formulation and replaced its much-loved soft drink with "New Coke." The new product didn't deliver what it promised, and the public's trust was betrayed. Even a company this big didn't realize how powerful the unspoken pact is between customers and a brand. After this expensive fiasco, they were forced to bring back the original product and "New Coke" quickly took a back seat.

When brand promises are broken, we as customers stop believing in a company, product or service. With a keen sense of loss and disappointment, we take our money elsewhere and spread the word. That's especially easy today given the proliferation of online communities and blogs where people can voice opinions about everything under the sun. Fail to deliver one too many times, and everyone knows about it.

In a highly competitive industry like landscaping, losing a few good customers can mean the difference between a year in the black and a year in the red. But in tough economic times – when profit margins are slim and growth is sluggish at best – it can be downright devastating. The tendency in such times is to trim spending on all "non-crucial" activities like employee training. But the stakes are simply too high in this environment. Investing in your brand is at least as important as a season's financial performance.

Whether you employ one or 100, it's worth the effort to step back and look at the long-term picture. What values does your brand represent? Do employees understand and live it? What promises are you making to customers? Are you delivering consistently and reliably? Before we address these questions, let's review what, exactly, makes a brand.

IT'S THE LOGO, RIGHT? Yes, but that's only a small part. Brands do have concrete symbols like names, logos, slogans and design standards. Some are trademarked, and all are valuable and important to protect. In most cases, business owners are careful to make sure the brand is accurately portrayed on everything from Yellow Pages ads to fleet signage.

But there's much more to it. Remember, brands develop over time through a series of experiences between customers and products... or customers and employees. These experiences can be positive or negative. Each time someone "touches" your brand by purchasing a product or service or interacting with an employee by phone, e-mail or in person, perceptions are formed, reinforced... or even destroyed.

In a nutshell, think about your brand as a combination of how it looks, what you say, and what you do. At that point, it's easy to see how employee words and actions have a significant impact on the strength of your brand.

THE VALUE OF BRANDING. The ROI for building a strong brand is twofold: 1.) It creates a unique and defensible niche in a crowded marketplace (in other words, you can charge more because you offer something of value others can't); and 2.) It builds trust and enduring connections in your relationships (that means it's easier to get and keep customers, employees, suppliers, and others who have a stake in your success).

The first step is defining what your brand stands for and how it differs from the competition. If you haven't already done this, now's the time to gather some or all of your employees to hear their stories and understand how they see your brand. Write down the attributes of your brand, such as, "We are reliable and dependable."

Documenting these values forms the basis for your promise... a simple statement that's memorable, unique and doable. Avoid vanilla words and phrases that apply to several companies, including competitors: "We provide service with a smile." It's more compelling

to aim for mint chocolate chip or butter pecan: "If we don't arrive on time, we'll do the next job free."

Validate your brand with customers as well. Have them compare their experiences and knowledge of your company with what you've documented. Ask them to rank the attributes in order of importance. They're generally quite truthful, and you might be surprised at the results.

Once everything's adjusted and documented, you're ready to "go live" with a clear and unique brand. As customers learn to recognize and trust it, they respond more favorably to your marketing efforts. They embrace new products and services quickly. And, they'll stick with you for the long haul. That's how you build equity the financial value of the brand to your bottom line.

ALIGNING EMPLOYEES BEHIND THE

BRAND. Statistics are plentiful bemoaning the sorry state of today's workforce. In 2007, Towers Perrin found less than one-fourth of all employees truly engaged, which means they're willing to go the extra mile to help the company succeed. On top of that, the Communications Executive Council in Washington D.C., states that nearly two-thirds of employees don't understand the company's brand values. Given what we know about branding, it would appear business owners face pretty stiff obstacles when it comes to aligning employees behind a brand.

If you were the only one interacting with customers, problem solved. In truth, organizations are comprised of diverse individuals who bring their own styles, personalities and views to the workplace. Some are short-timers while others are "lifers." Some are enthusiastic and committed, while others are there for the paycheck.

Left to their own resources, employees are likely to interact with customers in very different ways. This risk is amplified in organizations that employ seasonal or part-time workers or experience unusually high turnover. Far too often, these casual employees are the only face of the brand customers ever see. It takes concerted leadership on your part to instill the values and promise in the minds and hearts of your entire workforce.

A PROVEN APPROACH.

Building a strong brand is more than hanging up a poster listing your brand values, buying caps and shirts in the right color or putting your logo on every truck.

While this should be part of the overall plan, leading researchers say the best results will come from connecting with employees on a more personal level.

There's a difference between motivating and engaging knowledgeable workers (white collar) and production workers (blue

color). The first group tends to be deeply involved and wants growth opportunities. They need to know where the company's headed and how they will make a difference. The latter group also wants to make sense of their contributions. However, you'll want to adapt the content and style to fit their lives and realities - which may depart significantly from your own. Here are some methods that will make your brand more personal to employees:

- · Capture their attention early. Work the brand into everything you do and say right from the first day of employment.
- Explain not just what, but why. Giving employees a context for new information and expectations draws a line between performance and the company's success.
- · Use examples to help employees "buy into the dream." Watch how someone demonstrates the brand and share it with others, breathing life into the words.
- Always anticipate the question, "What's in it for me?" The answer may be different depending on the employee; some may have financial incentives while others might earn a recognition award for going above and beyond.
- · Invite two-way conversations where



AN EMPLOYEE EXPERIMENT

When assessing a brand and vision, a company should never leave out its employees in the equation. In fact, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration, employees may be the best source of information about customer likes, dislikes and needs. They hear customers' minor gripes about the service - the ones customers don't think important enough to take to the owner. Employees also can often supply good customer profiles from their day-to-day contacts

To get a good gauge on whether employees are on the same page when it comes to sharing a company's brand, try an experiment. At the next company meeting, ask employees to write one or two sentences describing the company's brand. "Don't prompt them - let everyone come up with his or her own descriptions," says the National Federation of Independent Business' Jeffrey Moses in Today's Workshop. "If you find everyone's ideas about the company are not on the same page, it's time to establish a focus to make sure your company begins functioning as a tightly organized unit, not a machine clanking along with loose pieces." - Nicole Wisniewski

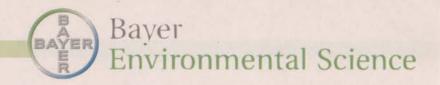
> employees can ask questions and offer ideas. One-way communications keep people from trusting and owning a brand.

· Identify "brand champions" who are strong role models for others. Ask them to share their stories in meetings, out in the field and during employee training.

KEEP IT GOING. Generating attachment to a brand won't happen overnight. Some employees are skeptical or disengaged. Some are short on time and consider this to be at the bottom of their priority list. Some will leave the company before you can turn them into real ambassadors.

Patience and consistency will pay off as employees transition from compliance to commitment. You'll see brand values played out in everyday customer connections. Customer loyalty and thank-you notes will reach an all-time high. A new sense of energy will pervade the company as though it's somehow reinvented. Best of all, you'll sleep better knowing your brand investment is protected.

Connie Kotke is principal of Nautilus Communications, a branding consulting practice. Kothe has more than 15 years of experience in leading strategic communications for several organizations, including The Toro Co.



New Fight, Old Battlefield

topchoice *

+ FERTILIZER

uring the annual reenactment of the occupation of fort Presidio La Bahia and the Goliad Massacre, the troops not only battle each other, but they face a brigade of fire ants on the front line. This year, Bayer Environmental Science and Pest Fog, Inc. provided TopChoice® insecticide to combat these harmful insects and keep the soldiers safe from the real danger.

For 23 years, The Crossroads of Texas Living History Association and Presidio La Bahia have staged a reenactment of the occupation of the fort by Col. Fannin and the subsequent massacre of 341 of his men and him on orders from Santa Anna. Without warning, the reenactment soldiers have been attacked by fire ants both while they are sleeping in tents on the 3 acres of land within the fort walls and while they are lying "dead" on the ground during the battle.

When L.J. Cohen, president of Pest Fog, Inc., located in Corpus Christi, Texas, decided to treat the historical landmark in mid-February 2008, Bayer donated TopChoice, which he applied across the property with a spreader connected to the rear of a golf cart. A single application of professionally applied TopChoice will provide the property up to an entire year of fire ant protection, both curing existing

mounds and preventing new mounds from forming.

"Living in Texas, I understand the prevailing threat of fire ants," says Foster McWhorter, lawn and landscape market specialist with Bayer Environmental Science. "We wanted to help protect the men and women showcasing an important event in the history of the state and the nation."

Last year, the event hosted more than 4,500 visitors. Each year, attendance grows. Currently more than 33,000 people visit Presidio La Bahia, with more than 7,000 of them being students.

Cohen adds: "This landmark keeps history alive. It's extremely gratifying to watch the soldiers perform and the families learn about this significant historical event without the concern of fire ant attacks." – Blair Kahora

KING OF GREEN



By Meredith Setzman

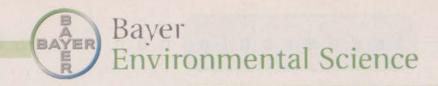
The first winner of the Bayer Lawn Care Institute's **Business Planning Award** is King Green Lawn Care.



aving just welcomed a newborn daughter into the family, Charlie King couldn't have picked a riskier time to leave his employer and start a company in the basement of his house. Defying the advice of others, he founded King Green Lawn Care in Gainesville, Ga. As Charlie's first born, Jennifer King grew up with a dedication to King Green that paralleled the growth of the business. Just six months be-

The Kings have yet another reason to celebrate: their winning submission for the first Bayer Lawn Care InstituteTM (LCI) Business Planning Award. They won the grand prize - a paid trip to the Green Industry and Equipment Expo in Louisville, Ky. and recognition at the Lawn & Landscape Leadership Awards Ceremony. Selected by the Bayer LCI Advisory Board, the winner must have implemented the most innovative and effective business development initiative to improve or grow his or her business.

hind Jennifer, the company will be celebrating its 22nd birthday this February.



LEARNING TO BE A LEADER. Groomed from high school summers at King Green, leadership experiences in the Delta Zeta sorority and business management classes at North Georgia College and State University in Dahlonega, Ga., Jennifer King has created some benchmark additions to the company. "I was kind of taking it day-by-day at first, but now it is growing into something long-term," she says. "I'm just trying to learn as much as I can and use that to help King Green."

While making updates to the company Web site, Jennifer is learning how to track data collected on the site and use it for future analysis. She also utilizes new approaches to marketing, shifting the focus beyond telemarketing to the Internet and referrals. "People don't pick up the phone as much as they used to, so I'm trying to think of some fresh ways to get our name out there," she says.

Most recently, Jennifer rejuvenated the layout for bid proposals. The proposals are packaged neatly into black presentation binders, and inside, several color-coded tabs separate the pricing, testimonials, employee information and just about anything else customers would care to know about this family-owned business.

Earlier this year, Gainesville Parks and Recreation approached Charlie King about a proposal for their facility, Bobby Gruhn Field, and he decided to let Jennifer run with it. "It was her baby from start to finish," he says. "And we won the bid."

SOUTHERN ROYALTY. King Green has two other locations in Georgia – Athens and Atlanta – and a branch in Charlotte, N.C. Although primarily a lawn care business, the company has recently expanded into pest control. About 90 percent of its customers are residential; however, Bobby Gruhn Field is just one example of a few larger commercial properties on King Green's roster.

Now a valuable member of the staff, the younger King was first drawn to the company as a matter of convenience more than anything else. "I didn't have to go out job hunting like my friends; it was fantastic," she says. "I started off with low-totem pole jobs and did some telemarketing, but I found that I really enjoyed talk-

ing to the customers."

Jennifer's investment in King Green grew substantially as she realized how much she was driven to help the clients. She soon became a registered lawn care applicator, a certified pest control applicator, and is now studying to receive a designated certified operator's license - the next step in pest control. "I want people to respect me for what I've done and not just who I'm related to," she explains.

Epitomizing the spirit of the Business Planning Award, Jenni-

fer was not satisfied with obtaining a few licenses; she wants to be a contributing member of the green industry. She attended PLANET's Legislative Day on the Hill and Renewal & Remembrance, as well as several University of Georgia turfgrass field days.

survival of the Business. The Business Planning Award nomination form opens with "Running a business is hard work." In Charlie King's entry, he adds "Planning for its long-term survival makes it even harder." He mentions that Jennifer's leadership skills at King Green are a large part of the team dynamic.

The duo makes sure the staff keeps quality service at the forefront of their decision-making process. In the face of the drought that drastically affected the South, the Kings rely on these values to reassure their clients. "It's our job to convey to our customers that we will make their lawns look their best," Jennifer says.

Twenty years ago, Charlie King might not have guessed that his basement-run business would flourish into a company with four regional locations, or that his baby girl would be an integral part of its success. Together, they've only discussed King Green's long-term survival, but, for today, the Kings are just enjoying their accomplishments.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Running a business is hard work. Don't you deserve acknowledgement for the time, effort and creativity put into sustaining and growing your company?

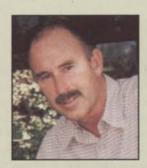
The Bayer Lawn Care Institute™ (LCI) is now accepting nominations for the 2009 Business Planning Award to recognize one green industry professional who has implemented the most innovative and effective business development initiative to improve or grow his or her business.

The winner will be selected by the LCI Advisory Board. The award will be presented at the Lawn & Landscape Leadership Awards Ceremony during the 2009 Green Industry and Equipment Expo. Airfare, hotel accommodations and registration for the show will be complementary for the winner and a guest.

For more information about entering next year's contest, please contact Meredith Setzman at msetzman@tierneyagency.com or 215-790-4398. You can also contact your local Bayer field sales representative with any questions about the Business Planning Award.



LAURIE BROCCOLO Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care Rochester, N.Y.



DAVE HANSON ValleyCrest Cos. Calabasas, Calif.



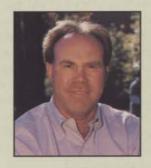
DAVEY TREE INSTITUTE Kent, Ohio



MICHAEL KERNAGHAN Weed Man Mississauga, Ontario



TIM DOPPEL Atwood Lawn Care Sterling Heights, Mich.



MARK SCHLOSSBERG Pro-Lawns-Plus Baltimore, Md.



PHIL FOGARTY Weed Man/ Crowley's Vegetation Management Cleveland, Ohio



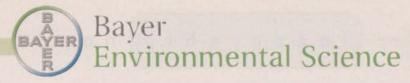
CHRIS SENSKE Senske Tree & Lawn Care Kennewick, Wash.



NORMAN GOLDENBERG TruGreen Memphis, Tenn.



TOM TOLKACZ Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care Denver, Colo.



Pursuing Perfection

rowing sod for the lawn care industry is both an art and a science, as South Florida sod producer Paul Grose can attest. The general manager of the King Ranch-Florida Farm in Belle Glade, Grose learned the ins and outs of sod production on the job. "But my background in agriculture has served me well," he says.

Grose manages some 100 employees and all production aspects of three farms. His proficiency in sod production is evident as he travels back and forth between the sand-based bermudagrass and zoysiagrass farm in Indiantown, and the muck-based operations near Belle Glade, 40 miles away.



patch and dollar spot, he wants to protect his St. Augustine grass turf from diseases like take-all patch after the new lawn is installed. "We never see take-all patch on the farm, but the disease can move in on a home lawn as the new sod is getting established," he explains. "Most homeowners tend to overwater, and some varieties are more susceptible to disease. So, we use a preharvest fungicide during the hot, rainy summers to prevent disease after our turf leaves the farm."

Grose began using Armada® fungicide when the product became available three years ago. He likes the effective, long-lasting, broad-spectrum control the new product provides, as well as its reasonable price. "We were faced with using some very expensive fungicides," he adds. "But Armada gives us just as good control and is more economical to use.

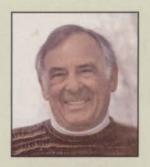
"We'll apply Armada if we anticipate disease pressure from excessive rainfall and high temperatures, or if we actually see disease presence in the turfgrass," he explains. "I'd say it's the most reliable – and relied upon – fungicide we use."

King Ranch conducts its own evaluations of herbicides, fungicides and fertilizer combinations on all its farms. Grose works with both manufacturer representatives and University of Florida researchers to test new materials. "It keeps us up-to-date on new products and helps us maintain relationships with the scientific community and the manufacturers, which we feel is extremely important," he relates.

As he surveys the muck sod fields at the Belle Glade farm, Grose remarks on the multitude of benefits turf brings to the environment – both in urban and rural areas. "King Ranch has been in the turf business for a long time and we want to continue our role as a leader," he notes. "We want to set quality standards and raise expectations for the green industry. I definitely want to participate in that process." – Debbie Clayton



BOB ANDREWS The Greenskeeper Carmel, Ind.



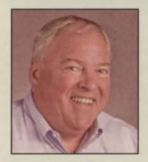
TOM LIED Lied's Landscape Design & Development Sussex, Wis.



GARY CLAYTON Agriliance Kennesaw, Ga.



GEORGE MORRELL ValleyCrest Cos. Atlanta, Ga.



RUSSELL FRITH Lawn Doctor Holmdel, N.J.



LINDA NOVY past president Gardeners' Guild San Rafael, Calif.



RON KUJAWA Kujawa Enterprises Cudhay, Wis.



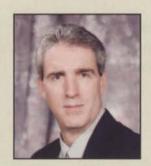
J. LANDON REEVE Chapel Valley Landscape Woodbine, Md.



WAYNE RICHARDS retired vice president and chief operating officer Cagwin & Dorward Novato, Calif.



DALE AMSTUTZ Northern Lawns Corp. Omaha, Neb.



KURT KLUZNIK Yardmaster Painesville, Ohio



TOM BLAND Bland Landscaping Cary, N.C.



SAM LANG Fairway Green Lawn Care Raleigh, N.C.



BILL HOOPES Grass Roots Training Delaware, Ohio



GARY LASCALEA GroGreen Lawn, Tree & Shrub Care Plano, Texas



BRUCE HUNT The Brickman Group Long Grove, Ill.



BETH SEME Elizabeth A. Seme Latham, N.Y.



ADAM JONES Massey Services Maitland, Fla.



JOSEPH VARGAS, Ph.D. Michigan State University East Lansing, Mich.



JOHN BUECHNER Lawn Doctor Holmdel, N.J.



TERRY KURTH Weed Man Middleton, Wis.



TOM DELANEY Professional Landcare Network Marietta, Ga.



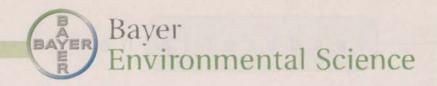
IOE REYNOLDS Black Diamond Lawn Care Toledo, Ohio



SAM FARISON Farison Lawn Care Louisville, Ky.



BARRY TROUTMAN ValleyCrest Cos. Calabasas, Calif.



3 Business Solutions

KICK FIRE ANTS OUT OF SCHOOL

Children are most susceptible to fire ant attacks during recess and physical education class when they could unknowingly step onto the fire ant mounds that commonly populate school grounds. School administrators and facility managers need to become acquainted with the available control options. Lawn care professionals can capitalize on this market and thwart a serious public health



threat by introducing the decision-makers to TopChoice.

To assist lawn care professionals in pitching services to schools, Bayer is once again offering the TopChoice® insecticide "Protect Against Fire Ants" Schools Program. The program is available to both private and public secondary school districts for use on school

grounds in Arizona, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas. Schools in these states will receive a discount on their TopChoice or TopChoice + Fertilizer treatments.

Contact your Bayer representative for more information. - Christa Gardner

HEALTHY TO THE CORE

At the Green Industry & Equipment Expo one year ago, Bayer Environmental Science introduced its latest innovation for the green industry — CoreTect^{1M} tablets.

The convenient and easy-to-use tablets combine the power of Merit[®] insecticide with a fertilizer. The product is ideal for use both during tree and shrub installation and on established plants.

"CoreTect's controlled-release properties provide outstanding insect control and fertility throughout the year," says Dr. Nate Royalty, product development manager, insecticides for Bayer.

Additionally, the tablets allow plants to better survive harsh environmental conditions, including drought, heat and poor soils.

"The tablets result in better stress defense and more efficient use of nutrients and water," says Royalty. – *Tim Londergan*

RONSTAR

RONSTAR G® FOR RESIDENTIAL LANDSCAPE USE

Ronstar G® herbicide from Bayer Environmental Science may now be used on residential landscapes for preemergent control of annual broadleaf and annual grassy weeds.

Ronstar is available in wettable powder, flowable or granular formulations, and on numerous fertilizer plus herbicide formulated products. The new use does not include application to residential turf.

For use on residential landscapes, the label revision allows two applications of Ronstar at the rate of 4 pounds of active ingredient (a.i.) per acre. A maximum of 8 pounds of a.i. per acre per year is allowed. Ronstar may be used around a wide variety of ornamental and landscape plants, including arborvitae, maple, crabapple, crape myrtle, dogwood, forsythia, sedum, azalea and spruce. The product now may be used in both residential and commercial landscapes.

The label revision stipulates that Ronstar must be watered in before reentry to the treated area. The product provides long residual preemergent weed control and does not harm plant roots.

Weeds controlled by Ronstar include broadleaf weeds such as lambsquarters, Pennsylvania smartweed, common groundsel, redroot pigweed and common purslane, as well as grassy weeds such as crabgrass, goosegrass and foxtail. – Meredith Setzman



MARTY ERBAUGH longtime business owner, former LESCO chairman of the board Strongsville, Ohio



CHRIS LEMCKE Weed Man Scarborough, Ontario



GERALD GROSSI Arborlawn Lansing, Mich.



BILL LEUENBERGER The Chalet Wilmette, III.



TOM HOFER Spring-Green Lawn Care Plainfield, III.



CHUCK MCINTIRE Marietta, Ga.



SCOTT **BRICKMAN**The Brickman Group
Gaithersburg, Md.



MARIA CANDLER
James River Grounds
Management
Glen Allen, Va.



KIRK **HURTO**TruGreen
Delaware, Ohio



LOU **KOBUS**Fox Run Nurseries
Mount Vernon, Va.



JACK ROBERTSON
Jack Robertson
Lawn Care
Springfield, III.



DAVID **SNODGRASS**Dennis' Seven Dees
Landscaping and Nurseries
Portland, Ore.



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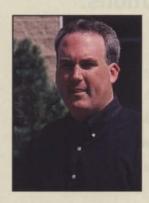


allectus









DAN FOLEY D. Foley Landscape Walpole, Mass.



DAVID SHETLAR The Ohio State University Columbus, Ohio



JIM MCCUTCHEON HighGrove Partners Austell, Ga.



CONNIE HOM Buckingham Greenery Buckingham, Va.



BOB OTTLEY One Step Tree & Lawn Care N. Chili, N.Y.



HAROLD ENGER Spring-Green Lawn Care Plainfield, III.



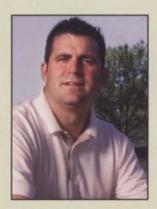
BILL ARMAN Landscape Development Valencia, Calif.



ED WALTER Washington Tree Service Shoreline, Wash.



GERRY MCCARTHY Mac's Landscaping Stoneham, Mass.



ALAN WHITE Turf Systems Burlington, Ontario Canada



JOHN GIBSON Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care Denver, Colo.



FRANK MARIANI Mariani Landscape Lake Bluff, III.



DEN GARDNER Project EverGreen/TOCA Valencia, Calif.



TOM FOCHTMAN CoCal Landscape Denver, Colo.



ERICA SANTELLA TruGreen Orlando, Fla.



SCOTT JAMIESON The F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Co. Northbrook, III.



RICK BRANDENBURG Turfgrass Entomologist North Carolina State University Raleigh, N.C.



TOM SHOTZBARGER Tomlison Bomberger Lancaster, Pa.

INTRODUCING...

Lawn & Landscape magazine and Bayer Environmental Science are proud to announce the winners of the 10th annual Leadership Awards. These individuals embody the essence of leadership, whether it's in their tireless industry involvement, pioneering spirit, dedication to education, commitment to personal improvement or environmental stewardship. We congratulate and thank them for their outstanding contributions to the lawn and landscape industry.



KURT **BLAND**Bland Landscaping
Apex, N.C.



JENNIFER **LEMCKE**Weed Man USA/
Turf Holdings
Scarborough,
Ontario, Canada



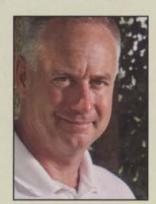
MARTY **GRUNDER**Grunder Landscaping
Co./Marty Grunder!
Inc.
Miamisburg, Ohio



DAN **POTTER**University of Kentucky
Lexington, Ky.



CHRIS **KUJAWA** KEI Cudahy, Wis.



CRAIG **RUPPERT** Ruppert Nurseries Laytonsville, Md.

PRACTICAL



MAGIC

By Emily Mullins

ometimes it takes the worst to bring out the best in someone. Sometimes, a person's true leadership skills don't shine though until duty calls and they must rise to the challenge. Kurt Bland knows this from experience. In 2004, his mother, Nancy, was diagnosed with cancer. Given two years to live, Bland's father, Tom, knew it was time to fulfill the couple's dream of purchasing a motor home and traveling around the country. With 30-days notice, Tom placed his company, Bland Landscaping, in the hands of his sons and hit the road with his wife. It was at that moment Bland learned the true meaning of leadership. "I've always known I possess leadership qualities, but the day we took over the business for my father was the precise moment I knew I had to step up," Bland says. "I knew I had to accept the responsibility I was being presented."

While unfortunate, the transition in management excelled Bland Landscaping into a new realm. Among other changes, the Apex, N.C.-based company added an irrigation division, instituted rigorous water and lean management practices and began running its fleets on biodiesel. In 2007, the company grew 24 percent and saw its most profitable year to date. Tom Bland credits much of this to a revitalized passion and energy the younger generation of Blands brought back into the business. "It was hard turning over the business 1 built and had been in charge of for 30-plus years," he says. "But knowing my wife would never live to be an old woman, I made the decision to spend the time with her. It wasn't good that it had to happen that way but, businesswise, it really excelled things."

While seemingly effortless, Bland's transition from operations manager to general manager was years in the making. A green industry career seemed inevitable for the curious outdoorsman with a knack for machinery and a love of technology. Born in 1975, a year before Bland Landscaping's inception, Bland was exposed to the landscaping industry from day one, and it was assumed he and his brother, Matt, would one day take over the family business. But rather than being entitled to the role, their father made sure they earned it every step of the way. "Many people expected me to come into the business after high school and just take over, which was an unfounded thought," Bland says. "Like most, I was a pretty irresponsible teenager. Had I not learned from my mistakes, I wouldn't have been as confident in my new role and really think I would have gotten more flack and resistance."

SCHOOL DAYS. Bland's first paying job was mowing a neighbor's 6-acre field when he was 13 years old for \$100 and a place to board his horse. At 15, Bland got a workers permit and became a "glorified laborer" for the family business. During summers and school breaks, he'd do whatever was needed – from grounds maintenance duties to helping with large-scale commercial installation projects. One of his favorite things to do was repair equipment – or at least try to. "I probably tore more things apart than I actually fixed," Bland says, "But it helped me learn about the machinery and increased my interest in equipment technology and how it works."

While he started working at a relatively young age, he still made time for fun. "My parents wanted me to enjoy being a teenager, but at the same time, I wanted to buy a horse and a car and they wanted to see me work for those things," Bland says. His father remembers Bland and his

"Without experience outside of the family business, you're unable to relate to how things are done elsewhere. You're more likely to accept things the way they are, especially at a business that has run successfully for 30 years." - Kurt Bland



brother driving old trucks and jeeps around the property and woods, getting them stuck in the mud here and there. He was and still is an avid reader, but always preferred books and magazines about subjects that interested him - like technology or sports - over school books. "He might not have always gotten his homework done, but he read what interested him," Tom Bland says. "He's always been able to pick up something and just have a tremendous comprehension of what he reads."

Bland was a delegator from an early age, always willing to pass off his chores to someone else "so they could gain the good experience." In fact, his mother often compared him to the legendary delegator Huckleberry Finn. This mentality lasted well into college, when Bland remembers his grounds management professor reminding him that this was a classroom, not a business. "Even though our lab group finished first, the professor observed that I'd given everyone a specific responsibility and, as a result, they'd only learned what they were assigned to do," Bland recalls. "He reminded me that the only way to learn is through doing, and it was then I realized I naturally gravitate toward taking the lead."

Bland's college career got off to a rocky start when he missed orientation to prolong his time as a counselor at a Canadian fishing camp. He began at a community college and transferred to a four-year program at North Carolina State University. Although he earned a double major in horticultural science and agriculture business management, his first intended major was landscape design, something he quickly realized he wasn't meant to pursue. "My design professor, Will Hooker, said I was too practical for design - that I was always finding reasons not to do something creative instead of creatively finding ways to do them," Bland says. "At that level of the landscape design educational process, practicality is discouraged."

Bland continued to butt heads with Hooker, who approached landscaping with an ideological approach Bland didn't possess at that time. Their differences reached a pinnacle when Hooker told Bland that, unless he viewed the future of the landscape industry with a sustainable outlook, he'd evolve into a "petrochemical abuser who does more environmental harm than good." To this, Bland walked out of the classroom and received an incomplete. Little did Bland know at the time, this would be one of the most valuable pieces of advice he'd ever receive. "For years, I really felt a grudge toward Will and found it hard to talk to him," Bland says. "But if it weren't for him challenging me the way he did, I would have never changed majors and would probably look at the landscape industry the same way I always had. He opened my eyes and showed me I had to look at the future differently."

Hooker's approach stuck with Bland, who today is considered one of the industry's most forward-thinking environmental supporters. The men are good friends to this day, to the point where Bland visits Hooker's classroom to provide critiques and feedback. Bland's newfound open-mindedness and acceptance of new ideas paved the way for his reentrance to the industry as maintenance division manager, not at Bland Landscaping, but at Del Conte's Landscaping in Fremont, Calif. - a job he landed during the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) (then

Kurt Bland on branding...

aintaining a triple-net bottom line, including profitability, social responsibility and environmental stewardship, is the core focus of Bland Landscaping's brand, in addition to focusing on continually improving client communication.

Q. What do you think are the strengths of your business brand in your market?

A. Quality of work, value to our customers, involvement in our community, and corporate responsibility are all strengths of our brand. We adhere to a philosophy of maintaining a triple-net bottom line that extends beyond the monetary value of our earnings. We therefore base our decision making on what is best for profitability, social responsibility and environmental stewardship.

Q. How did you create your business brand?

A. Our brand is the result of adapting to market conditions and social developments in our region. As we have progressed from one generation to the next, we have maintained our core values of excellence, professionalism, progressiveness, honesty and integrity. By following these guidelines, the result is a strong brand that continues to position us for the future.

Q. What have you found are the best ways to market your brand message and why? What did you learn were not the best ways to market your brand message and why?

A. Our image and our actions speak louder than our words. We maintain a strict uniform dress code that forbids denim, we keep a well maintained fleet, we do what it takes to deliver a job well done, and we train our employees constantly on the many facets of their job. You will not find us in any telephone directories that charge a fee; therefore we do not use Yellow Pages ads. In tracking our leads we concluded they are expensive and do not target specific clientele.

Q. What do you do to make sure your brand has consistent personality and/or reputation in the minds of your customers?

A. We constantly communicate with customers. Whether it is a visit from a manager or an owner, a survey sent in the mail, an in-depth, one-on-one interview with someone other than their primary point of contact, or talking to them at our annual client appreciation day, we try to canvas our clients' opinions regularly. Sometimes you hear things you do not want to hear, but that is how we improve.

Q. What advice would you give to other landscape professionals who are attempting to establish winning brands in their markets?

A. Know thyself. While this may sound cliché and be a statement of the obvious, it is very important in order to be able to live up to the brand one creates or wishes to create. We know what we are good at, and we know where we have failed. We also know that it takes commitment to make things happen the way they should and commitment requires buy-in. To build that buy-in, an organization must have the right players on board and empower them to thrive as individuals and as a team.

"Kurt is a dreamer," says his father, Tom Bland. "He is a visionary and sees the big picture."

the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA)) Student Career Days.

One of Tom Bland's prerequisites was that each son gain managerial experience at another landscaping firm before assuming such a position at Bland Landscaping. Not only would this bring in new ideas and perspectives, but also give each son the credibility necessary to be respected by the company's other employees, vendors and industry peers. "I think this was one of the smartest decisions my dad ever made," Kurt says. "Without experience outside of the family business, you're unable to relate to how things are done elsewhere. You're more likely to accept things the way they are, especially at a business that has run successfully for 30 years."

HEADING WEST. Bland worked for Del Conte's Landscaping for two and a half years. While he could have gained his outside managerial experience anywhere, he chose California because of its progressive nature and hotbed of issues - from Hispanic labor to water and pesticide use. "So much in the way of legislation and government authority begins in the West and migrates East," Bland says. "What I saw in California wasn't necessarily better, but it was different. Things going on there were going to be issues for us here in North Carolina in the future and I was going to be thrust right in the forefront of all that."

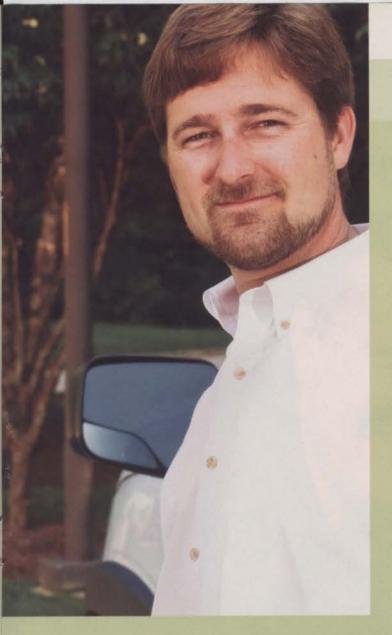
While maintenance division manager at Del Conte's, Bland worked in a variety of roles and volunteer positions, most of which focused on sustainable landscape practices. Issues like blower bans, water management, grass recycling and reducing landscape waste were daily discussions on the West Coast and gave him a taste of what was to come back home. To Bland, this was the ultimate combination of his practicality and Hooker's ideology. "You can't deny a government mandate, you just need to find a way to comply," he says. "I had the opportunity to work with very forward-thinking people from Berkeley and other Bay areas determined to find different ways of doing things."



Bland took a particular interest in water management practices while at Del Conte's, which would prove to come in handy upon his return to Bland Landscaping. For the past few years, North Carolina has suffered the most severe droughts on record, giving landscape and irrigation contractors little water to work with. While Bland Landscaping previously subcontracted all of its irrigation work, Bland was able to incorporate his water management knowledge to create a stateof-the-art irrigation division and become an important component of the City of Raleigh's water management task force. "My dad never wanted an irrigation department unless someone was passionate about it," Bland says. "I was passionate about it."

HOMECOMING. Bland returned to his family's business in 2002 as operations manager with a new breadth of knowledge and a wealth of ideas. However, these new ideas weren't welcomed by all. Bland's practical and no-nonsense business approach were different from his father's laid-back style. Some of Bland's new initiatives, particularly lean management, were downright rejected by some employees who chose to leave the company rather than conform. "When we started making changes, some people left, others compromised and others thought what we were doing was great for the company," Bland says. "But I'm not always interested in debating everything. Some things are just the way they are and change is one of them."

When his sons reentered the family business, Tom Bland saw a renewed passion and energy. He saw long-term plans and a cohesive vision. His initial succession plan was to place them in the driver's seat by the



time he reached his early 60s. However his wife's illness accelerated his succession plan and, when he was 54, his sons were at the wheel. Tom Bland kept in touch with his sons via e-mail while traveling, and when he and his wife would return home every three weeks for her chemotherapy treatment, he would spend a few days in the office while she recuperated. But upon returning to his leading role after his wife's passing in 2006, Tom Bland found the company running smoothly and efficiently, and he decided it would be best to keep things that way. "Last year was our best year ever financially and they constantly remind me of that," he laughs. "I had the option to go back in front of the company or let my sons continue. It would have been moving backward to get back in front of them."

Since Bland rejoined the company in 2002, Bland Landscaping has gone from 120 to 190 employees—and counting. Last year, the company surpassed its goal of 15 percent growth by an additional 10 percent and doesn't see it slowing down anytime soon. To keep it

up, Bland makes it a point not to focus on any one aspect of the business more than another. He has his hand in every department, not deep enough to micromanage, but just far enough to know what's going on. He tries to spend as much time out in the field as he does in the office, communicating with his maintenance crews in Spanish then addressing a client's needs.

Aside from the family business, Bland has racked up his share of personal career accomplishments. He's especially proud of the fact he passed both the Certified Landscape Professional and the Certified Landscape Technician exams on the first try. "It may sound corny, but I was very determined to pass on the first try and really put my mind to it," he says. "It's rewarding to be able to tell younger industry professionals gearing up for their tests that it's possible to pass the first time around."

He was also honored by the invitation to participate in the past two PLANET Crystal Ball reports, an annual publication regarding the future of the green industry as told by select industry experts. "I've read these books since I was 12 and 13 years old and I always used to think how neat it would be to go to some remote location and talk about the future of the industry and how we can adapt to the changes around us," he says. "When I was asked to participate, I was stunned. I questioned if I was even qualified. There are people who've been at it for much longer and accomplished much more."

Perhaps Bland's interest in the green industry's future has gotten him where he is today. His desire to figure out how to do things better has inspired those around him to do the same. According to Bland, the future won't be as bright for contractors who choose otherwise. "Ten years from now I see the industry being prosperous and healthy, but it's going to be much different from how we know it today," he says.

In particular, Bland predicts fuel and manpower will be scarcer in the future. Gas-powered machinery will be phased out in place of newer, cleaner technologies. Lean management will be necessary due to a lack of labor. More water will be reserved for drinking, not for watering lawns. "Some people think my views are negative and pessimistic, but I don't see it that way," he explains. "I'm optimistic we can certainly change, but I'm not optimistic that all people are willing to change."

Whether one sees him as an optimist or a pessimist, Bland's practicality will no doubt continue to influence the green industry for many years to come. He'll lead his family business through challenges that arise, because sometimes it takes the worst to bring out the best in someone. "Kurt is a dreamer," Tom Bland says. "He is a visionary and sees the big picture."

PROMISES



KEPT

Every time Marty Grunder makes an introduction, he describes himself as a landscaper, business owner, husband and father — and he is devoutly loyal to each of these areas in his life.

By Nicole Wisniewski

members of the Ohio Landscape Contractors Association attending the group's annual conference. He stands confident, in a deep navy suit, crisp white shirt and royal blue tie - a color that complements his distinguishable auburn hair and freckled face, a look Grunder often describes as "the guy who sort of looks like Conan O'Brien." He tells stories with his hands, bringing them together at key moments and then apart to ask questions and firmly chopping one into another to make a point. This afternoon, he's telling the story of Charles Kettering, the inventor of central air conditioning, the electric starter and the automated vehicle assembly line.

arty Grunder looks back and forth across the roomful of faces - all

"Charles Kettering was one of those once-in-a-lifetime dudes," says Grunder, the founder and president of Dayton, Ohio-based Grunder Landscaping Co. and landscape consulting firm Marty Grunder! Inc. "Only one person in the U.S. has more patents than Charles Kettering, and that's Thomas Edison."

In 1919, it took 37 days to paint an automobile, Grunder tells the group, which was a major frustration for Kettering, so he put 19 engineers to work on improving the process. Many months later, those engineers shared their plan with Kettering - they were excited to report they had reduced the vehicle-painting process to 30 days. "Kettering looked at them and thought somebody was kidding," Grunder shares. "He slammed his hand on the table and said, 'An hour's all it should take to paint an automobile - what's wrong with you people?' At that, a young engineer let out a little cackle and a smile. Kettering memorized his name and face and went to work to come up with his own quick-drying paint."

Three short months afterward, Grunder explains, Kettering invited the young engineer to lunch, insisting he drive. "An hour and five minutes later, after finishing their meals, they left the restaurant," he says. "The young engineer scanned the parking lot and, feeling confused and embarrassed, admitted he couldn't find his car. 'Isn't that your car?' Kettering asked, pointing to a nearby vehicle. The young engineer said, 'It looks like mine but mine isn't that color.' To that Kettering replied: 'It is now.'

"You can do anything you want to do," Grunder tells the group, explaining the point to his story. "If you have a goal like Mr. Kettering did, even when everyone else thinks you're crazy, don't deviate from that. Because, as Mr. Kettering said, 'The only thing that's ever changed the world is a human being."

Grunder hasn't racked up patents that rival those of historic American inventors, and he's the first to admit his message is "simple stuff," yet there are many in the landscape industry who would say Grunder is a human being who's changed their world.

"Marty's message isn't something you haven't heard before," shares longtime industry colleague Randy Tischer, owner of Green Valley Sod Farm in Sugarcreek Township, Ohio. "But what Marty does is actually push you to do something about

"It's not what you know or who you know, it's who knows you when they need you. That's the key to making business work. Your job as networker is to get your name out and brand it into potential customers' brains so they call you when they need you." - Marty Grunder



it. He calls me up once every other month to check on me. He always asks how things are going and how he can help."

From what Tischer describes as a "freckle-faced, scrawny kid" who came to his father's sod farm with a green, beat-up pick-up truck, a magnetic landscaping sign and a dream to an owner of a \$4-million landscape business and a successful speaking and consulting company, Grunder is one person who keeps his promises - to other people and to himself.

DO WHAT YOU KNOW. Operating tractors and running landscape equipment was second nature to Grunder, who grew up on a 5-acre farm in Sugarcreek Township, Ohio. And growing up in a home without air conditioning meant summer days were spent outdoors. "We were always told to go outside and do something," Grunder says.

In 1984, Grunder bought his first mower - he was 15 years old. His plan was to mow lawns to earn money to pay for his University of Dayton college education. Though he had a tractor his father, Martin Sr., would let him borrow to drive around town and attempt to sell his mowing services, the large, beat-up machine with its chipped paint, rust spots and Chevron tires wasn't something customers wanted on their lawns. "Three customers told me they would let me cut their grass if I had a smaller mower, so I told them I had one and went home and told my mom I had to get one," Grunder says. "We were on our way to Sears when we passed a garage sale advertising a mower for \$25. That was my first piece of equipment."

Taking care of what he had - that was one of the first lessons Grunder learned from his father, who never took his cars to the garage for repairs or called someone to install a basketball court on their property. Instead, the civil engineer would figure out how to replace brakes or mix concrete himself. "He could build and fix anything," Grunder says.

From his mom, Mary Ellen, Grunder learned the simple art of saying "thank you," which he still uses in his business today by consistently thanking customers for their business. "My mom would make us write thank-you notes to people who gave us toys and gifts before we could play with them," he says, adding this instilled in him the importance of this simple gesture of appreciation.

If there's one thing Grunder is not, it's a benchwarmer - he likes to be an integral part of the team. Though he was a good athlete when he was in grade school, high school competitive sports didn't suit him. "I love baseball," Grunder says. "I had a great arm and a good glove and I could run fast. But I was small and I couldn't hit. If you can't hit, you really can't play. I just wasn't good enough."

As a result, Grunder gravitated toward activities he was good at - landscaping. By his senior year, he "was making more money than any other kid in high school," he says.

Business moved fast. By 1990, as a senior at the University of Dayton, Grunder's company was grossing more than \$300,000 in revenue and a story about his business appeared in The New York Times.

TAKE ADVICE, GIVE ADVICE. By 1995. Grunder Landscaping had won several local small business awards - the Dayton Business Reporter Small Business of the Year Award in 1993 and 1995, and Grunder himself received the Dayton Business Reporter Executive of the Year award in 1993, and the U.S. Small Business Administration's Ohio Young Entrepreneur of the Year and Midwest Young Entrepreneur of the Year, both in 1995.

As a result of this recognition, Grunder was asked to speak at a seminar for aspiring entrepreneurs at the Dayton Convention Center. "The school guidance counselor wanted me to tell my story to the kids," Grunder explains. "I prepared a whole speech."

But he didn't realize what he was getting himself into – when he walked up on stage, he looked out onto a room of more than 500 people. "I was so nervous, my palms were sweating and my heart was racing," Grunder says. "I was bobbing back and forth like a mercury bird. I started to speak, and a gentleman in the front row was nodding his head, which told me I was doing a good job, so I started to relax."

When Grunder was finished, the students rewarded him with a standing ovation. "Wow," Grunder says, describing his reaction to the rush of the roaring applause, "That was fun. Instantly, I wanted to do it again."

That's when Grunder launched his consulting career with Marty Grunder! Inc. What drove him to take this on, in addition to running a landscape business, was his growing fervor for sharing his story, experience and advice with listeners.

"Marty has a love for landscaping, but a passion for public speaking, working with landscapers and helping them grow their businesses," Tischer says. "He loves motivating and pushing others." While Grunder felt confident in his abilities with each new speaking opportunity, he still thought he could improve. At 25, he hired speaking coach Dottie Walters. "She watched me speak and gave me suggestions on my cadence, story telling and told me what to do with my hands," Grunder explains. "Where she helped me most of all was with my mind. I was a 25-year-old shy speaker when she met me and then a year later I believed what I had to offer was valuable information. She instilled a sense of confidence in me."

Walters also encouraged Grunder to write a book. At the time, Grunder Landscaping was a \$1.5 million business — "it's neat what I do but no one is going to line up to buy a book about it," Grunder thought. "She said, 'If you were to ask a roomful of people how many of them have cut grass and got paid for it in their lives, I'll bet most hands would go up. So you have a common ground with a lot of people. Why would you think you couldn't write a book about what you've done?'

"I said, 'OK, I'll give it a shot," Grunder continues.

Grunder started writing the book and was more than half-way through when the copy sent to a publisher in Traverse City, Mich. burned up with the office during a fire, Grunder didn't have a backup. That same year, Grunder's father passed away unexpectedly. Grunder scrapped the idea of writing a book.

One year later, Grunder thought, 'My dad didn't quit – I'm not going to either." Two months later, the book – The 9 Super Simple Steps to Entrepreneurial Success – was finished. The book won the 2003 Independent Publisher Book Award in the business/career category. Today, Ama-

zon.com users describe it as "a four-year degree in 194 pages," "a roadmap to success," and a page-turner that could "start an epidemic of infectious enthusiasm."

Tischer says this deftly describes the contagious positive emotion Grunder's work drums up in others. "Earlier this year, I attended his boot camp in Tampa," Tischer shares. "And Marty had a few folks get up and talk about their personal stories and how they fixed problems and were able to take challenging situations and turn them around and make life better for their businesses and families. And as people were telling their stories there were literally teary eyes all around me. It's not often when a 45-year-old grown man gets teary-eyed, but these people were really moved and it just goes to show you how much they feel Marty has done for them personally and professionally. You don't see that often and it just got me. This guy really means something to these people."

NEVER QUIT. In addition to a passion for his work, if there's another key trait Grunder has that can be attributed as a primary reason for his success, perseverance would have to be it.

"To be frank with you, I'm a pain in the ass and I like getting my way," Grunder admits. "If I see something I want, I try to figure out how to get it."

Grunder especially embraces this character attribute when it comes to engaging with professionals he admires.

Take Frank Mariani, for instance, the owner of 35-year-old and \$30-million-plus Mariani Landscape.

Grunder's wife, Lisa, is from the Chicago area. In 1989 when Grunder was courting Lisa, he read about Mariani in a

"His mind is always working," says Marty Grunder's wife, Lisa. "He's a dreamer and is extremely optimistic."

city magazine. Mariani Landscape's Lake Bluff, Ill. headquarters were right around the corner from Lisa's parents' home. "With Grunder Landscaping, I wanted to create a smaller version of what Frank created with Mariani Landscape, so I decided I had to go meet him," Grunder says.

Grunder thought he could reach his goal by having Mariani's wisdom on his board of advisers. "I asked him 10 times to be on my board before he said yes," Grunder shares. "I finally got him to agree to be on my board when I sent him a plane ticket to encourage him to come to a board meeting. I told him if he didn't think he could help me and also learn something, he didn't have to come. To my surprise, he said OK. Now when someone asks, 'Do you know Frank?' I'm proud to say he's on my board."

Mariani has been on Grunder's board of advisers for six years. "In the last 10 years, nobody has meant more to me in this industry than Frank Mariani – the amount of time he's spent with me has been remarkable," Grunder says. "I get emotional just talking about the guy."

Another huge mentor for Grunder is John Maxwell, the author of 17 New York Times best selling books on leadership. "I started listening to his books on tape 10 to 12 years ago," Grunder says.

Finally, Grunder got up the courage to "drop him a note and tell him what a big fan I was and I'd love to meet him sometime. Three months later, his assistant calls and says John is flying into Dayton in a month and would love it if I had lunch with him. After the lunch I was invited to his seminar. And in front of 6,000 of my hometown folks he brought me up on stage and told my story. I was shaking. That's how our friendship started."

Grunder respected Maxwell's message so much he wanted his consulting landscape companies to see him, but \$75,000 in speaking engagement fees were too high for this group to afford. "So I called last year and asked if I could bring some people to see him and hear his message. I



told him we couldn't afford \$75,000, but we'd come to him and bring enthusiasm. His assistant told me he had a really busy schedule and she wasn't sure if it was realistic. A couple days later, she called me and told me John likes me, so he'll do it."

This August, Grunder and 12 of his colleagues traveled to Chicago for a four-hour personal lesson from Maxwell on his five levels of leadership. Grunder says: "I could go on and on about what John has meant to me, both personally and professionally; suffice to say, many of my ideas come from John."

STAY TRUE TO WHAT'S IMPORTANT.

When you own two businesses, having a solid family life is important, which is why Grunder can't help but list his family as a tremendous positive influence. Grunder met his wife, Lisa, when he was a senior at the University of Dayton. He graduated with a business degree in 1990 and they married in 1993. The couple has four children – 14-year-old Emily, who Grunder says is very personable not unlike Lisa and himself; 12-year-old Katie, who has Grunder's desire and is very tenacious; 10-year-old Lily, who Grunder says has Lisa's good looks and is "everyone's friend;" and 7-year-old Grant, who Grunder describes as "a character with a hint of my hair" in a strawberry swirl amid blond tresses.

"I learn so much from them," Grunder says, sharing a story from a conversation he had last year with his son, Grant, who was 6 years old at the time. "I asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. He responded, 'Nothing.'



Oh my goodness, I thought... the son of Mr. Motivator doesn't want to be anything when he grows up. I can't take this. I have to spend some time with him and push him and have him be more focused on goals and have a plan.

"Then," Grunder continues, "I realized he was only 6. We parents all want what's best for our children. We want to see them grow up and be successful. We want to brag to our friends about the accomplishments of our kids, and we hope they will be more successful than we are. At the end of the day, success is about being the best you can be at whatever you are doing. Part of what shapes us are all those experiences we have as kids. Grant will have plenty of time to figure out what he wants to do; right now, his time is best served being a kid and forming positive

memories about his childhood. I will set the best example I can for him, and I know he will turn out just fine."

Laughing, Lisa says, "this is where I come in to remind Marty that his kids are not his employees." While running a home with four children and a husband who owns two businesses is like "conducting an orchestra," Lisa says Grunder bends his schedule regularly to coach girl's basketball or be at the table for family dinner nights – he makes sure weekends are dedicated to family. "Our favorite thing to do on a Saturday night is hang out with the kids," Grunder says.

At the same time, he has high expectations for his children. A chore checklist where dad and child sign off on completed tasks earns them allowance. No chores, no allowance. "He wants them to learn the consequences of their actions," Lisa says. "He is bound and determined to make sure they know their dad's accomplishments are not theirs. They have to make their own way. God forbid they say they are bored – Marty will have something for them to do in no time."

And the Grunder children know this full well. Dad's personality is complete with "a lot of energy," Lisa says. "He can't sit still. His mind is always working. He's a dreamer and is extremely optimistic. He thinks about what he wants and makes sure he does what he needs to do to make it happen. He motivates and expects a lot out of people, and I think the kids pick up on that."

Thinking about his children makes Grunder feel reflective. "When I started Grunder Landscaping Co., I didn't know what life was all about. I certainly did not have a vision that Grunder Landscaping Co. would be what it is today; I just wanted to cut grass and get paid to have fun. Today, as I am 40 years old, I realize what a blessing it is to own my own business, the freedom it gives me, and the opportunities."

One day, "after I was almost 3 miles from home, my wife called to tell me Grant woke up, came downstairs and asked where I was - she wondered if I wanted to come back to give him his hug," Grunder continues, explaining that normally none of his kids are downstairs as he leaves for work but when he yells "goodbye," Grant runs down the stairs and jumps into his arms to give him a hug. "I thought quickly - let's see, I have a staff meeting at 8:30; at 10:15 I have to record a commercial for community service I'm doing; I have to get that big job I sold processed; I have to get my head on straight with the sales leads we have; and I have to prepare for a trip to Orlando to speak to a group of entrepreneurs. Man, this would take an extra 20 minutes. But, who cares. And I turned my truck around and went back home to give Grant a hug. The best part about running my own business is I can turn my truck around and go right back home when someone calls. I'm my own boss and, yes, not everyday of being an entrepreneur is easy or fun, but most days are great and they're especially great when you know someone loves you and still wants to give you a hug.'

Grunder admits he wonders about what the future will be like for his children. "I just want to be able to set a great example for them," he reiterates. "I hope they watch dad work and focus and do things over that didn't work out. I hope they take these lessons with them in life."

Considering the countless landscape contractors who have listened to and learned from Grunder's message, he has nothing to worry about.

FAMILY



MATTERS

Since he began meeting clients with his father

at 6 years old, Chris Kujawa has proven that he is

destined to lead Kujawa Enterprises.

By Stefanie Toth

t just over 6 feet tall, Chris Kujawa is standing in front of his employees after a meeting with some of Kujawa Enterprises (KEI)'s most important clients. A broad smile reaches across his face as he proudly announces the amount of satisfaction the clients expressed, but he doesn't take credit for the work. "You're the ones who made the customer happy," he says.

Humble yet proud, Chris Kujawa began his career in the landscape industry as a laborer in his early teens, working with maintenance crews. Since the 1980s, when he became an official employee, Chris has held many positions at KEI, an \$11 million, full-service landscape business that began in a small building in the town of Cudahy, Wis., about 10 minutes outside of Milwaukee. At 46, he leads his father Ron's company, KEI, as executive vice president of sales and marketing.

"Chris brought in the business," says Sally, Chris' mother and KEI's president. "He's very sales driven. He sells honesty and integrity and you can see that. Our clients know that if he says it will happen, it will happen. There was a lot of growth because of his initiative."

In addition to one-on-one marketing, Chris has involved KEI in its clients' associations, which not only helps in understanding their issues, but it also addresses how to solve those problems. He also participates in service organizations with which KEI shares something in common, and he promotes customer interaction as KEI's brand. The recurring themes of honesty and integrity, the platform of the Kujawa family work ethic, have spawned the rapid growth of KEI and will lead them into the next five to 10 years, he says.

"We concentrate on who we are as people," Chris says. "It's the fact that you can look across a desk at a client and say, 'Put your confidence in me' and they can do that. You need to understand what you do to be the best and know what your clients respond to."

At 6 years old, Chris already exemplified the ability to solve problems and help people when he went with his father Ron to talk with clients and work in the field. The Kujawa family lived in the top floor of KEI's offices and each morning walked down the stairs to begin their day. "Both my husband and I had the philosophy that since it's a family business you start as soon as you can," Sally says.

While the other three Kujawa children were not excited about going out on the job, Chris jumped at the opportunity to help solve customer's problems and pull weeds, even though he was only paid \$2 an hour. He still relishes working in the field, even though his day begins in the office. "I would travel with my dad and walk into someone's office who had a problem," he says. "Whenever we left, everyone was happy. It was about going in and making a connection with somebody, understanding their problem and helping them achieve a solution."

When he graduated from college, Chris was sent to an industrial psychologist to gain insight on his career potential. The psychologist confirmed Chris was a born leader with strong people skills. Nothing would stop him from becoming head of his father's landscape company. "It stems from being a social and public person," he says. "It's just kind of the way I'm wired."

Ron and Sally Kujawa, who founded KEI in 1968, made sure their children took part in the company's daily operations, but the stigma of being an employee of his parents has never been a problem for Chris. Although he is known to disagree with his father on the way some

"He's very much a clone of his father, which is one of the biggest compliments I can pay him." - Rick Rollo



solutions are achieved, Chris always enjoys the trust that comes with working with family. He feels it is an honor to follow in his father's footsteps. "We both have ethics and we operate from a foundation of morality and a strong sense of right and wrong," Chris says.

Sally, on the other hand, assists Chris in daily operations such as handling monetary transactions and cost accounting. She stressed the importance of balancing family time and workload to Chris.

"It's a huge relief to have someone back at the store keeping track of all those critical functions that keep a business breathing," he says. "Sally is able to do all that while still filling the roles of wife, mother, grandmother and sister."

Chris' parents are two of his biggest influences. He cites their enforcement of work ethics and training in different business operations as a reason why he is successful. "Bringing me up in the business, I've talk to a lot of people and learned what their problems were, learned how to listen and come up with solutions," Chris says.

Chris has also used his Catholic faith to inspire KEI employees and encourage company growth. The Magis initiative, derived from the Catholic Saint Ignatius, founder of the Jesuit order, was introduced to employees about three to four years ago and is Latin for "more." Chris took the word one step further and turned it into a campaign within KEI that encourages employees to do their best. He plans to promote the concept of Magis as the vision of KEI for the next five to 10

"It's kind of a never-ending journey," he says. "If I can instill a little of the Magis

philosophy and watch it bloom and have people understand it, it would be terrific. It's about always doing your best and becoming a real leader within the industry and the community."

A NATURAL LEADER. While many executives in an organization remain in the office, Chris works in the field most of the day, getting dirty and making sure the job is done right. He trains employees personally to try and bring out their leadership potential. These workers, many of which have been with KEI for 10 years or more, rise in ranks to become some of KEI's leading people. One man, Tom Drusinsky, received encouragement from Chris from the beginning of his employment with KEI. He started in the lower ranks with maintenance crews, working alongside Chris and has recently become the new operations manager.

"Chris saw leadership qualities in him," says Sue Dufek, Chris's godmother and aunt. "He looks to move people up in the company."

Recruiting and training reliable employees who can handle the unexpected is difficult, he admits. But, unlike many business owners who fail to accept help, Chris is able to recognize the needs of the growing business and keeps this in mind. For example, he called in his younger brother Joe four years ago to assist with the administrative aspects of KEI. "He hates administrative and paperwork," says Joe. "He hates all those things sales people

Employee satisfaction and retention is important because Chris believes it builds a stronger company. He is known around

Chris Kujawa on branding...

hen dealing with clients, Chris Kujawa focuses on who KEI employees are as people and that they are "extremely easy to deal with" - creating a deeper level of customer confidence and trust.

Q: What do you think are the strengths of your business brand in your market?

A: We are extremely easy to deal with. We're creative and we're honest and we do what we say, It's that simple. We take responsibility for your sites. We manage it for you. That's our job. We're not out their just to perform a technical function. Our brand is rooted in the relationship. Our standard answer is "Sure, we can take care of this," whether we know if we can do it or not. We'll hire someone who will be that resource that you can use. KEI is known for its honesty and integrity.

Q: How did you create your business brand? What steps helped you determine a clear brand message? What mistakes did you make in attempting to arrive at the right brand message and how did you learn from them?

A: I don't know that we took a proactive approach. It just evolved. We serve a lot of the top Fortune 500 brands that are here in town and I think that when you work with people whether its Harley or Rockwell and you surround yourself with those kinds of clients you take on some of their characteristics as well. Being a partner is not a one-way street, it's a two-way street.

Q: What have you found are the best ways to market your brand message and why? What did you learn were not the best ways to market your brand message and why?

A: We've done a lot of one-to-one marketing. We don't do a ton of advertising because we're not serving the general public. We get involved in our clients' associations and try to understand what their issues are and try to find solutions for them. We try to set up networking opportunities for our clients. We cross-market with other service organizations that we know we have something in common with. We also concentrate on who we are as people.

Q: How often do you evaluate your competitors' brands to determine their possible advantages in the marketplace and be proactive in positioning your company accordingly?

A: All the time. One of my standard questions with a new client is what is your current vendor doing that you really like. Maybe it's the way they send their bills out on time or plant flowers. I also ask if you could wave a magic wand what are three things you would change about your current vendor. Then, you maximize what they like and minimize what they don't like. We have some very good competitors here in the Milwaukee market. I think it raises the bar for everybody, and that's a good thing.

Q: What advice would you give to other landscape professionals who are attempting to establish winning brands in their markets?

A: It's about understanding what you do best and being true to that and not trying to be something your not for the sake of creating a brand. If you're going be Wal-Mart, then be the best Wal-Mart you can be. Don't think you're going to be Neiman Marcus. And if you're not Neiman Marcus, don't try to be Wal-Mart. Understand who you are and go with that.

As the current president of Project Evergreen, Kujawa says, "We're projecting a vision of Americana that people like. We're the front door to this vision. We're the first impression you see when you enter a city, community or campus, and that's a good thing"

KEI to cover duties when an employee gets sick and even visit employees in the hospital when a baby is born.

Rick Rollo, vice president of the interiors division, has worked at KEI for more than 25 years and recalls a time when he took his wife out for dinner. As he was walking out of the office, Chris asked him why he was leaving so early. Rollo responded that it was his wife's birthday. Later on at the restaurant, a waitress presented Rollo and his wife with a bottle of champagne.

"I asked, 'Where's this from?' and she said, 'Happy birthday from Chris,'" Rollo says. "He cares a lot for the people who work for him and with him."

Making time for family and hobbies is essential to Chris' philosophy. He enjoys spending time with his three children, who are 11, 16, and 20 years old. In the past, Chris has coached his children's sports teams while working long hours at KEI. But, his wife Judy and their children have been an strong support system. Whether it's the task of getting up at 4:30 a.m. to get to work, leaving work late or traveling, his family has always given Chris the freedom to do what he feels is good for the industry and company, he says. Although Chris has always wanted to work in the family-run business, he is leaving it up to his children to decide if they want to join KEI. "They're all good kids and work hard," he says. "If their career path happens to be KEI, that's great too."

Taking time to relax is always on Chris' agenda as well. When free time is worked into his schedule, cruising around town in his Harley Davidson is one of his favorite things to do. Since he was young, Chris has been an avid hunter, going on trips with his parents every year. He enjoys traveling around the



world in hopes of catching some interesting game. In the past, he has been to South Africa and Tanzania and has taken home trophies such as kudu, nyala and impala. Chris hopes to bring back buffalo and elk some day. "I love going on dangerous game safaris with mom and dad," he says.

CHARITY WORK. In addition to being actively involved in KEI, Chris Kujawa is a leader in his church and organizer of many charity events. He comes from a long line of Kujawas who have been involved in their communities whether it was through volunteering, participating in church council or holding local political offices.

Being involved in community organizations and attending conventions has helped Chris discover how to be a leader through surrounding himself with successful people and emulating them, he says. "It's imbued into the fabric of who we are as a family and rooted in the traditional Catholic sentiment of 'to whom much is given, much is expected'" he says. "Giving back shouldn't be a luxury, but a responsibility."

Serving as the current president of Project Evergreen, Chris has been able to promote the benefits of green spaces. His goal is to promote a sense of community and neighborhood through landscaping and also address labor, energy and productivity issues within the industry.

"We're projecting a vision of Americana that people like," he says. "We're managing green spaces responsibly. We're the front door to this vision. We're the first impression you see when you enter a city, community or campus, and that's a good thing. We work hard at that."



Chris' hospitality spans beyond the Milwaukee area and even the landscape industry. When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, Chris and his brother Joe knew they needed to help in some way. Under Chris' direction, they organized an employee collection drive, and within a week KEI drove down a trailer load of water, clothing and other essentials. "When I look at the people he's touched or have been impacted by him it amazes me," Joe says. "People will say to me when I meet them, 'Oh, you're Chris' brother. I worked on this with him' or 'He helped me in this way.""

One of Chris' greatest accomplishments is founding the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) Educational Foundation, which provides scholarships to future leaders of the landscape industry who are studying landscape architecture in college. Over the last few years, the educational foundation has given out more than 370 scholarships and has raised more than \$2 million in assets. When the program started in 1997, the average scholarship given was \$545. This has increased to more than \$1,000 in 2008.

"He's extremely interested in making sure the educational part of the industry is taken care of," Dufek says. "He's very dedicated to the industry as a whole and he's got a great sense of humor."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE. Chris Kujawa has proven to be the hard-working, dedicated, driven individual that is needed to run a company. From the minute he stepped into the field, Chris was destined to become the head of Kujawa Enterprises, and this is because he holds the same values and goals as his father, Ron, who is a previous Leadership Award winner.

"He's very much a clone of his father, which is one of the biggest compliments I can pay him," Rollo says. "He's the leader people will follow. Chris can lead the troops forward."

Chris has learned many lessons in his quest that have helped him gain the experience and knowledge that are needed to grow as a leader. He has learned to slow down and let situations sort themselves out. Problems tend to address themselves, he says. A leader also needs to be willing to excel. "Not everyone is willing to lead. It's very rare these days," Chris says. "They have to say. 'I will take this project and with it this responsibility.'"

Family and friends agree that Chris has personified the characteristics it takes to be a leader since he began working at KEI, and he will lead the landscape industry in it's strive for excellence, whether it's assisting a family member, friend or someone who needs a helping hand.

"He knows the industry from top to bottom," Dufek says. "He has some type of quality that draws people to him. He expects and wants everyone to succeed. It isn't just for Chris or the Kujawas. He wants everyone in the company to reach their highest potential."

FAITH-BASED BUSINESS

mong other things, faith plays a big role in Chris Kujawa's life. One main principle he believes in is "Magis," which is Latin for "more." A member of the Catholic Church, Kujawa uses this word for a campaign that germinates in KEI's daily operations. Every so often, he delivers this speech about striving for excellence in everything you do:

Jesuits often invoke the term "Magis," a Latin word used to inspire a boundless desire to reach higher levels of performance... to give your best possible effort... to make the most of your talents... to always strive for excellence in all things – your career, your family, your community, your life.

- Magis is not about just doing your job better or faster or producing more. In fact, it's not about embracing Magis only at work.
- Magis is about gaining a sense of one's self and searching for ways to be better, to be demanding more of ones self.
- Magis is a competition not with others, but within each of us. Some might say it's a struggle between right and wrong, easy or hard, and good and evil. It's also recognizing that we are all human and are imperfect.
- Magis is not about achieving perfection.
 Perfection is unattainable. It's about resisting the chains that bind us to mediocrity.
 Mediocrity is not a habit, it's a condition a soulless condition born of accepting less, of allowing ourselves to be drawn into a state of complacency. Once we accept mediocrity, and get into the habit of accepting less, we start losing respect for those around us and, ultimately, we start losing ourselves.
- The spirit of Magis appeals to the better angels of our nature. It pushes us past the shadows of average and into that warm glow that lights the path towards excellence. Being average is easy. Staying at the top is hard.
- Will Magis be easy? No, probably not.
 Doubting is easy. There's no effort in doubting.
 Shakespeare wrote: "Our doubts are traitors.
 They make us lose the good we often might win, by bearing to attempt."

To doubt Magis is to doubt yourself. As a company and as a society, if we are to demand more of our leaders, we must demand more of ourselves. Ours needs to be a community that leads with vision and character.

Starting now, I'm asking all of you to accept the challenge of Magis. To think critical is to not only meet but exceed expectations and to strive for excellence in all things. Serve yourself. Serve your family. Serve your community. Their research team.

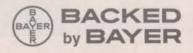


Our research team.



Science. That's kind of our thing. Our research and development teams are always busy looking for that next great solution, not copying what others have already done. We're perfectionists, just like you, so we aren't easily satisfied. Sure, we've developed lots of great products, but there's always a way to make them work better. So you know when you're buying from

Bayer, you're not just getting trusted results, you're investing in the future of your industry. That's not something many of our competitors can say. And as always, when you're Backed by Bayer you're getting all of the science and support that comes with it. Just call your sales rep, our customer support line, or log onto BackedbyBayer.com.



ATTITUDE



IS EVERYTHING

With a perpetual smile and can-do demeanor, Jen Lemcke helps lawn

care operators - both in the Weed Man organization and out - grow

their businesses.

By Marisa Palmieri

hen Jennifer Lemcke first began with Weed Man at age 23 in 1993, she was known around the industry as Roger Mongeon's daughter.

At the time, the father and daughter were Weed Man franchisees; today Lemcke is COO and Mongeon is CEO of Turf Holdings, the franchising arm of Weed Man USA.

These days when Mongeon meets industry associates they say, "Oh, you're Jen's dad." He wouldn't have it any other way.

"Her mother and I are very proud of all her achievements with Weed Man and her role in PLANET [the Professional Landcare Network]," Mongeon says. "It's hard as a father because you don't want to brag too much, but every time I talk to people in the industry about Jen, they always put her at such a high level."

So many people outside of Weed Man know Lemcke because she's a frequent speaker at industry conferences and seminars, and she's on PLANET's board of directors. The topic she usually speaks about is her passion – business systems and organization. Colleagues often refer to Lemcke, who favors color-coded binders and provides franchisees with shopping lists, as "The Spreadsheet Queen." Fittingly, her primary responsibilities at Weed Man are creating systems, support and training programs for subfranchisors and franchisees.

Though it's Lemcke's job to assist Weed Man franchisees in advancing their businesses, she has cast her net much farther than her job description requires, says Phil Fogarty, subfranchisor for Weed Man in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. Because of all the time she's devoted to helping other companies – whether it's a Weed Man franchise owner or someone attending a speaking engagement where she's volunteering her time – she's changed hundreds of people's minds and attitudes about management skills and systems. "I've seen her work with brand new franchisees who own little landscape companies," Fogarty says. "By the time she's trained them with Weed Man systems, their landscape companies have taken off. Then those guys become more active in the industry and it proliferates in all of us becoming better business people. She makes everyone around her want to be a better businessperson."

FIRST TASTE. Early on, Lemcke had no interest in lawn care. In 1986 when she was 16, her father left his job as a chemical engineer at Union Carbide to purchase a Weed Man franchise after a neighbor had met success in the business. Though she had done odd jobs for Weed Man during her teenage years, Lemcke told her father she no intention of working for him in the future.

Her position today would certainly surprise her former self. Despite an early lack of interest, Lemcke says she leads a satisfying career because, though in an indirect way, she has the career she's always wanted. When she entered Ottawa University, she didn't have a clear career focus, so she chose to study political science. "I thought it would be a stepping stone to law or teaching," she says.

Though Lemcke didn't end up in the education profession, in many ways she is a teacher. Her first job after college sharpened her interest in this area and prepared her for her future role specializing in developing training and systems. Lemcke took several communications

"Putting people in the right spot and giving them the opportunity to shine is a pretty awesome thing... The ultimate testimony of you as a person and as a leader is the success of the people around you." - Jennifer Lemcke



courses in college, which helped her get a job with the university's telecommunications department. Here she served as a teacher-student liaison and was responsible for maintaining a system that broadcast televised classes to students studying remotely.

Lemcke learned a lot from her first postcollege job - especially from her former boss, Don McDonough. "I don't think he knows just how much he's impacted me," she says. "If I had an issue he'd say, 'Don't come to me unless you already have the answer.' He always made me realize that no one's going to help me but me."

Possibly as a result of that experience, and certainly as a result of her upbringing and indoctrination to the Weed Man system, Lemcke carries with her a can-do attitude wherever she goes.

GETTING STARTED. Because of their close relationship, Mongeon had shared many details about Weed Man with Lemcke. "I think she began to see the business wasn't just about fertilizing and controlling weeds and insects," Mongeon says. "There was a lot of marketing, administration and employee relations, and that intrigued her." Though Lemcke's husband-to-be, Chris Lemcke, was studying criminology, he was interested in business, too, as some of his family members are entrepreneurs. By the time Mongeon approached his daughter and future son-in-law about their interest in joining his growing Weed Man network as management trainees, they already knew their answer.

Parent-child relationships often can get complicated in business, with favoritism and entitlement at the forefront of many coworkers' complaints. But the intense training Mongeon gave the couple was more than enough to prevent anyone from thinking Lemcke was getting a free ride. The trainees did everything there was to do at the franchise level - including answering phones, making lawn applications, telemarketing and more.

"I may have been harder on her in the sense that I was making sure people didn't think she only had the job because she was my daughter," Mongeon says. "I was extremely conscious of that. I wanted her to earn the respect of people before she got the job. Evervone I've ever talked to about that issue has said, 'She's earned everything she's got."

Lemcke calls that experience her greatest asset. "He truly worked us from the bottom of the barrel," Lemcke says. "When Chris and I opened the next year, our training put us in a great position," she says. "We knew what to do and how to do it."

Her can-do attitude during that time proved she had a ton of leadership potential, Mongeon says. "She always had a smile on her face." He recalls an instance when he knew his daughter would flourish in her role. After the year-long training, Lemcke was promoted to manager of the Ottawa franchise. Part of her new role was conducting sales training. Mongeon remembers the first three-hour training session Lemcke was slated to conduct. "I told her I'd do the first hour and a half, and she would take over after the break," he says. His daughter was nervous, he recalls, unsure how the room of middle-aged men would respond to instruction from a 23-year-old. "When it was her turn, her voice was firm and everyone's eyes were fixed on her," says Mongeon, who was

Jennifer Lemcke on branding...

iscovering that many people have a distrust for the lawn care and landscape industry was an awakening for Weed Man's brand, which focuses on the slogan, "Promises Kept." Weed Man backs up that statement by giving franchisees and employees the solid systems and processes to deliver on the company's promises.

Q: How did you create your business brand? What mistakes did you make in attempting to arrive at the right brand message and how did you learn from them?

A: A few years back we went through a culture shift because of our fast-paced growth. We were growing so fast that it seemed like change was happening at the speed of light. When we decided to change our culture, we realized it would not happen overnight and that we would need to stay focused on changing. We developed our mission statement at that time — "Let us Amaze You!" — and this became our litmus test for everything we did and created. If we did something new or changed a current process, we would ask ourselves, "Does this amaze our employees or does this amaze our customers?" If it did then we would go ahead and do it, if it did not we would analyze why not and then either dismiss it or adapt it to ultimately amaze our target. The biggest mistake we made was believing that we would get there quickly. Changing culture, which ultimately reflects on your brand, is a process and can take years. Stealing from the concept of lean management, you need to focus on continuous improvement. It's a journey, and you need to make sure your employees understand it, trust you and ultimately embrace your culture.

Q: What have you found are the best ways to market your brand message and why?

A: We have found that building relationships with our customers is truly the way to go. All of our marketing is based on creating a relationship with the customer by creating touch points along the process. Being honest and open with expectations has also helped to build a solid relationship. Once you develop something you need to make sure that you measure it, if you don't, how do you know what you are doing is working? If you try something new, you need to train your employees, let them know your expectations, allow them to execute plans, and then you owe it to them to follow up. By measuring the results, you can then make a solid business decision on whether it was a good thing or a bad thing.

Q: What do you do to make sure your brand has consistent equity, personality and/or reputation in the minds of your customers?

A: Standardization, process, training, measurement and follow up with our employees. They are our eyes and ears, and we need to make sure they are properly trained to service our customers the way we want them to be serviced.

Q: What advice would you give to other landscape professionals who are attempting to establish winning brands in their markets?

A: This might sound simplistic, but create a company that's built on good, solid values. Believe in your employees and empower them to deliver.

confident in his daughter's abilities because her training had been so thorough. "She was magnetizing. After 15 minutes I called a break and said 'Jen, you don't need me."

Going into the session, Mongeon believed his daughter had the knowledge to succeed, but coming out of it, he knew she possessed that "something extra" that's the hallmark of a true leader.

MOVING UP. Before Lemcke was promoted to manager of the Ottawa location, Mongeon, who owned franchises in Hull and Montreal, Quebec, had assembled a group of shareholders to expand into Ontario. After forming this group, known as 1051080 Ontario Inc., which is a holding company that operates Weed Man franchises across Canada and subsequently purchased the rights to sell Weed Man franchises across the U.S., with his daughter, son-in-law and a group of family members and friends, the Lemckes went to Ottawa to take over operations of an existing franchise.

During their five years in Ottawa, they grew annual revenue from \$200,000 to \$2 million. Much of their success came from what would become Lemcke's specialty – developing and implementing standardized training manuals, PowerPoint presentations and ensuring operational consistencies.

Next, Mongeon asked the Lemckes to help run the Scarborough office. Part of Lemcke's duties at this time, during the Y2K scare, were to convert the operations' existing Unix-based software to a Microsoft platform. Lemcke says her experience on this project working closely with the programmer helped "round out" her management skills.

Part of the reason Mongeon brought Lemcke to Scarborough was to assist with the development of Weed Man USA, the rights to which the holding company had acquired from Weed Man founder Des Rice. By August 2000, Lemcke was vice president of operations, helping her father execute his concept of recruiting American lawn care veterans to be regional subfranchisors.

During the first year their U.S. franchising arm, known as Turf Holdings, aimed to sell three subfranchises and three franchises. They sold seven and 21, respectively.



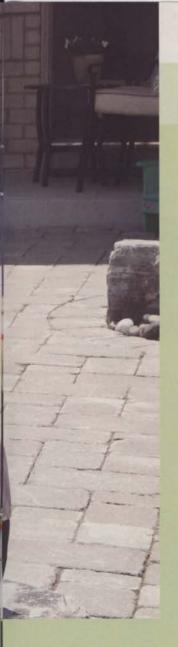
Today, Lemcke is responsible for training and supporting Weed Man's 14 U.S. subfranchisors and 100-plus franchisees. In many ways, her current role brings her full-circle to her first job out of college working for the university's telecommunications department. "In the vein of education – that's what I do now," she says.

Though she's been coordinating training programs and managing employees for nearly her whole career, Lemcke says it wasn't until the time her now 13-year-old daughter started school that she had her "a-ha" moment in managing and communicating with people. "It came to me when I was sitting at the kitchen table with my daughter," Lemcke says. "She was struggling a bit and needed hands-on work with reading and math. She just wasn't seeing things the way I was. I came to the realization that I was trying to make her

learn like me." Once Lemcke pinpointed the problem – two different learning styles – she was able to focus on helping her daughter through alternative techniques. "Now she's a straight-A student," Lemcke says. "Her strategies are just different than mine."

As a result of such experiences interacting with her children, Lemcke has broadened Weed Man's training resources. "There are manuals, PowerPoints, Webinars — everything," she says. "So if you have a different style than I do, you have an opportunity to learn and succeed just like everyone else."

In some ways, motherhood is one of Lemcke's greatest leadership assets, her husband says. "With employees, just like with our kids, she wants to develop and grow leaders," he says. "She's always asking, 'How can I help to make my children or my employees the best they can be?"



"Putting people in the right spot and giving them the opportunity to shine is a pretty awesome thing," Lemcke says. "As their confidence grows their outcomes become so much better. The ultimate testimony of you as a person and as a leader is the success of the people around you."

LEADING THE WAY. People respond to Lemcke and her leadership style for two reasons, Fogarty says: "It's her positive, reassuring aura coupled with the incredible competence in everything she does."

Others agree that it's the right mix of intangibles like charisma and an upbeat attitude plus the quantifiable results she delivers that make Lemcke a leader to follow. "Her leadership abilities are probably the best I've seen from anyone," her husband says. "She does everything to the hundredth degree; she makes sure she knows every detail inside and out and she works tirelessly, putting in a lot of hours. Because of that, it's hard to doubt her."

If you ask her, Lemcke says the greatest influence on her leadership style has been her father. "He's always taught me to work hard and be fully committed to what you're doing," she says. "He's also shown me that when you run a business, you always do it with integrity because at the end of the day that's all you have left."

Those around her say Lemcke's compassion and kindness round out her leadership strengths. "When people talk, she listens completely until she understands," Chris Lemcke says. "She's so compassionate – I've never seen her be biased to anyone. She's completely open-minded and that creates an all-around leader."

People not only respect Lemcke, Fogarty says, but they love being around her because of her perpetual smile, reassuring attitude and kindness. He refers to an often-quoted saying that he believes encapsulates Lemcke: "No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care."

"That's Jen Lemcke in one sentence," he says. "She just cares so much about every person, project, company and association she becomes involved with."

STRIKING A BALANCE

ennifer Lemcke puts in long hours at work and in her volunteer role for PLANET in addition to traveling several times a month for site visits with Weed Man's U.S. franchises, her internal customers. Amazingly, though, she's able to achieve work-life balance, her husband Chris Lemcke says.

To ease the pace of such an active lifestyle, the Lemcke's made an investment in something they're hoping will "slow down the summers" and give their kids many of the same memories Lemcke has from her childhood: a camping trailer. It comes in handy during the road trips the family frequently takes for the kids' athletic tournaments. "When we decided that's what we were going to do, within a week's time we bought the trailer and were out the next week camping," Chris Lemcke says. "It's something Jen really enjoys — it's something she did with her family on Ferguson Lake as a child."

During hectic times Lemcke gives credit to her husband for making it possible for her to do her job in the best way possible, especially considering her travel. "It's not every man that would say, 'Go and do your thing' and find a way to make it work," she says. "Without him I would never have been able to do this."

Though she's received a number of awards and accolades, Lemcke says her marriage and the success of her children – Jessica, 13, Justin, 11, and Joshua, 9 – are the accomplishments of which she's most proud.

"We have three incredible kids involved in sports, who do well in school, and it's all because of her ability to find balance, especially with the amount of hours she works," Chris Lemcke says. "She's a great mother."

Because she believes people aren't born leaders – they choose to lead, Lemcke characterizes her own leadership style as focused on cultivating others' talents. Part of that requires letting people make mistakes, but being there to help them with the resolution, she says. But before that, you set them up to succeed with the training, systems and tools required to get the job done. "Then you say, conceptually, this is what I want, go and do it. It's good for people to explore, spread their wings and do what feels right. That's when they're apt not to make mistakes," she says.

Lemcke recalls a recent decision to delegate the formation of an internship program to one of her detail-oriented employees. "I knew it was exactly what he would shine at," she says. "He came up with the most amazing program. We sent it out to universities and associations and received rave reviews.

ODYSSEY OF



DISCOVERY

A self-described lunatic about the world of entomology,

Dan Potter's contributions to the understanding of insect

pests and their impact on turf and landscape environments

stem from simply listening to those who know best.

By Mike Zawacki

an Potter was 11 years old and sitting patiently on a train bound from Stanton Island back to his Connecticut home. A nondescript cardboard container, about the size of a shoebox, rested on his lap. Every so often Potter would gingerly lift the container's lid and sneak a peek inside at the contents to reassure himself that what was inside was well worth all the snow shoveling and leaf raking he'd done.

"To me, it was a treasure chest," Potter says. "I found somewhere in a magazine a guy in New York City who sold exotic insects from Africa and South America. I went by myself to visit him and purchased – for about \$8 to \$10 – this box full of giant elephant beetles and things that were green and blue and shiny with big horns on their heads.

"That is my earliest memory of getting really riled up about insects," he says. While it had been a remarkable adventure for a little boy, the odyssey of discovery had only begun for Potter, who never outgrew his passion and enthusiasm for the insect world.

In his 30 years as a researcher, educator and mentor, Potter has not only established one of the leading centers for turf and landscape entomology at the University of Kentucky, but through his vision and leadership he's become the preeminent mentor training the next generation of green industry researchers on how to better understand the insect pests that plague turf and landscape environments.

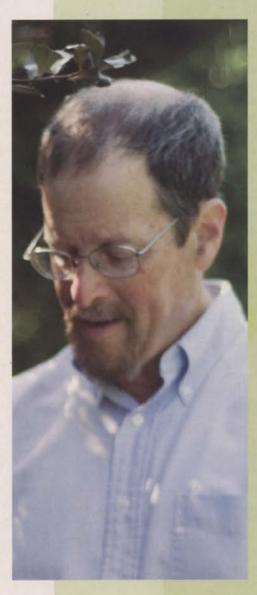
"Dan has an infectious enthusiasm for the study of insects," says Ken Haynes, a faculty colleague at The University of Kentucky. "Somehow he is able to transfer his love of insects to young people, college students, graduate students and his colleagues."

BIG SMALL WORLD. Potter is amazed at the amount of sex and violence involved in his area of research.

Following his undergraduate work at Cornell, Potter entered the entomology graduate program at The Ohio State University, one of the top entomology programs in the country. As a young, nerdy bug guy, Potter found himself studying spider mites. His focus wasn't how to kill these pint-sized plant pests, but rather to better understand their behavior – their sexual behavior. Potter was mesmerized.

"Most people would think something that is smaller than a pinhead wouldn't have much in the way of sexual behavior," he says. "But it's pretty complicated. The females produce a scent that attracts the males and the males actually fight over the females. They really can beat themselves up and even kill each other over the females. You could say there was a lot of sex and violence in my graduate work."

What Potter took away from that micro-voyeuristic experience laid the groundwork for a greater understanding for him on how to better manage pest insects, instead of the chemical eradication method popular at the time. It's a theme that would have a profound influence on the young researcher and shape his career in the green industry in the years to come. "I think our approach was pretty unique because of the balance between understanding the pest biology and listening to what the industry was saying so that the research wasn't just an academic exercise." - Dan Potter



"I've tried to look at pest management in the turf and landscape environment as more than just reaching for the sprayer," he says. "I'm not at all adverse to the sprayer, and we've done an enormous amount of research to develop new insecticides with less environmental impact, but it's not really where we start. "We start with an understanding of the insects, where they're coming from and why they are there?" he adds. "And then what can we modify and do to change the system so that it's more stable?"

LEARNING CURVE. Following his graduate work, Potter's career path led him directly to academia. Potter intended to model his career after the mentors who were such an influence on him during his studies. "I knew since my sophomore year in college what I wanted to do," he says. "I wanted to be my advisors, who were my role models."

Young and ambitious, the 26-yearold fielded an offer from the University of Kentucky to fill a newly created position for turf and landscape entomology. At the time, turfgrass entomology was an undeveloped discipline with only a small handful of researchers in the U.S.

"The urban landscape didn't get important in the U.S. until the 1960s, and the field was wide open in the late 1970s," he says. "I had this diverse industry of turf, trees and shrubs, each with their own unique problems. There'd never been a turfgrass entomologist in the transition zone, so the pests weren't known or what their thresholds were.

Most of the research was going on in the Northeast, and than, there really wasn't that much either."

What was most attractive, though, was the position granted him the ability to build his own entomology program from scratch, an unprecedented opportunity for a researcher his age, Potter says. The only problem: Potter didn't know squat about the turf or landscape industry, and he'd never given much thought to the insects that inhabit lawns and golf

"It was really kind of scary," he says. "I had no technical help whatsoever. It was just show up, here's your office and here's your lab. I was told to build a topnotch research and teaching program in six years."

Potter had a steep learning curve to climb. As the department head he was expected to develop courses and teach turf and horticulture students about entomology without any prior knowledge of the green industry. "I didn't know a juniper from an arborvitae and there was no reason I would because that wasn't my background," he says, "I could spot identify every single moth in the woods, but if someone asked me the difference between a pushup and sand-based putting green I had absolutely no idea what they were talking about."

Potter's most prudent course of action was not to hide his deficiencies, but rather embrace them. "I never presented myself as an expert," he says. "Instead, I sought out people's advice."

A.J. Powell was one of the first

Dan Potter on credibility...

ow does Dan Potter get his graduate students to believe in their work and establish integrity for his turf program at the University of Kentucky? By working with them side-by-side and building camaraderie.

Q. What are the strengths to the green industry in having an established program focused on insect pest management?

A. I've worked in the college of agriculture for 30 years now and believe strongly in the land grant mission, which is to develop research that benefits agriculture and society. An important role of a researcher in my position is to generate unbiased information because in the landscape industry there are products and techniques that don't work equally well.

When I came on board 30 years ago, the knowledge base on turf and landscape insect pests was not very complete. Land grant universities and state universities had not focused on turf and landscapes as a priority. We've been able to develop a lot of the knowledge that lets landscape managers approach insect pest management from a more informed perspective on things like life cycles and timing and what pests predominate in certain areas.

Q. Why is establishing credibility and reputation so critical for your program?

A. I work directly with the professionals in the green industry everyday. If I'm not credible, then their livelihoods and their reputations are on the line, too. If I offer a recommendation and I'm wrong or I overstep my knowledge, that person could loose their job and certainly have their reputation damaged.

Q. What mechanisms ensure consistency in the quality of work produced by your program?

A. My primary role here is as a mentor. I have 10 people in my lab who are all under my guidance developing into the next generation of scientists, advisors, educators and consultants who will work with the green industry. I try to not have a relationship where I am the boss and they're the employees. I go into the field and I work beside them. If we have a grub dig, I'm there in my blue jeans on my hands and knees. I might not be able to dig the holes as quickly as a 20-year-old, but I'm there. I try to foster a spirit where people are proud to be part of our program. We're the only lab that has shirts, and they say "UK Entomology: Fear No Grub."

Q. What advice would you give young up-and-comers who are considering the academic side of the green industry?

A. I tell my students that the most important thing to do when they're getting started is to get out and listen. Get out and make observations and talk to people from all segments of the green industry. The key is to get familiar with the industry so that they have some credibility. And I can't teach my undergraduate class to have any credibility without getting down on my hands and knees and showing them how to do the work beside them.

Dan Potter likes to be a real example for his students."I do as much physical work as anyone else in the lab," he says." I go into the field, I get dirty, and I'm involved with the work at all levels."

people he reached out to when he started at UK. Powel with the local extension turf specialist, who Potter describes as a "good old Kentucky boy" who knew everything there was to know about turfgrass.

Powell was impressed with Potter's potential from the get go.

"When Dan arrived at UK we were in the midst of a 'supposed' sod webworm epidemic," Powell says. "Because Dan was not trained specifically in landscape insect problems, he readily admitted his lack of knowledge and immediately did what he was trained to do. He actually went to the library and in two days found enough information to help us not only understand sod webworms, but help us realize that we had serious physiological problems that mimicked sod webworm damage.

"In his first two days of work, Dan saved our citizens thousands of dollars, eliminated the use of non-essential insecticides and made our entire industry much more professional and appreciative of UK," he adds.

Powell took Potter out into the field and gave him a crash course on the entomological problems the turf industry was facing. Most importantly, though, Powell began introducing Potter to other area extension agents and golf course superintendents who shared with him the challenges they faced.

"The first two or three years of doing this I tried to talk to as many experienced people as I could and really listen to them. I must have asked a million questions," Potter says. "And even though I didn't have much to say, I made



myself available to them as a researcher."

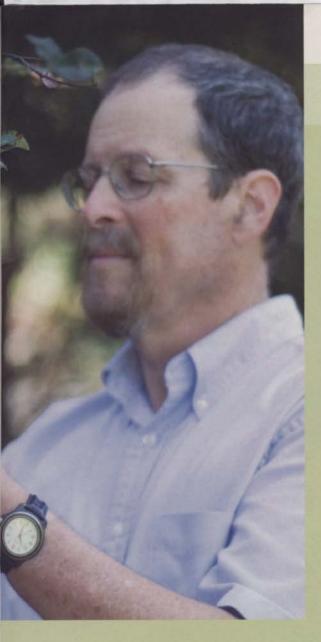
In time, the people Potter once reached out to began coming to him for guidance. "I got pretty active in talking in the state and presenting research updates," he says. That segued to teaching workshops and short courses. Then I was getting invited from out-of-state agencies to give presentations because someone had heard of me and the program."

SIX YEARS LATER. When Potter began assembling the early vestiges of his program, there were maybe two people in the U.S. who had more than a 50 percent research appointment in turf.

Six years later, Potter had five graduate students and his department was publishing a lot of research on practical turf and landscape insect pest problems. "My objective at the time was to solve problems with insects and not to solve them by finding whatever spray would kill them the fastest," he says. "We were trying to fill the knowledge gaps about the biology of these insects and then to apply that biology to a more rational approach to spraying.

"I recognize insecticides play a critical role in pest management," he adds. "But I think our approach was pretty unique because of the balance between understanding the pest biology and listening to what the industry was saying so that the research wasn't just an academic exercise."

But while he was establishing his program on the national stage, Potter also worked equally as hard to train and prepare his students, researchers who



would be entering and influencing the market.

Myth busting was one of the things his students and research department prided itself on and is an example of taking something that is part of the industry folklore and testing whether it is true. For example, in the 1980s one of his students evaluated the effectiveness of Japanese beetle traps, the hanging variety that were very popular as backyard deterrents.

"We did a milestone study on 24 home properties where we put out standardized test gardens and took the manufacturer's instructions from the trap and we put it to the test," he says. "We were able to show that in virtually every scenario the traps attracted every beetle in the area and you ended up doing more harm than going. The beetles were being attracted, but not to the traps. Instead, they were settling on the nearby landscape. That has become part of the popular literature on managing Japanese beetles that has stood the test of time."

IN THE FIELD. Potter bristles at the question of his legacy on the turf and landscape industry. Early on, as Potter worked to establish his entomology program at UK, he had an epiphany about the work he was doing.

"You only have one career and you wonder what will be your legacy and what you can do that will have the greatest impact," he says. "It took a while to figure that out."

Potter says it comes down to few key things.

With his students, which he believes is one
of his most important charges as an academic and
mentor, it's important that they appreciate the goals
and objectives of the research they're undertaking.

It's a benchmark he continues to hold himself to
even after three decades in the industry.

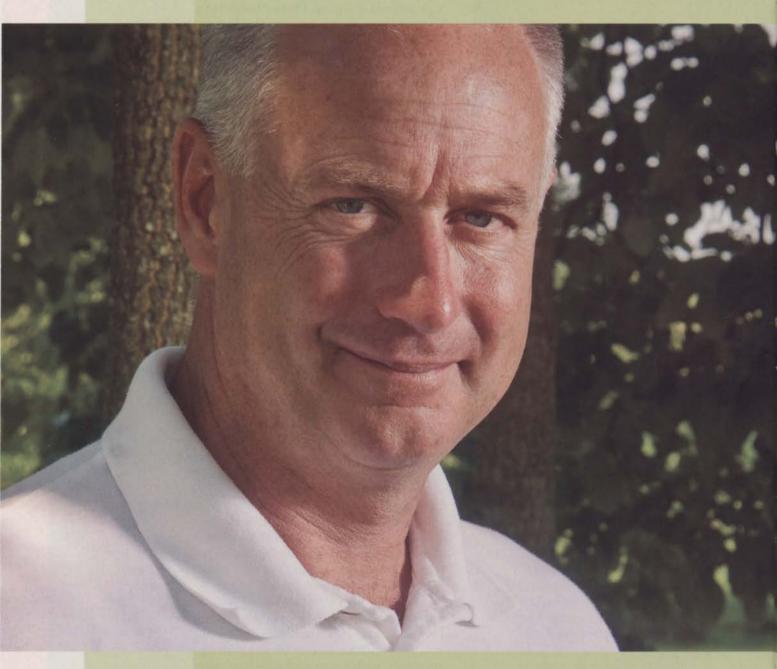
"I set the example, and I've always felt this was important in the program's success," he says, "If one of my graduate students is going to put out a study that involves a couple of hundred trees, than I'm going to be out there working with the technicians and the undergraduates. I do as much physical work as anyone else in the lab. I go to the field. I get dirty and I'm involved with the work at all levels."

Potter takes satisfaction in knowing the work his program does has a positive and lasting impact on the green industry. And as far as his legacy is concerned, every paper his program publishes or each student that goes on to contribute in a positive way represents a brick that continues to strengthen the green industry's foundation of knowledge.

"Our body of work for the past 30 years has formed a significant portion of what's known about turf and landscape insects in the U.S. And I don't think that's bragging," he says. "It's very satisfying to know that if we do a study it helps the green industry. We provide a foundation that lasts. It's very satisfying to do the work that becomes the framework for the green industry when landscape managers go out and have to deal with these problems.

"It's nice when someone sends you an e-mail that they've read your work and it's helped them out," he says. "That's it in a nutshell."

FROM THE



GROUND UP

Craig Ruppert stays close to his

roots in the tree planting and

landscape management business.

Heather Wood Taylor

hose who meet Craig Ruppert for the first time outside his work environment are led somewhat astray. When asked what he does for a living, Ruppert often says he's a landscape contractor. While this technically is true, there's a little more to it. Ruppert actually is the CEO of Ruppert Nurseries, a Laytonsville, Md.-based landscape and nursery company that's one of the top revenue earners in the industry. President Chris Davitt would love to tell these people who Ruppert really is. He says those who are set straight about Ruppert's position and his years of dedication to his company, his employees and the industry can begin to piece together a picture of someone who got where he is by jumping in wholeheartedly and not forgetting where he started.

JUST A JOB. Thirty years ago, it would have been accurate for Ruppert to describe himself simply as a landscape contractor. He started a lawn care business as a high schooler, mowing the neighbors' lawns with a used lawn mower he bought.

Mowing lawns didn't exactly excite Ruppert. But being one of eight children in his family, he knew if he was going to receive an income, he'd have to earn most of it himself. The business morphed from a way to make weekend spending money to a profession Ruppert not only loves, but immerses his life in.

"I stuck with it long enough and gradually the company grew and evolved, and somewhere along the line you realize you like it, you might be good at it and you might be better off doing what you know than something else," he says.

Chris Davitt was one of Ruppert's first employees. Ruppert was a friend of Davitt's older brother and Davitt was 11 - seven years younger than Ruppert - when he started working for him. Luckily for Davitt, Ruppert didn't mind mowing for \$3 an hour; he was excited to be graduating to a power mower from a push mower.

Ruppert had a knack for the business side of the venture. He decided to leave college and go full-time with Ruppert Landscape Co. The early days were a learning process for Ruppert, recalls his wife, Patty. "I seem to remember he asked if I would help do his quarterly taxes, and I didn't know the first thing about such a thing," she says.

But Ruppert stayed with it. He credits his brother, Chris, for helping him get the operation off of the ground. From the original business sprouted Ruppert Nurseries in 1990, of which Ruppert is CEO and Davitt is president. The company houses the landscape division. Ruppert Nurseries is under the umbrella of Ruppert Cos., which also includes Ruppert Properties (commercial real estate), and Ruppert Ventures (capital and real estate investment), both founded in 1999. Ruppert is the CEO of those entities, but doesn't work as closely with them.

BIG MOVES. The company had its ups and downs but mostly saw steady growth to the point its revenues reached \$45 million in 1998. It was around that time that Ruppert began to be concerned about how the industry was changing. "The future was uncertain," he says. "We perceived a higher level of threat in the marketplace from the emergence

"We try to build a company culture that is built around people and recognizes those people as our most important assets dedicated to growing the business as long as we can do it profitably - our real goal is to grow for our people." - Craig Ruppert



of a large company. We had the opportunity to sort of shake up the industry from within and be a part of a larger company."

The larger company was TruGreen-ChemLawn, which shook the industry by acquiring LandCare USA and becoming a mega company. For the first time, serious consolidation was happening in the industry. Ruppert became a player shortly before this mammoth deal took place.

"We really didn't consider selling until six to eight months before we sold," he says.

Ruppert liked the idea that, as part of a larger company, his employees could have the opportunity to grow and even play leadership roles. He sold the landscape management division of Ruppert and became senior vice president of the landscape management division at TruGreen.

Ruppert doesn't stay awake at night thinking about the what-ifs - he says he has no regrets. "I think we made the right decision at the time we made it," he says. "I don't think anybody could have really predicted it accurately before. I don't look back and regret the decision - it was a learning opportunity in many ways."

Ruppert also doesn't regret leaving TruGreen after about five months. His time spent away from the business that followed helped to shape his personal life, he says. "During those years I had much more free time," he says. "My four kids were all at the age where spending more time with them was very worthwhile, fun and rewarding for me. I coached every sport you can coach with every kid. I wouldn't have traded that time for anything."

His wife, Patty, wouldn't have traded

it, either. "All of a sudden he had more time and got involved in the kids' activities to a degree they hadn't been used to," she says.

But Ruppert couldn't stay away from the business forever. Not too long after Ruppert's noncompete agreement with TruGreen expired in 2003, he got the itch to get back in, forming a landscape division in Ruppert Nurseries.

But it did take all of those five years before it occurred to Ruppert he wanted to be in the business full-time again. "I think we missed all that goes with the successes and failures that come with running a service business," he says. "We also saw an opportunity in the marketplace for us to potentially

In short, Ruppert realized he was better at running a business than he thought. Seeing how a large corporation ran and watching other companies in the business helped Ruppert find his fit in the market. The recipient of an MBA, Ruppert can't deny his strong entrepreneurial spirit.

COMBINED EFFORT. Ruppert Nurseries went on to grow rapidly in the five years it's been back. The company went from a revenue of \$45 million when it sold in 1998, to a revenue of approximately \$65 million this year, Ruppert says. That's a faster pace than many of the industry's top companies. The business jumped from No. 26 to No. 15 from 2007 to 2008 on Lawn & Landscape's list of the Top 100 revenue-earners in the industry.

True to his nature, Ruppert doesn't take credit for the growth. "The most important thing about our company is our people," he says. "We've been successful because of

Craig Ruppert on branding.

hile Craig Ruppert, CEO of Ruppert Nurseries, says he doesn't think in terms of branding, he acknowledges his company has a brand in the community and has an idea of what it looks like.

Q. What do you think are the strengths of your business brand in your market?

A. Most service companies would have the same answer: good quality, good value. We're certainly like everyone else in that aspect. Customers will pick us because we're capable of delivering what they want: quality service at what they perceive to be a good value.

Q. What have you found are the best ways to market your brand message and why?

A. We try to be visible in the community, and we send press releases and articles that help create our public image – our image on the road, in the community and what people say about us. We don't advertise. We do a small amount in the tree growing division; other than that, we never really have. Way back in the early days we put fliers on doors when we were cutting the grass. Our efforts are directed more directly to our customer to build those relationships.

Q. What do you do to make sure your brand has consistent equity, personality and/or reputation in the minds of your customers?

A. We want our customers to think of us as being a professional company with good people. By professional, I mean well-equipped, in uniform all the time, with clean trucks. We're perceived as professional and customers are impressed with our people.

Q. How often do you evaluate your competitors' brands to determine their possible advantages in the marketplace and be proactive in positioning your company accordingly?

A. We periodically look at our competition, but what we sort of realized – and what's most important – is what we do. Our biggest challenge is to execute; to do what we want to do effectively. Someone once said competition is within. Our focus is internal – to improve what we're doing.

There's not one company that doesn't do something better than we do. We don't spend much time paying attention to what our competitors are doing, but we do watch and try to learn. But we're most focused internally on our own execution.

Q. What advice would you give to other landscape professionals who are attempting to establish winning brands in their markets?

A. Know who you are and try to represent who you are. A lot of us learn from each other. We see little things in the market and if it's a good idea we try to implement it. I think all companies do it. But at the end of the day, every company is unique. Be proud of that. Don't try to imitate the competition. Be you, be who you are and try to communicate that message constantly.

I don't consider myself an expert on branding – just in the grass cutting and tree planting business. Cutting grass and planting trees – that's what they pay us to do.

them," Ruppert says. "We try to build a company culture that is built around people and recognizes those people as our most important assets dedicated to growing the business as long as we can do it profitably – our real goal is to grow for our people."

Ruppert is a firm believer in transparency in the company. He holds town hall-style meetings to let the employees know what's going on in the company. He also believes in rewarding employees and letting them know they're valuable. He shows it by having picnics and parties throughout the year and by giving awards for service and safety. He makes these exercises a top priority.

"It's not easy to do these things all the time because there are other things that need to be done, but by structuring them and making sure we have them regularly I think we're doing a better job in the company and making sure people are taken care of," he says. "There are still plenty of challenges, but the real people who deserve the credit are the ones who work in the field every day; they're the ones who allow me to receive awards on behalf of the company."

The fact that the employees are able to be the driving force behind the company is due to Ruppert's ability to shape them professionally, Patty says. "I think he understood early on that the power of business in terms of relating to other people, relating to the world, becoming who he was going to become over time and developing people into who they're supposed to become," she says.

LIFE'S WORK. Patty describes Ruppert's ability to motivate people and get them excited about even the most menial tasks. She likens it to Tom Sawyer's ability to get boys excited about painting a fence. "He has



a way of making a project seem so great and fun that people throw themselves into it," she says. "We have some of the best people working for the company. They make the company – no question about it."

Davitt and Ruppert talk a lot about the company's employees as their greatest asset. In fact, Ruppert considers one of his crowning achievements to be the company's high retention rate. Many employees have remained there for 15 to 20 years, starting with the existence of Ruppert Landscape Co. and returning with the forming of the new landscaping division in 2003. "The biggest measure of our success is the ability to keep those people and get them to continue their trust in us," Ruppert says.

Maybe employees' trust in Ruppert has something to do with the fact that he comes to work dressed in a polo shirt with the company logo on it and khaki pants, just like everyone else. "As managers, we try to lead by example – this is very important to us," Ruppert says. "We try to work the same hours, drive the same vehicles, have the same basic offices, and as much as possible we make sure to try and feel the same experiences similar to what our employees are feeling, so we can really be connected."

His brother says Ruppert will occasionally work in the field with crews in the nursery to remember how he got started in the business. "I don't think he ever forgets his roots," says Chris Ruppert, who was the company's president before recently retiring.

Patty agrees that Ruppert deeply invests his life in the company. All of their children the youngest of whom is now 18—were raised on the campus where the business sits. "They all grew up around landscape equipment"



Craig Ruppert's wife, Patty, says Ruppert "told me decades ago he never plans to retire; that he wants to die on his tractor. I can just see him with grandchildren on the tractor."

she says. "They all have had their own pair of pruners from an early age with a holster carrier with their name on it. Craig would name blocks of trees after each of the kids."

Chris Ruppert doesn't mind spending his time away from work but can't envision his brother ever becoming this way. "Craig doesn't do the things he used to... but he will always stay involved," he says.

Patty agrees. "He told me decades ago he never plans to retire; that he wants to die on his tractor," she recalls. "That was back when he was young enough that it didn't worry me at all. But, honestly, I don't think he'll retire. He'll definitely make room for the next generation. We have our kids growing up and they're looking at the possibility of becoming involved in a more possible way. I can just see him with grandchildren on the tractor."

"LEED"ERSHIP STARTS AT HEADQUARTERS

Craig Ruppert, CEO of the Ruppert Cos., is showing he can be a leader in the environmental movement.

This past summer, the company constructed a corporate headquarters on its 16-acre Laytons-ville, Md. campus that's certified by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program. The company built a new corporate office for Ruppert Properties, as well as a new building for the nursery division and two of its local landscape and landscape management branches, and it aims to meet the highest LEED standards on all of them.

"Our thinking has something to do with the belief that man has something to do with the fact that the environment may be changing," Ruppert says. "Besides, it makes good sense to reduce our energy use and costs."

The other reason behind the construction is due to the belief that a healthier environment leads to happier employees and greater productivity. "We want this to be an organization our employees are proud of," says Chris Davitt, president of Ruppert Nurseries.

The company offers services that are considered part of the green movement. There hasn't been much consumer demand yet for such services in the regions where the company does business, but Ruppert suspects it will catch on soon, and the experience that came from constructing the campus will come in handy when it does. For example, a green roof will be constructed on one of the buildings, and it can be used to educate prospective customers about the installations.

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