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MAY 2010
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Leading business media for landscape contractors

Diversified by *design*

A move back into the garden center business helps Dennis' 7 Dees stay stable in an uncertain world. >> pg. 34

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Stoking your sales all season
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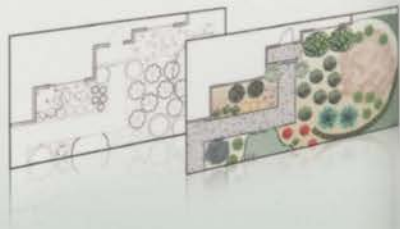
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CHUCK BOWEN
Managing Editor

Running on all eight

David Snodgrass understands the importance of diversification. The president of Dennis' 7 Dees in Portland, Ore., runs an \$18 million-plus operation that includes residential design/build, commercial bid/build, landscape maintenance and five garden centers.

The subject of this month's cover story – "Diversified by design," page 34 – Snodgrass knew the inherent risk of running any green industry business, and what he had to do to fight it.

"The green industry is never hitting on all cylinders in all areas," Snodgrass says. "Sometimes there are pockets of strength and pockets of weakness. Being diversified allows us to leverage the pockets of strengths into the pockets of weakness."

Landscape contractors and other green industry professionals have seen that bumpy ride first hand. Companies too focused on residential design/build have folded. Nurseries with too much stock have set fire to their fields. For some, only serving a particular niche is a recipe for disaster.

Snodgrass and other landscape contractors who have taken the same road to diversify their operations are on the right track. Some in the North offer snow and ice removal; companies in the Southeast take up perimeter pest control. It seems everyone has started a maintenance division to build up a stream of recurring revenue.

Many successful business owners will tell you to focus on one thing and do it really well. And that's great advice, until nobody wants to buy that one thing you do, no matter how well you do it.

But, in reality, Snodgrass hasn't strayed from his core strength – landscape design. He's just repackaged it and found five storefronts to sell it in, and to sell it to more customers. Through his Planscaper program, he makes his designers available to homeowners who want a professional installation but want to do the heavy lifting themselves. The clients buy the plants from his garden centers and, sometimes, he upsells them to projects in his landscape division.

"We're trained landscape designers and contractors. That's our grounding. We have brought that into the retail garden center arena, so we have a level of professional design that's not going to be part of a garden center that expands into landscaping or a garden center that's going to offer some type of DIY service," he says.

Every company has a core strength – something you're better at than anyone else in your market. The challenge is to think about that strength broadly enough to make it marketable and salable to customers. It's not snow removal, killing bugs or cutting grass. Anyone can do those things. It's managing two dozen subcontractors, setting up efficient routes and developing profitable systems.

David Snodgrass was able to find a new channel to highlight his expertise and stabilize his firm. And he's right, the green industry's disparate segments aren't usually all booming. But when you find your company's strength – and the right market – you'll start running on all eight cylinders. **L**

“The green industry is never hitting on all cylinders in all areas.”

– David Snodgrass, Dennis' 7 Dees

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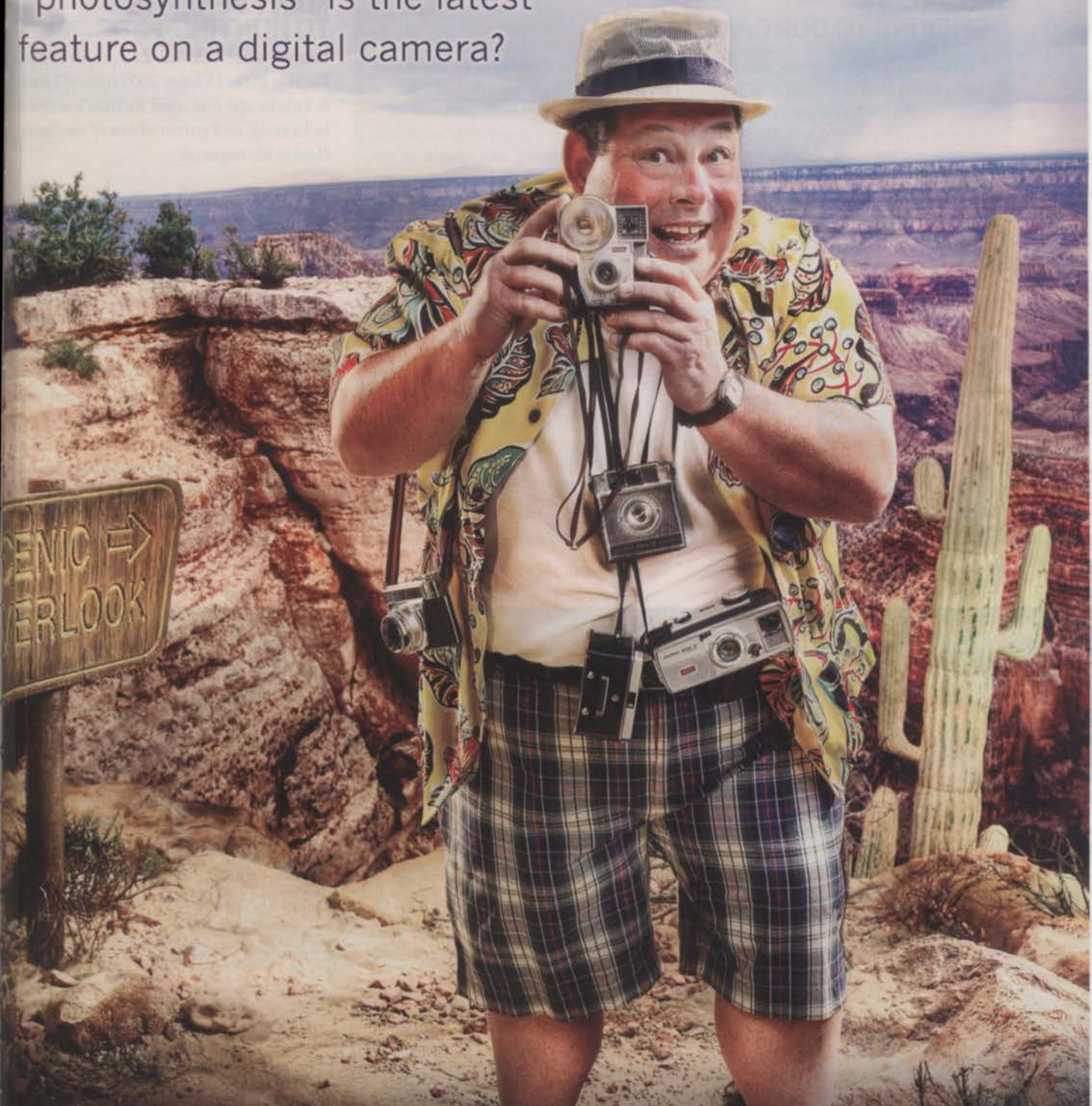
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STICKING TO OUR GAME PLAN

Just read my first 2010 Breakthrough on B&L Landscaping ("Business Breakthrough," March 2010). I like the format a lot! It is especially cool that they shared documents and the video with the rest of the green industry. It really makes it a lot more personal.

There is a lot going on with the economy, but one thing we like to say in our organization is that it has made us much smarter! We are doing extremely well despite all the gloom and doom in Cleveland and throughout Ohio. Some of the things we have done include leaning heavily on industry experts and their foresight on the economy. We began planning, diversifying and scrutinizing everything we do in our organization. Developing a solid game plan and sticking to it has paid huge dividends.

We have been selected by state local and national organizations as one of the fastest growing privately held firms in the country. We have remained extremely profitable despite the economy and have continued to grow by double digits for several years.

We are excited despite how many feel. This economy has created an enormous amount of opportunities for all creative entrepreneurs.

Keep up the great stuff! I am an avid follower of the magazine.

*Jerry Schill, vice president and owner
Schill Grounds Management
Sheffield Village, Ohio*



MANY BENEFITS TO HUNTING

Editor's note: A sidebar in a profile of Ron Kujawa in the October 2009 issue of Lawn & Landscape discussed Kujawa's interest in hunting, and garnered lots of feedback. Here is his response.

As a lifelong hunter I was not surprised at the excited response over the sidebar "Shooting an Elephant" (October 2009). All hunters are familiar with such emotional, if not fact-based, responses. While I commend the passion, I prefer the facts. I hope this measured response helps explain the benefits of hunting to the animals, the environment and the people of Africa.

According to The United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora Conference of the Parties, published in 2007, not all elephants are



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considered endangered.

Countries that treat elephants as a renewable resource with economic value and allow hunting (within a highly regulated, quota-driven system) have seen their animal populations flourish. Elephants have only remained endangered in countries that have banned hunting.

"Trophy hunting is of key importance to conservation in Africa by creating financial incentives to promote and retain wildlife as a land use over vast areas," reported *National Geographic News* in 2007. Trophy hunting employs tens of thousands of people in Africa and preserves more than 540,000 square miles (that's more than the combined size of Texas, California, New York, Florida and Ohio) in the 23 African countries where it is permitted.

Most rural Africans live on diets of maize or rice; meat from hunts provides

the primary protein source to the local community.

In Zimbabwe, this much-needed protein was valued at more than \$250,000 annually, according to "The Income from Elephant Trophy Fees in Campfire Districts in 1992." Anecdotally, nothing from my hunt was wasted; we witnessed first-hand the gratitude people had for the sustenance provided.

In addition to the money spent by people like me, there are many international foundations (SCIF, Mzuri Wildlife Foundation, etc.) funded by hunters that contribute additional millions of dollars for education, conservation and humanitarian projects.

Animals are protected by anti-poaching patrols employed by the hunters, and trophy fees are shared with indigenous tribes. (The Economics of Wildlife and land use in Zimbabwe, WWF Project Paper No. 36 Harare, Zimbabwe.)

I learned hunting and fishing from my father while growing up. Now, because of my professional achievements, I enjoy the heritage instilled by my forefathers in places few people get to visit. In so doing, I have seen the world as it really is; I have helped employ the needy and feed the hungry, and I am proud to pass this legacy on to my children and grandchildren.

Ron Kujawa
KEI Enterprises
Oak Creek, Wis.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Have something you'd like to share with the editors – a great idea, industry insight or even a new hire? Send it to lleditors@gie.net or call Managing Editor Chuck Bowen at 330-523-5330 and you and your company could be featured in an upcoming issue of *Lawn & Landscape*.



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Nick Shebert of TurfPro, Sacramento, Calif., befriended an alligator during an Everglades airboat tour attendees went on during the R&R portion of the DuPont event.

GRUBS, GATORS AND MORE

Networking and product/pest education headlined DuPont's first lawn care symposium.

NAPLES, Fla. – Grubs, gators and gearing up for the busy season were the talk of the DuPont ProBusiness Exchange Acelepryn Lawn Symposium held here in March.

About 80 attendees convened to learn about Acelepryn, an insecticide with the active ingredient Calterix. It's the first turf product featuring an active ingredient from the anthranilic diamide class of chemistry. Acelepryn's main foe is the white grub; it also controls other key turf pests like billbugs and caterpillars and can be used on landscape ornamentals.

Andrew Adams, owner of Capital Turf Management, Willow Grove, Pa., said several of the product's characteristics – such as having no signal word on the label – make it a good point of discussion for homeowner associations and school districts.

The DuPont team also offered a preview of Imprelis, a broadleaf herbicide that's shown to be effective against ground ivy, wild violets and henbit. Imprelis has a new active ingredient, aminocyclopyrachlor; it's expected to receive EPA registration in the third quarter of 2010.

In addition to learning more about products and pests, symposium attendees networked with their peers and were treated to some R&R. – *Marisa Palmieri*

TruGreen, Earth Day part ways

MEMPHIS, Tenn. – A month before TruGreen was to sponsor the Earth Day Network's event on the National Mall touting organic and sustainable lawn care, the organizations parted ways. The event was slated to take place on April 25.

"Due to unanticipated events, Earth Day Network and TruGreen regrettably announce their relationship for the 40th anniversary event has been suspended," a joint statement said. "TruGreen continues to respect the commitment Earth Day Network is making to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, and Earth Day Network recognizes TruGreen's efforts on behalf of organic and sustainable lawn and land care."

Soon after Earth Day and TruGreen announced their partnership, antipesticide community rallied to criticize the relationship, including the creation of several Facebook pages dedicated to stopping the sponsorship.

That criticism grew when the New York Department of Environmental Conservation announced a \$500,000

fine against TruGreen for pesticide violations.

N.Y.'s New Leaf purchases Lion Landscaping

SOUTHAMPTON, N.Y. – New Leaf Landscape Maintenance acquired Lion Landscaping of Sag Harbor, N.Y.

New Leaf has been serving the Hamptons since 2003 and specializes in landscape design, installation and maintenance. President and Owner Michael Regolizio also owns Blue Tides Irrigation, Regolizio Management and Arrow's Rest. He has more than 15 years of landscape experience.

Better hearing conservation efforts needed

GREELEY, Colo. – A study conducted by researchers at the University of Northern Colorado shows that hearing conservation efforts are needed for urban tree service workers and others who operate chainsaws, chippers, stump grinders, leaf blowers, water trucks, rotochoppers, tractors, and brush and weed trimmers.

CLCA certification program gets WaterSense label

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA) received the WaterSense label from the U.S. EPA for its Water Management Certification Program. Previously a WaterSense Program Partner, CLCA's Water Management Certification Program was requested to include an irrigation system auditing component to the certification program in order to receive the WaterSense label.

As requested, CLCA's Water Management Certification program now includes irrigation system auditing, which allows individuals to conduct irrigation audits on new landscape projects that fall under California's newly updated Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance.



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These efforts could include hearing testing, hearing loss prevention training and using ear protection.

Twenty men ages 21-57 from seven employers participated in the study last

summer. Their length of service ranged from one month to 28 years. The research highlights include:

- Research found that 95 percent of workers (19) worked in conditions that

exceed either OSHA and/or NIOSH limits for on-the-job noise exposure.

- Using a noise dosimeter to measure exposure in working conditions, research showed that ear protection should be used when operating chainsaws, chippers, stump grinders, leaf blowers, water trucks, roto-choppers, tractors, brush/weed trimmers.

- Workers ranked chippers (measured at 112-119 dBA) as emitting the loudest noise. Noise exposures above 115 dBA are not permitted by OSHA.

- 80 percent routinely wore hearing protection of earplugs, earmuffs or combination earplug/earmuff. The

researchers recommended users wear both earplugs and earmuffs when dBA is 100 or greater (operating leaf blowers, chippers, chainsaws.)

- Three of the seven employers had components of hearing loss prevention programs, but only one had a comprehensive hearing conservation program as required by OSHA.

YardApes participates in Greencare for Troops

NEW MILFORD, Conn. – YardApes, in partnership with Project EverGreen, will again participate in "GreenCare for Troops" in the greater New Milford area. Project EverGreen is a nationwide outreach program initiated to connect local area lawn and landscape firms with families of the men and women serving their country in the armed forces.

"Lawn and landscape maintenance becomes a definite hardship when a family's primary source of income is on active duty and away from home," said YardApes founder Shayne Newman. "By maintaining a healthy lawn and property, we hope to contribute to the families' overall well being during a very stressful time in their lives. It's a sincere gesture of support."

Companies interested in providing services can visit www.projectevergreen.com for more information.

Syngenta videos explain pesticide formulations

GREENSBORO, N.C. – Syngenta now offers an explanation of the science and the ingredients that go into the formulations of its control products.

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The series of eight short video segments, covering topics ranging from the importance of surfactants to the value of long-standing research and development efforts, is available at www.greencastonline.com/

FormulationVideo/. The videos include information on how Syngenta transforms active ingredients into formulations, the role that various inert ingredients and manufacturing processes have in delivering a product

Stihl debuts new models

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – Stihl's two new chainsaw models, the MS 311 and MS 391 improve fuel efficiency by up to 20 percent and reduce emissions by up to 50 percent as compared to previous models, meaning longer run times between refueling and lower fuel costs, the company says.

Both models offer a pre-separation air filtration system that requires fewer filter changes, allowing for longer run times between filter maintenance, and an advanced anti-vibration system that reduces vibration, resulting in operator comfort.

The MS 311 and MS 391 also feature a toolless fuel and oil cap with retainers, translucent fuel tank, and side access chain tensioner. The platform design concept allows for streamlined parts and maintenance.

that performs well in a wide range of conditions and the company's stewardship efforts to support long-term usefulness of its products.

Jacobsen rolls out dealer inventory system

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Jacobsen introduced a tool that it says has helped improve its fill rate for service parts.

The new electronic tool allows each dealer in the Jacobsen network to upload its parts inventory, which is then viewable on a private intranet so that all Jacobsen dealers can check availability across the group.

"We have consistently

maintained a strong 97 percent fill rate of service parts over the last few years, something Jacobsen customers and dealers have taken note of," said Britton Harold, Jacobsen's product manager for parts and accessories.

"But sometimes the 3 percent that goes on backorder can present a challenge," Harold says. "Some of those parts that make up this minimal shortfall can have long lead-times or, in some cases, are just hard to get because of the quantities needed or the prohibitive cost of producing a one-off item."

Although Jacobsen dealers routinely contact each other when trying to source parts not in stock, previ-

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ously there was no quick reference system, similar to a central bulletin board, to help source the urgently required items.

Enthusiasm reins at Student Career Days

ATLANTA – Host school Chattahoochee Technical College took home first prize at this year's Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Student Career Days. The event was held at the school's North Metro Campus last month.

Student Career Days is an annual three-day competition among students and college landscape horticulture programs. Students

compete in business-related and technical events and attend a career fair where they look for internship and job opportunities.

With more than 1,000 students and faculty attending from 68 participating colleges and two FFA-affiliated high schools, it was the largest representation of schools the event has seen in its 34 years. The event also boasted its first ever international attendees, Bridgwater College in England and the Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture from Ontario.

Garden designer and media personality P. Allen Smith was the keynote speaker. He shared his advice for students entering what he calls "the



Brickman was one of about 40 companies exhibiting at the Student Career Days career fair.

best industry on the planet." He was inspirational, but tough in his graduation speech-esqe delivery.

"If you don't have a strong work ethic, get one. Or just turn around and walk away," he said. "Don't go into your



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career with an attitude. Go into it with the attitude that you're going to do whatever it takes."

Roger Phelps, promotional communications manager for Stihl, who sponsors Student Career Days, said at the career fair that the students' contagious enthusiasm was similar to the buzz he heard from the contractors who attended the event.

"In talking with a few of the landscapers here, they're beginning to see things turning around," he said. "The energy at this event is reflective of the cautious optimism we're hearing in the market."

Rounding out the top five schools were 2). Brigham Young University - Provo; 3). Brigham Young University - Idaho; 4). North Carolina State University; and 5). University of Maryland. - Marisa Palmieri

PEOPLE

Kevin Thompson joins the Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association as executive director. Thompson brings more than 10 years of association management experience, having served most recently as executive director of the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation and the Ohio Lawn Care Association.



Thompson

HydroSense Irrigation Design & Consulting, Toronto, hired **James Riddell** as business development manager-conservation.

Joe Weiss, a sales associate with Bluegrass Lawncare, Bridgeton, Mo., not only achieved his sales quota for 2009, but was named corporate employee of the year. Weiss has worked for the company for three years, bringing his 14 years of experience and knowledge to the lawn, landscape and snow removal business.

Bill Bewlay, vice president of operations, was appointed COO of Cleary Chemical Corp. in February.

The Davey Tree Expert Co. named **James Stief** a corporate officer. Stief is a 32-year veteran of the company.

The National Truck Equipment Association elected three new members to its board of trustees. Distributor trustees **Jim LoPresti**, president and CEO of Auto Safety House, Phoenix, and **Jefrey Messer**, president of Messer Truck Equipment, Westbrook, Maine, and manufacturer trustee **Dave Zelis**, director of sales and marketing of Buyers Products Co., Mentor, Ohio, join the group.

The Irrigation Association hired **Marcia E. Cram** as foundation and membership manager and **Eva R. Hornak** as communications manager.



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TurfEx TS700GR and TS1200GR

TrynEx International
www.trynexfactory.com

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control products; ideal for lawn care, landscape and facility maintenance application.

- Constructed of heavy-duty, yet light-weight polyethylene.
- 40 percent lighter than similar steel-built models.



CHAIN SAW SHARPENING SYSTEM ///

PowerSharp

Oregon Chain
www.powersharp.com

- PowerSharp system includes the PowerSharp chain, the PowerSharp bar-mount sharpener and the PowerSharp guide bar.
- These components provide a fast, simple

and portable method for sharpening saw chain with precision.

- The PowerSharp starter kit, which includes all components in one package, will sell at the MSRP of \$75 to \$80.
- Developed by Blount under its Oregon brand.
- Available May 2010 from dealers, hardware retailers and home improvement stores.
- Available in a variety of configurations and fits most saws on the market, as well as models already in use.



PROTECTIVE MAT LINK ///

Turn-a-Link

AlturnaMATS
www.alturnamats.com

- New steel link features galvanized coating; will not rust.
- Like AlturnaMATS original Turn-A-Links, available in round single or doubles and flat single or doubles.



UTILITY TRACTOR ///

MF2635 utility tractor

Massey Ferguson
www.masseyferguson.com

- Expansion of 2600 Series includes this new model with 74 gross engine horsepower.
- Powered by a Tier III emission-compliant direct-injection Simpson four-cylinder turbo-charged diesel engine.
- Two transmission choices: the standard 8x2 constant mesh transmission and live PTO or optional 8x8 transmission

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8751, 8752

Corona® Quicksaw 7-inch Folding Saw

- 3-sided Teeth are impulse-hardened to maintain sharpness and eliminate tooth snaps with cutting tips that are hardened electromagnetically
- The hard chrome-plating on the SK4 steel blade resists corrosion and makes cleaning easy
- Elastomer grip reduces hand fatigue by dampening vibrations
- Blade lock prevents accidental folding
- 15-1/2" Overall length

13-inch Pruning Saw

- Cuts faster, lasts longer
- Made with the same SK4 high-carbon steel used in expensive knives and other precision cutting tools
- Patent-pending tooth pattern delivers a 20% faster cut than comparable professional saws

81248 7" Folding Saw	81255 13" Pruning Saw
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FELCO



1786

Felco® Hand Pruners

81130 Model 2	81218 Model 5
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\$42 ⁵⁰	\$25 ⁵⁰
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CORONA



1795

Corona® Hand Pruners

81200 BP3180	81192 BP3160
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\$24 ⁷⁵	\$20 ⁹⁵
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ARS



2615

ARS Heavy Duty Hand Pruners

81120 8" Pruner	81121 9" Pruner
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\$53 ⁹⁵	\$57 ⁹⁵
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FELCO



6134

Felco® F-600, 6" Folding Saw

81136 F-600, 6"

\$26 ⁹⁵

CORONA



8006

Corona® Forged Extension Handle Hedge Shear

81180 Hedge Shear

\$34 ⁹⁵

BAHCO
FRAMES



1783

Bahco® Lopping Shears

81089 1-1/4" Cut

\$57 ⁷⁵



8285

Aluminum Tripod Ladders

- For fruit picking, tree pruning, and maintenance
- 3" wide steps
- 3" wide side rail
- 5/16" Grade-5 steel bolts, steel brushings at back leg pivot point
- Solid aluminum aircraft rivets
- Maximum load: 250 lbs

90901 10'	90902 12'	90903 14'
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\$191 ⁰⁰	\$239 ⁰⁰	\$264 ⁰⁰
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ARS



Track System



2617

Super Turbocut® Curved Pole Saw

- 16" pole saw with hooked tip
- A notch in the cutter blade allows the saw to be temporarily hung on a branch out of the way while not in use
- The telescoping pole has a unique track system along the center section that allows positive locking at any point
- Sheath included with saw

81095 Turbocut Saw Head	81096 Telescoping Pole, 18.5'
----------------------------	----------------------------------

\$91 ⁰⁰	\$171 ⁵⁰
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JAMESON

3787

Jameson Telescoping Pole Saw/Pruner Package

- 6' to 12' Double Lock® Telescoping Pole with female ferrule
- JA-14 Pruner with adapter and rope
- One 13" Tri-Edge saw blade with pole saw casting and adapter

80159 Telescoping Pole Saw Package

\$142 ⁵⁰



FIELD KING



1846

D.B. Smith Field King™
Deluxe Sprayers

- Viton® gaskets and seals
- 24" long spray wand
- 50" reinforced hose
- Fully adjustable brass nozzle
- Dual paddle agitators mix contents each time you pump

13398

4-Gallon

13399

5-Gallon

\$76⁹⁵\$113⁹⁵

7282

Field King™
Handheld Sprayers

- Viton® seals throughout
- Pressure release valve built into the cap sends air and liquids down and away when released
- 35" hose, aluminum wand, and adjustable brass nozzle

13296

2-Gallon

13297

3-Gallon

\$34⁹⁵\$37⁹⁵

3785

SHURflo 4 Gallon
Electric Backpack Pump

- Max Vert. Throw: 15'; Horz.: 25'
- Four pump speeds
- Adjustable cone nozzle
- Sprays up to 120 gallons (454 Liters) on a single charge

13650

Electric
Pump\$259⁰⁰41% Glyphosate
Isopropylamine Salt

8273

Sideswipe® Pro
Herbicide Applicator

- Selective application of herbicides
- Wets evenly without drift
- Top shield protects desirable plants and shrubs during application
- 32 oz. (1 liter) reservoir handle
- 1,800 sq. ft. coverage area

18025

Sideswipe
Pro\$38⁵⁰

17121

Razor Pro
2-1/2 Gallon\$75⁹⁰Razor Pro
cannot be
sold in CA,
MA, VT, WA.

1935

EarthWay
Model 3100
Shoulder Spreader

- 40 lb. Capacity
- Lays 8'-12' swath
- Criss-cross shoulder straps provide even, steady, comfortable support
- Bottom support plate spreads load evenly across your lower abdomen

69009

Model 3100
Spreader\$114⁵⁰

7240

ATV Broadcast
Spreader

- 2.2 cubic foot polyhopper
- Spreads from 5 to 45'
- 12 Volt motor with variable speed
- Holds up to 145 lbs. of potash or 99 lbs. of urea
- Made in U.S.A.

69104

ATV
Spreader\$319⁰⁰

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ECHO



2280

Echo® Model SRM-265 String Trimmer

- 25.4 cc commercial-grade, dual-ring piston engine
- 59" flex drive straight shaft
- Pro-Fire® electronic ignition, extra-heavy chrome plating for durability, and 4-layer cable drive shaft

80150
String
Trimmer

\$322⁰⁰

solo



2133

Solo® Model 471-KAT Power Air Blower

- Meets ANSI Standards with an operating sound level of 64.5 dB.
- Achieves an air velocity of 235 mph
- 53cc, two-cycle, 3 hp engine with electronic ignition can operate for up to 2 hours on 1 tank of fuel

13114
Power
Air Blower

\$469⁰⁰

solo



4075

Solo® All-Purpose Chain Saw

- Great for thinning, felling and pruning medium sized timber
- Automatic chain brake, anti-vibration system, oil supply regulation, and decompression valve
- 50.9cc Solo® 2-cycle engine

80400
Solo 651
with 20" Bar

\$499⁰⁰

Cannot be sold
in California.



3600

String Trimmer Chaps

- 14 oz. cotton chaps protect legs from wet grass and flying debris
- Can also be worn when walking through tall grass or briar
- Adjustable Velcro® strips
- Machine washable

23398
Regular

23399
Long

\$39⁹⁵

\$39⁹⁵



8577

The Sling Bag

- 7'10" x 7'10"
- Can hold loads up to 3,000 lbs.
- Four sewn straps to hand carry or drag it behind a tractor
- Geo-textile fabric will not mold and allows moisture to escape while holding in all contents

69181
Sling Bag

\$89⁰⁰

RAZOR-BACK®

UnionTools



3014

RazorBack® Bow Rake

- 16"W head with (15) 3-1/4" L teeth
- 60" L White Ash handle

4218

Union® 22" Steel Tine Rake

- 22"W with (22) 7" L steel tines
- 48" White Ash handle

33804
Razorback
Model 63-141

33856
Union Model
64-430

\$33⁹⁵

\$10⁶⁵



3744

Landscape Trailer Accessories

- Secure a variety of tools and equipment to your trailer!
- Constructed of heavy duty black powder-coated steel and include mounting hardware
- Made in the USA.



4503

Polymer Trailer Tongue Box

- High-density polyethylene
- Integrated hinge and a zinc-plated hasp latch
- 18" x 20" x 36"

93810
Polymer
Tongue Box

\$119⁰⁰



3744

Lockable Trimmer Rack

- Holds three trimmers
- For open trailers

94700

\$167⁰⁰



3744

Multi-Rack

- Secure your trimmers, chain saws, or blowers
- Rubber straps included
- For open or enclosed trailers

94701

\$47⁹⁵



3744

Backpack Blower Rack

- Rubber strap included
- For open or enclosed trailers
- Not for STIHL® BR400

94702

\$47⁹⁵



3744

Water Cooler Rack

- Accommodates most standard size coolers
- Straps included
- For open or enclosed trailers

94703

\$46⁶⁰



3744

Gas Can Rack

- Holds one 5-gal. or two 2.5-gal. polymer cans
- Strap included
- For open or enclosed trailers

94704

\$52⁹⁵



3744

Trimmer Line Spool Bracket

- Holds one 3 lb. spool
- For open or enclosed trailers

94706

\$21⁹⁵



3744

Hand Tool Rack

- Holds up to six straight handle tools
- Rubber grommets
- For open trailers

94705

\$83⁹⁵



6648

Treegator®

- Reinforced, UV treated 10 mil polyethylene
- One holds 20 gallons and drips 6 to 10 hours
- Fits tree 1" - 4" in dia.
- Heavy duty nylon zippers, polyprop straps, and heat sealed edges



79128 Treegator
\$21⁵⁰

Buy in quantity
and save even
more!



NEW!

7205

**Deep Drip™
Tree Watering Stakes**

- Promotes strong root development by delivering water and fertilizer directly to tree roots
- Water for shorter periods
- Aerates the soil with oxygen
- Place directly in hole during planting or drive into ground around an existing tree

79161 14" Stake	79162 24" Stake	79163 36" Stake
\$9⁵⁰	\$9⁹⁵	\$10⁵⁰



3052

**Lincoln
Soil Moisture Meters**

- Reads in a scale of "1" to "10," with "1" being completely dry and "10" indicating full saturation
- A chart on the back of each unit indicates relative moisture readings
- Complete instructions, Soil Moisture Management Handbook, and wilt point tables are included

77104 9" Probe	77105 24" Probe	77311 36" Probe
\$89⁹⁵	\$94⁹⁵	\$99⁹⁵



6350

Duckbill Earth Anchor

- Model 40 DTS Kit for Tree Diameters up to 3" - 3 Duckbill Anchors with 12' of cable, 3 tree collars, and 3 cable clamps. Anchor holds 300 lbs. (135 kg)
- Model 68 DTS Kit for Tree Diameters up to 6" - 3 Duckbill Anchors with 13' of cable with a turnbuckle mid line, 3 tree collars, and 6 cable clamps. Anchor holds 1,100 lbs. (500 kg)

79134 Model 40 DTS Kit	79135 Model 68 DTS Kit
\$19⁹⁵	\$39⁹⁵

79132 Driving Rod for Model 40	79133 Driving Rod for Model 68
\$7²⁵	\$8⁹⁵



8343

**Ames® True Temper®
Reel Easy® Hose Reel**

- Holds 400' of 5/8" hose
- Heavy-duty frame, a 6' leader hose, a chrome handle with cushion grip,
- Four 10" pneumatic wheels

67720 Hose Reel	67736 1-5/8" x 75'L Hose	67738 5/8" x 100'L Hose
\$164⁵⁰	\$41⁷⁵	\$56⁵⁰



NEW!

8343

**Ames® True Temper®
Reel Easy®
Swivel Hose Reel**

- Swivels 180° left or right
- Holds 400' of 5/8" hose
- Steel frame, pneumatic tires, and rubber anchors

67721 Hose Reel	67736 1-5/8" x 75'L Hose	67738 5/8" x 100'L Hose
\$205⁰⁰	\$41⁷⁵	\$56⁵⁰



93329

93330

8284
**CARB Compliant
No-Spill® Fuel Cans**

93329 2.5 Gallon	93330 5 Gallon
\$19⁹⁵	\$30⁹⁵



8242

**Rust-Oleum® 17 oz.
Inverted Tip Marking Paint**

- Additional colors available

57149 Safety Red	57151 Fl. Orange
\$4⁷⁰	\$4⁷⁰



8338

Amdro Fire Strike

 17100
5 lbs.
\$23⁹⁵
 Cannot be
sold in CA.

3050
**Kelway® Soil pH
And Moisture Meter**

94302 pH & Moisture Meter
\$117⁵⁰



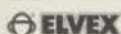
Bausch & Lomb

5250

**Bausch & Lomb®
Coddington Pocket
Magnifiers**

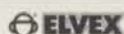
61280 10x, 1" Focus, 7/8" Dia. Lens	61290 14x, 3/4" Focus, 5/8" Dia. Lens	61300 20x, 1/2" Focus, 5/8" Dia. Lens
\$23⁵⁰	\$25⁵⁰	\$27⁹⁵


7009
**AMS One-Piece
Soil Probe with Step**

 77636
Step Probe
\$71⁴⁰


2055
**Elvex® Trix
Safety Glasses**

23287 Clear Lens	23288 Gray Lens
\$2⁷⁰	\$3⁰⁵



6963
**Elvex® Quattro™
Corded Earplugs**

94172 Ear Plugs
\$1⁶⁵

3482

**Wells Lamont®
Grain Pigskin Gloves**

90909 Medium	90910 Large
\$7⁹⁵	\$7⁹⁵


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more!*



67220

8049
**Professional
Tool Sets**

67202 148-Piece	67220 170-Piece
\$99⁹⁵	\$117⁵⁰


1116
**Fluorescent Plain Vinyl
Wire Stake Flags**

33506 Orange	33507 Pink
\$5⁴⁰	\$5⁴⁰

8042

**Workmate
Portable Desk**

53204 Workmate
\$13⁹⁵



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3800

Car Seat Organizer

- Adjustable strap
- Zippered center compartment
- 1200 denier PVC coated nylon fabric

35367
Car Seat
Organizer

\$30⁹⁵



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Available!
See website for
full selection!

8037

RAM No-Drill Vehicle Laptop Mounts

- RAM-VB-108-SW1 – Ford Excursion (2000-2005), Ford Excursion Eddie Bauer Edition (2000-2005), Ford F-250, F-350, F-450, F-550, F-650, F-750 Super Duty Trucks (1999-Current), Ford F-350 Super Duty Trucks (1997)
- RAM-VB-159-SW1 – Chevrolet Avalanche (2007-Current), Chevrolet Silverado - All Versions (2007-Current), Chevrolet Suburban (2007-Current), Chevrolet Suburban with Deluxe Power Seats (2007-Current), Chevrolet Tahoe (2007-Current), Hummer H2 (2007-Current), Equivalent GMC Models (2007-Current)

31211
RAM-VB-108-SW1

\$226⁴⁵

31217
RAM-VB-159-SW1

\$259⁶⁰

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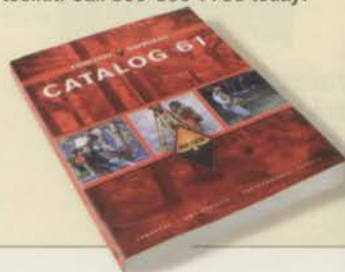
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Buy or sell?

Interest rates are set for a slow but steady climb. Here's how to take advantage. By William J. Lynott

If you have any of your money invested in bonds – treasuries, corporates or municipals – you already know that the rules for buying and selling bonds are constantly changing.

As most investors know, the market price for bonds tends to increase when interest rates are falling and decrease when rates are rising. On the surface, that seems simple enough; the problem for both types of investors is figuring out in which direction interest rates are heading and, thus, when to buy and when to sell.

If you're old enough, you may remember back in 1980 when 30-year treasuries were paying nearly 12 percent. Not only do I remember back that far, I'm one of the lucky people who bought that gem

of an investment.

But now the bond is maturing. I'm getting my principal back and now I have to decide what to do with it. Should I buy another long-term bond or invest it elsewhere? Should I invest in another bond as a trader and look for a possible increase in the market price (meaning a drop in interest rates)? This is where those changing rules for both types of bond investors come into play.

Bond traders haven't done so well lately. In the single year 2009, the total return on a 10-year treasury was a negative 9.3 percent. Of course, a buy-and-hold investor like me wouldn't care about the market price for a bond I already held, but what about a bond investor looking for a place to invest some cash?

There are signs that long-term interest rates are beginning to edge up. There is also a general feeling that the Federal Reserve will raise short-term interest rates in several modest steps this year. If that happens, bond market prices will decrease (bond prices move in the opposite direction of interest rates) signaling another poor year for the bond trader.

For buy-and-hold bond buyers like me, the question is whether or not this is a good time to buy another long-term bond. At the time of this writing, the 30-year treasury is priced to produce a yield of 4.56 percent. Not bad, considering the dismal rates currently in effect in most places where you can park your cash. But what happens if the predictions of slowly rising long-term interest rates prove to be correct? That would mean that tying up your money for the long-term might not be your best bet.

For every financial guru who predicts that market prices or interest rates are headed up, there is another expert who predicts they will go down.

To me, the best answer to the conundrum posed by that situation is to search for the weight of the majority. Where do the majority of financial professionals stand?

Right now, majority opinion is clear: Interest rates are set for a slow but steady climb. That appears to be a reasonable prediction, considering the federal government's massive borrowing needs in its attempt to juice

up the economy.

What that suggests to me is that investing in long-term treasuries may not be the best move at this time. With a slowly improving economy, high-grade corporate bonds are worth looking at. An improving economy should also translate into a more attractive investing climate for municipals.

If, in fact, our economy is now positioned for a modest but steady improvement, even bond investors may want to take a look at the stock market. The time may now be right for carefully choosing strong companies with a long record of paying, and even improving, dividends. While history is no guarantee of what the future will hold, investing in equities has been the most profitable choice during almost any 10-year period in modern times.

In the final analysis, common sense suggests that any investment portfolio should contain a mix of bonds and equities. Deciding the best recipe for that combination

“Investing in long-term treasuries may not be the best move at this time.”

depends on a number of variables including your age and your tolerance for risk. The older you get, the less you should care about long-term results. For younger investors, now may be the time to loosen up a bit in your investment philosophy. **L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Abington, Pa. He has 40 years experience in business management and financing.

Follow your plan

You've undoubtedly heard the story of Capt. Chesley Sullenberger who landed the US Airways jet in the Hudson River and saved 150 lives in the process. I've listened in amazement to the conversation he had with the air traffic controllers when the plane encountered some birds that shut down both engines rendering the massive jet powerless and gliding to a landing.

What's amazing about Sullenberger was the calm in his voice. He didn't panic; he simply let his training take over and worked the plan he had been presented with in training and, best of all, it worked! There's a business lesson you can learn here: Don't panic.

It's very easy to panic right now. Entrepreneurs like us are hurting right now. It's not a time to take crazy risks, but it is time to work your plan and not panic.

Recently I spent a day with Joe Calloway, the author of "Becoming a Category of One: How Extraordinary Companies Transcend Commodity and Defy Comparison." The book focuses on what companies can do to differentiate themselves and be the best in their categories.

As Joe looked at my business and what I was and wasn't doing, he gave me a piece of brilliant advice: "Whatever you would do in the long term, do in the short term, and don't panic." In other words, work your plan. Let's explore this with a couple of examples specific to our industry.

EXAMPLE NO. 1. You've been in business more than 25 years, and have a sterling reputation. Much of your work comes from word of

mouth. If someone is building a big, new home in the area, they call you. But, only two new homes have been built in your area in the last 30 months.

He gave me a piece of brilliant advice: "Whatever you would do in the long term, do in the short term, and **don't panic.**"

Here's what you don't do. You don't start mailing coupons. You don't start calling on shopping centers to see if you can mow their grass. You don't take out billboards saying, "No job too small" or "We'll match any bid."

What you should do is stick to what your company is known for and you work a little harder. Make more calls. Knock on the doors of homes that look like they need your services in the neighborhoods you already work in. Get out and see every client you have, in person, thank them for the business, and present to them a proposal for every single thing you see you could do in their landscape to make it look better. If someone is going to get a deal, make sure it's a client where there's hope to get more work.

If your vision is to be known as the finest landscaper in your marketplace, behave like that. Don't ruin or hurt your brand just because there's a recession.

EXAMPLE NO. 2. Your biggest client owns a successful factory in town. You do all their maintenance

work; after all, that's what your company specializes in. But, in the last three months, you've lost several accounts in other office parks.

You are getting worried and have a conversation with your big client. The owner says he wants a new pool in his backyard and an outdoor room at his house. You bid it and win, but learn that your bid was \$150,000 less than the company that did all the other installation work.

Now you feel sick. You regret taking the job, and wish you would have stuck to what you know best. What you should have done was told the client, "Yes, we need work but it has to be the kind of work we do best. Building a pool is not what we do, and the last thing I'd want to do is mess up our relationship."

You should have worked your plan and stayed focused on what you do best – maintenance. You should have put together a plan to market more of the services you do offer and not ventured off in an unknown territory. You shouldn't have panicked and should have done in the short term what you should do in the long term.

Sullenberger had every right to panic, but he didn't and it paid off. As green industry professionals, we need to do the same thing.

As my friend Joe said, "Do in the short term what you'd do in the long term and don't panic." Some great advice; now I need to follow it and so do you. Follow your plan, leverage your strengths and run your business doing the things you do best. My gut tells me we'll all be rewarded for this type of behavior. **L**



MARTY GRUNDER

is a speaker, consultant and author, and also owner of Grunder Landscaping Co. in Miamisburg, Ohio. Reach him at marty@gie.net or via www.martygrunder.com.



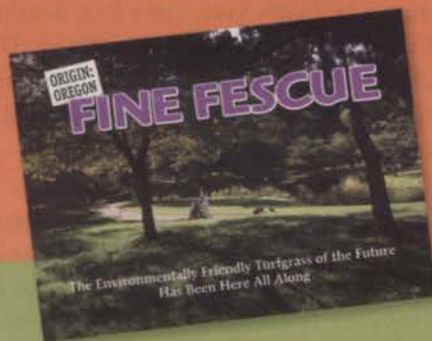
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Steve Rak, Dave Thorn and Joe Chiera

Prices, production and profit

How three contractors set up their businesses for success.

A panel discussion at CENTS in Columbus, Ohio, earlier this year revealed how three contractors have grown their companies – what systems they've put in place, what consultants they use and how they bid and price their jobs to ensure a profitable year. Steve Rak, Southwest Landscape Management, Columbia Station, Ohio; Dave Thorn, DTR Associates, Aurora, Ohio; and Joe Chiera, Impact Grounds Maintenance and Design, Norton, Ohio; brought together perspectives on high-end residential, commercial maintenance and full-service work for the audience. – *Chuck Bowen*

What forms of advertising and marketing techniques have been most successful for growing your business?

Dave Thorn: Customer referrals have been No. 1. No. 2 is home and flower shows. Currently, through shows, we've made connections with garden writers and editors. They'll do stories on us. Those have been key to our marketing – which is free. People love a story.

Steve Rak: We don't do a lot. We develop a lot of relationships with [property] management companies. A lot of it is word of mouth. I also enjoy writing, and I write for a magazine called "Properties" in the Cleveland area.

Joe Chiera: On the design/build side, we've done a lot of direct mail. We send it in the spring and follow up in the summer and fall. Also word of mouth – if you

do a good job on a project, you should get two or three leads. On the maintenance side, all our trucks are the same colors with our logos. We used closed trailers. The more trucks you have out there, the more it does for all your marketing.

What are your internal procedures from the time a client calls the office to the first day of the job?

SR: We bid in October of the year before. To help get your foot in the door, it's a numbers game. When they don't know you, ask if there are any projects you want us do enhancements on. If we do a good job, they get some face time with us, and we get some face time with them.

JC: Our office manager takes all the calls. He has a sheet of questions to prequalify the lead. On design/build,

it's me or another salesman who takes the call. We follow up within 24 hours of the call and meet with the customer. On maintenance, an account manager handles everything. They supervise the job, sell enhancements. They own the property.

DT: Our approach is pretty basic. We tell a story when the client calls. We're screening them as they're screening us. If it's a good fit, we set up a client meeting, where we'll have a lengthy conversation. I try to be a good listener and keep telling the DTR story. We send a formal design proposal and create a final plan. We use that exercise to showcase our work. Then, we have an on-site project meeting, where I introduce the client to the head foreman. We give door hangers to the client, so they can leave notes for our crews if we're not there at the same time.

At what point did you decide to hire a full-time office manager?

JC: Our office manager has been key to our growth. I was pulling my hair out doing payroll and answering phones. My answering machine was always jammed full with messages. We have two office managers, one answers the phone, one runs bookkeeping. They do our HR and are shopping for our health insurance. They've really helped out a lot.

SR: It wasn't soon enough. When you start a business, you're motivated to grow, but this whole paperwork thing gets out of control. We hired one three years ago, and I couldn't live without her. She'd be the last person I'd get rid of. Can we afford to pay someone full-time? Definitely, yes. I'm principally a salesperson. I am spending more time on customer sales and customer relationships.

DT: Ours is sort of a business manager; she answers phones and does clerical work. But we divide and conquer on this and try to run very tight. It's not beneath me to answer the phone or plant a tree.



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INTERVIEW

We also have internships with local schools, and have students come in to do CAD or clerical work.

What tools do you use to show your value over your competition?

SR: For us, it's a simple message: Our core focus is on commercial maintenance.

“If you want to grow, your people need to be in on it. Give them a stake in it.” — Steve Rak

We don't do design/build. Every bit of our resources goes into cultivating that culture of commercial maintenance. We don't have to pull a guy off a design/

build job. You're going to get A players on your property every day. This is our meat and potatoes.

JC: Our main selling point is communication, and making the customer feel like part of our extended family. We try to have our account managers contact clients twice a month, get to know the property managers outside of their work. When you build that relationship with the customer, it goes beyond money, because they'll continue to refer you.

DT: It's selling the story. When I meet with clients, I ask, 'What can we do? How can we better help you live? We're here to be a property manager for you.' We'll clean gutters, sweep the garage, wash windows. I tend to become very close to my clients. Once you make that connection ... they couldn't think of using anyone else because of the connection we have.

As your company grew, how did you motivate your staff to accept the changes that were necessary to move forward?

SR: Just don't keep it a secret. If you want to grow, your people need to be in on it. Give them a stake in it — maybe something they're doing can help, like more snowplowing, etc. This is their company, too. But sometimes people don't want to do that. Sometimes you have to let them go. That's not a bad thing.

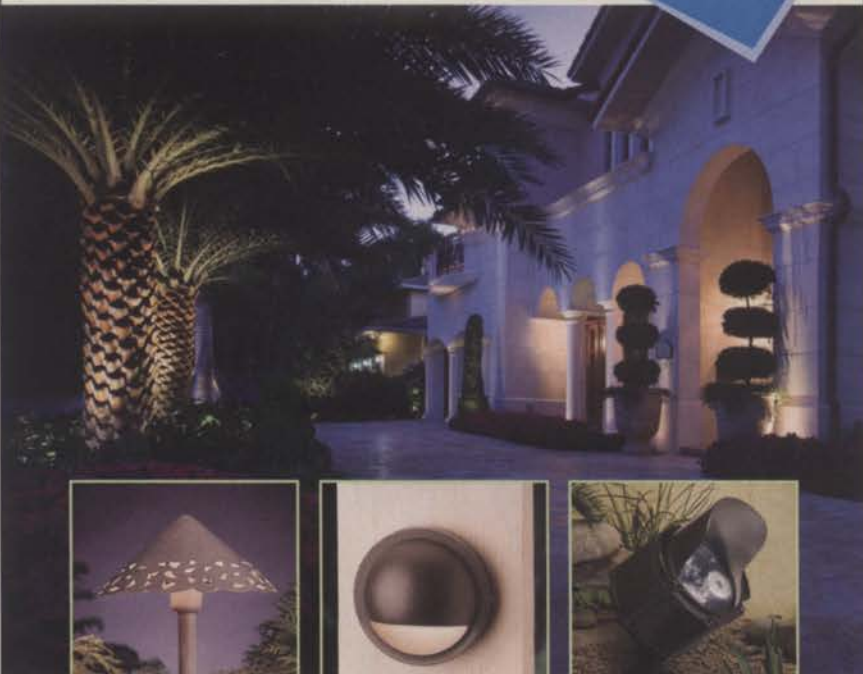
JC: We started with a core of four guys, all basic laborers. We brought in some consultants to help with our growth and challenges. We took a lot of their ideas, and most of those four guys are account managers now. You never stay the same. You either get better or you get worse.

How have you used consultants to help grow your company?

JC: I can't say enough. We use Rod Bailey in Oregon. He taught us the basic principles of business. I never knew what a P&L was. After a two-day talk with him, we were quoting things accurately. That

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got us on the path to growth. We also use Ed LaFlamme. He helped us from an operations standpoint – what a company looks like and how to set up quality control for the whole job.

SR: We've been using them for ages. Frank Ross, a financial consultant, set us up to track costs. Steve Pattie, from the Pattie Group, and I meet once every other month. He knows my employees. We're not competitors, so we don't compete for commercial maintenance market. Just do your homework. Consultants aren't cheap, but if you get the right one in your business, they can really help you grow it.

DT: We've hired Tom Koobee in Chargin Falls, Ohio. I did the Dale Carnegie public speaking courses. Frank Ross comes in every year for us. He's been instrumental in guiding our ship. He's helped me understand finances and P&L statements. I always want to have a good year because I want to show Frank we did a good job.

Subcontractors are vital to a successful business. In a down economy, how do you stay committed to those relationships while protecting your business?

JC: The only sub we have is snow removal. I treat everyone the same way I treat our employees. I don't try to beat them down on price, as long as they're giving us good service that's worth the money.

SR: Pay them on time. Everyone who runs a business knows what it's like to wait for your money. It's irritating. Get these people paid. If we can't, we need to work at our business. Nothing irritates me more than chasing clients. Treat them as part of your family. My subs do quality work. It might cost more, but I can call them any time and they're out there.

DT: We have two irrigation subs, two tree removal, two electricians. I will get estimates from two people to make sure I don't miss an opportunity.

How do you structure your bids? Do you price per square foot, or use a material-plus-labor approach?

SR: We do both ways. With production rates for mowers and plows, there are so many variables there – lakes, trees, hills, I don't think you can look at it from a square-foot perspective.

JC: We don't price anything on the design/build side on square feet. We do everything materials plus labor. The

gross margin is key for my financial success.


DT: Our jobs are polar opposites from one to another. We spend a lot of energy and time working with labor hours, machine costs and overhead mark-up on top of everything. We start with profits and work backward from that. **L**

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Diversified by

David Snodgrass, president of Dennis' 7 Dees, brings his design/build skills to a chain of garden centers in Portland, Ore.

A move back into the garden center business helps Dennis' 7 Dees stay stable in an uncertain world.

After a four-year hiatus, David Snodgrass decided it was time to get back into retail.

To diversify his company, Snodgrass, president of Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping & Garden Centers in Portland, Ore., and two of his brothers returned to the foundation their grandparents built more than 80 years ago and bought back a group of garden centers his brother Dennis had sold off. And by adding a hybrid DIY design service for homeowners, they've been able to leverage those storefronts into a lead-generating machine for his landscape division.

GETTING BACK IN THE GAME. Snodgrass, who's president-elect of PLANET, and his siblings moved back into garden centers due to their love of plants and their history. Their maternal grandparents started the business in the 1920s – Bernard Esch running a lawn maintenance operation and his wife, Florence, growing rhododendrons in Portland. David's dad, Robert, took over and expanded into retail in the 1950s, naming the new company after his seven children: Daryle Linn, Dennis, Drake, Dan, David, Drew and Dean.

"I, and I think my brothers share this, love every aspect of the green industry. One more piece of that industry is a good thing," Snodgrass says.

And the company's five garden centers are a boost for business. Besides better discounts for bulk purchases from suppliers and savings on administrative overhead, they act as a great source of leads – and sales – for its landscaping division.

KEEPING CUSTOMERS. When homeowners will order a big installation, the company's landscaping division can handle it. But those clients aren't ordering a new project every other month – maybe every few years, if the economy's good to them, or if they buy a new house. During the in-between times, Snodgrass' retail arm can maintain contact with them – flats of annuals for the front beds or tomato plants for their vegetable garden – instead of losing them to another garden center.

"We lost them, I guess, and allowed them to go to competing garden cen-



Mulya Melco, Planscaper program manager at Dennis' 7 Dees, runs the company's hybrid DIY design service.

ters, and sometimes those competing garden centers offer landscaping services," Snodgrass says. "This way, we're able to service our customer regardless of where they are in their buying cycle. We're able to keep their attention and keep them as an ongoing customer throughout that process."

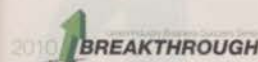
And the sales process works in the opposite direction, too. The landscaping division has a presence at each of the five garden centers, and all the sales associates are trained to guide customers to the right level of project – from DIY to do-it-for-me.

"A lot of times we can turn that customer into either a bigger landscape sale and still have them do the work themselves, or give them a proposal do to the work. It's been a real good source of leads," Snodgrass says.

ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE. And, the garden center purchases helped stabilize the 200-plus employee company's balance sheet: 24 percent of its \$18.5 million in revenue last year came from residential design/build; 28 percent from commercial bid/build; 18 from landscape main-

design

By Chuck Bowen



2010 Breakthrough is an ongoing series of success stories from the green industry. Each month, *Lawn & Landscape* and its sister horticulture publications – *Nursery Management and Production*, *Greenhouse Management and Production* and *Garden Center* – will profile businesses that have found success by working across the industry.

To see more Breakthrough stories from the rest of the green industry, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/2010breakthrough.

How are you working across the green industry to succeed in 2010? Send your stories to Managing Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gle.net or call 330-523-5330 and you could be featured in an upcoming issue of *Lawn & Landscape*.

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tenance and 29 percent from retail.


"It bucks the economy trend," Snodgrass says of his retail division's performance this year – up when other areas are even or down. "That goes back to the diversification – the green industry is never hitting on all cylinders in all areas. Sometimes there are pockets of strength and pockets of weakness. Being diversified allows us to leverage the pockets of strength into the pockets of weakness."

Snodgrass stresses that, for now, retail is a pocket of strength. But it can change with the weather. For example, Snodgrass' five garden centers pulled in \$35,000 total during a recent rainy weekend. That same weekend last year, in nice weather, they made \$113,000.

"You just have to suck it up, and sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. This year, sales for the garden centers are up 60 percent (overall). We had an early spring, maybe there's some pent-up demand showing. There's a huge interest in vegetable gardening. There are just a lot of things that bode well for being in the garden center business this year."

PLANSCAPER PROFITS. One of those things is Snodgrass' Planscaper program. Homeowners interested in installing plants themselves, but who want a professional design to work from, can sit down with one of Snodgrass' designers and get a professional plan. (See "How Planscaper Works," at right.)

The idea is that the company understands things like creating outdoor spaces, privacy screens, complimenting structures, sight lines and overall curb appeal, so homeowners won't have to.

"We're trained landscape designers and contractors. That's our grounding," he says. "We have brought that into the retail garden center arena, so we have a level of professional design that's not going to be part of a garden center that expands into landscaping or a garden center that's going to offer some type of DIY service." 

The author is managing editor of *Lawn & Landscape*.



HOW PLANSCAPER WORKS

Dennis' 7 Dees' Planscaper program targets DIY homeowners – the people who want a big installation, but want to do the heavy lifting themselves – and turns these leads into a revenue stream that a strict design/build division might ignore.

The company has a professional designer on staff at each of its five garden centers, and creates plans for homeowners who want "the power of a professional plan" without hiring a contractor to do all the work. The fee? Clients can participate for as little as \$500. The design fee goes toward plant costs.

They bring photographs of their home and meet in-store with the designer – no home visits required – who puts their ideas on paper.

The program has its own manager, who oversees the designers, and all garden center staff members are trained on how to talk to customers about the program. The company's revenue goal for Planscaper is \$300,000 this year.

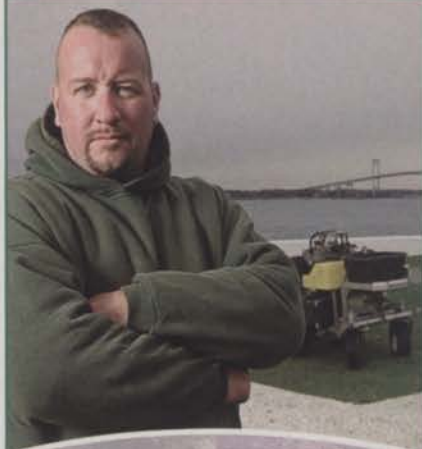
"The most important thing customers can have is the plan. It doesn't matter if you're going to do the work yourself or have it done for you," Snodgrass says. "The plan is the means to the end that ensures every step of the way you're going to have a great product. It's totally invaluable."

More on Planscaper

Download samples of Dennis' 7 Dees' Planscaper program marketing materials at www.lawnandlandscape.com/2010breakthrough.



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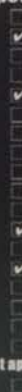


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WANT TO GET INTO GARDEN CENTERS?

Nearly a third of Dennis' 7 Dees' \$18.5 million in revenue comes from its five garden centers. Here, president David Snodgrass shares his tips for landscape companies entering the retail sector. — as told to Chuck Bowen

A garden center is a whole different animal. You need specialists who know retail garden centers as managers. There's an education in retail plant quality versus a landscape. The customer is going to pick up every single plant and look at it 360 degrees before they buy it. You can't just think of it as more of the same.

If you don't have some proven manager who knows the retail side of things, and you're trying to open a garden center with your skill set and mindset of a landscaper, you're in for a rude awakening.

It's a big, huge challenge to get people to your doorstep. That's all we want to do — we want to bring customers to our doorstep. Once they're there, the rest of the program and what they see is going to keep them there and bring them back.

In the spring on good-weather Saturdays, every garden center is busy. If the weather is bad, it just adds up to a great season or a poor season. If you have a wet spring, it's going to make it impossible to have a great season.

I would not buy a company that was not already successful. To think you're going to turn it around is a pipe dream.

The trend is for multiple locations in order to average down your costs. It takes a lot of marketing to get customers to come to your door. If you have to cover that with sales from one location, that's difficult to do. The trend is roll ups, and there is still a place for mom-and-pop independents, but that's really hands on.

You have to love plants to be in retail. If you really are an enthusiast about the industry, and have passion and energy, it can be a lot of fun for the right person. For the wrong person, it can be just the opposite.

It's really seasonal; you've got to weather the cold. You've got to make sure you can keep your staff around — that creates a good foundation to build on.

If you could open your doors for four months and close them, you'd be highly profitable. Spring and fall are profitable. Summer and winter can be long. Those are tough months. You've still got to pay the bills.



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— Marty Grunder, Grunder Landscaping

Stoking sales

In a sales rut? Borrow ideas from three sales-focused firms with entirely different strategies for bringing in business year-round.



Blame it on the economy or the competition. Point your finger at the weather, a late spring, a difficult winter. If pre-season sales were sluggish and spring has sprung but your schedule is sparse, it's time to get off the phone and stoke sales. (Yes, you heard that right.)

"If you didn't make sales this spring, there's really only one way to do it, and that's to get out there and talk to people," says Marty Grunder, president, Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. Offer property tours and look for enhancement sales. Talk

to long-time clients about what services they like and focus on selling those to prospects.

For a minute, think about when you launched your business. "You probably approached every day with a sense of unbridled enthusiasm and went after business like crazy," Grunder says. "When you met someone, you gave them a card. If you saw an office building going up, you found out how you could help on the job.

"I think as we grow our organizations we tend to lose a little zest, and that's what will grow your business," he says.

When production picks up, and even while summer work is full-steam ahead, don't forget job No. 1: sales. "The prettiest Ferrari won't run without gas," Grunder says. "Companies are the same way. You have to understand that sales is No. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 on your to-do list. It has to be. On a daily basis, you've got to spend the majority of your time selling."

This month, *Lawn & Landscape* spoke to three firms to learn how they sell year-round, balance selling and doing the work, and continue to drive business in the door even when times are tough. **L**



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The face-first approach

By running separate selling and producing engines, Coastal Greenery constantly fills its pipeline with prospects.

Production at Coastal Greenery is the "factory," and it operates separately from the sales force, which consists of president Jeffrey Johns, an account manager and a part-time salesperson focused on relationship-building. By running separate selling and producing engines, Johns constantly fills the company's pipeline with prospects.

"My job as a sales force is to keep the clients out of the factory," Johns says. "Because a client waiting around in the factory messes up efficiency and you don't want that."

Production is charged with producing income and profit – delivering on the promises the sales team makes to clients. Sales is responsible for keeping production busy with ongoing maintenance work (contracts automatically renew) and enhancements. "The way I set it up is almost like a competition between the two departments," Johns says. Both divisions rely on one another for success – but a company won't survive without a "kick-tail sales force."

To that end, Johns executes specific sales processes to upsell existing clients

Coastal Greenery
Principal: Jeffrey Johns, president
Location: Brunswick, Ga. **Established:** 1994
2009 revenue: \$2.1 million **Customers:** 60 percent commercial; 40 percent residential **Services:** landscape maintenance and enhancements



and attract new customers. Beginning with the company's book of business, Johns and his associate set enhancement sales goals. For example, Johns aimed to sell \$50,000 in enhancements in March, and \$600,000 in enhancements overall for 2010.

"The old days of sitting at a phone and having someone answer it and



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take orders is over, I don't care how the economy comes back," he says. In-person meetings with clients is the only way to suggest enhancements and get the client's OK.

"When you can paint a picture for them while standing in their yard, they'll say, 'That sounds good, how much will it cost?'" Johns says. "Most of them say, 'Sign me up.'" The closing rate on enhancements is an average 52 percent, a 5-percent increase since two years ago when Johns began on-site walkthroughs with commercial and residential clients.

"During that walkthrough I'm looking for extras," Johns says, always keeping his sales goals in mind.

Clients appreciate the regular attention and have an opportunity to voice

concerns in person. Meanwhile, Coastal Greenery has a conversation starter to suggest enhancements and a has better chance of selling them because of the face-to-face contact. "This is a way for us to deliver exceptional customer service and stay on top of those clients," Johns says, noting that residential walkthroughs occur quarterly.

All the while, Coastal Greenery recognizes that new account sales are critical for reaching the firm's 2010 goal of \$2.8 million. So this year, Johns is trying something new. He hired a part-time salesperson to nurture relationships with property managers. She works two, 10-hour days a week, and her sole goal is to provoke property managers to ask for a bid. From there, she turns the account over to Johns. The legwork for this invi-

tation involves TLC and intuition. For instance: bringing fresh-baked muffins to a morning crew meeting after learning about the gathering during a conversation with the property manager. The gesture is unexpected – and refreshing. The relationship-sales associate might drop by with coffee mugs and brochures or take the property manager out to lunch. All the while, she is filling Coastal Greenery's "bucket of contacts."

"She's a great communicator and she knows many people in the community – she's generating those leads for us," Johns relates. Those leads are filtered into a software system so they can be tracked. All the while, she sends out e-mail blasts and newsletters to these prospects so Coastal Greenery is top of mind. **L**



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The board-room approach

Matt Caruso relies on rock-solid relationships to grow his business.

There are expanses of paver surface on big-box lots that need to be laid in basic running-bond pattern. There are contractors that play beat-this-price with hardscape bids. Don't expect to find Decra-Scape vying for them.

"Many guys chase anything and everything that has the word 'brick' on it, and they end up with a whole bunch of nothing," says Matt Caruso, president and founder. "We look, specifically, for intricate applications."

Caruso references a rooftop patio project that involved craning materials and equipment; and a site that required

100,000 square-feet of brick in multi-weave patterns. "That's the work I spend my time looking for, and you can't get that through direct mail," he says.

The sales strategy at his specialty firm is tailored to win the work that suits the company's focus. Decra-Scape aligns with engineers, manufacturers, landscape architects and contractors who share a vision for the end product: a "wow" look that's executed with advanced equipment (Decra-Scape is the only company in Michigan with a mechanical layer), Caruso says.

"My sales model is, you get me in the

Decra-Scape
Principal: Matt Caruso, president/founder
Location: Sterling Heights, Mich. **Established:** 1990
2009 revenue: \$1.3 million **Customers:** 70 percent commercial; 30 percent residential **Services:** hardscape/focus on specialty projects



board room and it's all but over," Caruso says. "But you have to know how to get into the board room."

Often, Caruso enters the bidding process through the back door by relationship selling. One outlet for developing these relationships is a local chamber of commerce group that meets weekly to share contacts, Caruso says.

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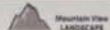
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But perhaps more importantly, Decra-Scape is recognized as an authorized contractor of a manufacturer's products. "Basically, they believe in us enough that they'll stand behind us if our work fails," Caruso says. "And they aren't going to do that for just anyone. You have to meet certain requirements."

Manufacturers often send representatives to canvass the specifier community, Caruso explains. "They are out there trying to get their product on different jobs," he says, adding that his company name is sometimes listed in specifications for a job so a general contractor will have to get a bid from Decra-Scape. "They may not use us, but they have to entertain a number from us," he says.

That doesn't mean Caruso can wait for work to fly in. He must emphasize his


niche expertise to those he aligns with, letting them know he aims for specialty projects because of their size, scope or expertise requirements.

"I have to get out there and sell that," Caruso says. "So if I meet with a landscape architect or engineer, I'm talking about sustainable work like permeable pavers and how we can be utilized as an information resource if they need help building those projects. And I tell them, 'By the way, we bring this mechanical layer to the table with a capability to put down 8,000 to 10,000 square feet of pavers a day.'" That pitch turns heads.

Caruso also attends trade shows, meeting with tradesmen who might need his services and constantly returning to his book of business to keep in close contact with existing customers.

For residential work, Decra-Scape's location on a main road encourages passers-by to stop in. And whenever the company is installing hardscape in a neighborhood, door-hangers are distributed and employees engage in "friendly communication" with anyone walking by the project site.

While sales were slower in 2009 than in years past – Decra-Scape usually brings in annual revenue of closer to \$3 million – maintaining relationships and constantly reminding those contacts of their niche helps ensure that Decra-Scape gets a spot at that board table.

And as for the price wars that can occur there: "If you're confident in what you do, confident in your pricing and your ability, that takes the dollar concern off the table," Caruso says. 



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The calender-year approach

For Joe Kucik, the mantra is 'always be selling.'

A written plan with a detailed, 12-month sales process steers business development efforts at Joe Kucik's Scotts LawnService franchise. "You have to put it on paper," says the longtime lawn care player, who has bought and sold several businesses and also operates green industry software firm Real Green Systems.

Create a budget, jot down goals and expectations, map out what services you'll sell when, and don't leave out a single month of the year, he says.

"Your plan should have you selling something every day of the year - you're

not selling the same thing, necessarily, but you're still selling every day," Kucik says. For instance, Kucik's sales team will focus on aeration in April, then grub control.

His selling year kicks off in late December with a 10,000-piece mailing to "cancels and rejects." That primes this population for the phone campaign beginning immediately after New Year's.

"A lot of people think you can't get started selling until the snow is gone or the weather gets better," Kucik says. "Sure, there are easier times of the year to sell lawn care, but you need to get

Scotts LawnService

Principal: Joe Kucik, franchise owner

Location: Lansing, Mich.

Established: 2004 **2009 Revenue:**

\$2.8 million **Customers:** 96 percent residential; 4 percent commercial

Services: lawn care and pest control



a quick start on marketing and sales to build momentum. If you don't get started until the middle or end of February, you aren't going to build that good momentum until too late."

A dedicated sales staff spends all of January following up on that initial mailing with phone calls, with a goal to sign 100 customers per week. In February, a

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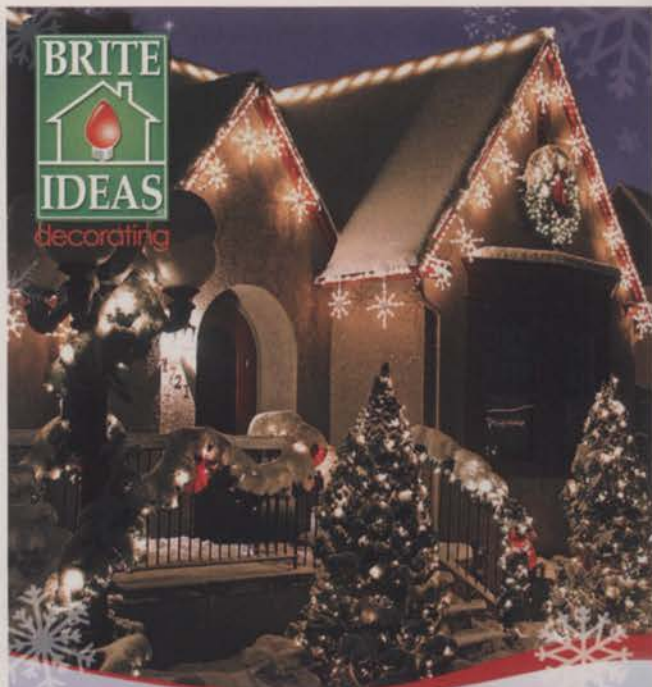


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direct mail campaign targets the company's marketing universe, which includes about 210,000 homes of which Kucik knows the price and property size.

Every week during February and March, 5,000 to 10,000 direct mail pieces are sent to these prospects. With follow-up calls, Kucik expects a 1.5 to 3 percent sell-through rate and sales goals continue at 100 customers per month. He sets this goal knowing that he wants to spend less than \$100 to acquire a single customer.

"A lot of people implement marketing plans and have no idea at the end of the day what each new customer ended up costing them," Kucik says. "How will they know where to put their marketing dollars next year?"

While the 3 percent or less sale rate of

direct mail with a follow-up call seems low, Kucik says that without the phone call, the direct mail will result in just a half-percent sell-through rate.

Meanwhile, by April, he ups the customer sales goal to 200 before the season is in full-swing.

Come summer, he divides the sales team into groups. Five people man the phone every day. Three associates focus on outside sales. A team carries out door-to-door sales efforts. About 30 to 35 people work for Kucik during high season, most of them servicing properties.

Regardless of job title, all employees are encouraged to sell, and an incentive shows them Kucik is serious about bringing in sales year-round. A technician who refers a client can earn an

8-percent commission on one year's service. "They get paid as services are rendered throughout the year," Kucik explains, pointing out the other side of this enticement: quality service ensures that customers continue the service, and that the technician continues to pick up the bonus on every service visit.

"If you don't offer an incentive, some technicians will simply tell people who are interested in the service to call the office," Kucik says.

This combination of strategies keeps sales rolling in year-round, but it will only work, Kucik says, when a plan is put on paper. Accountability and measuring results against goals is a critical component of a successful sales system. **L**

The author is a regular contributor to *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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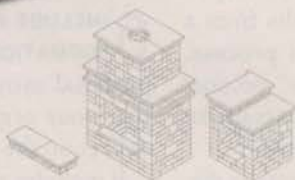


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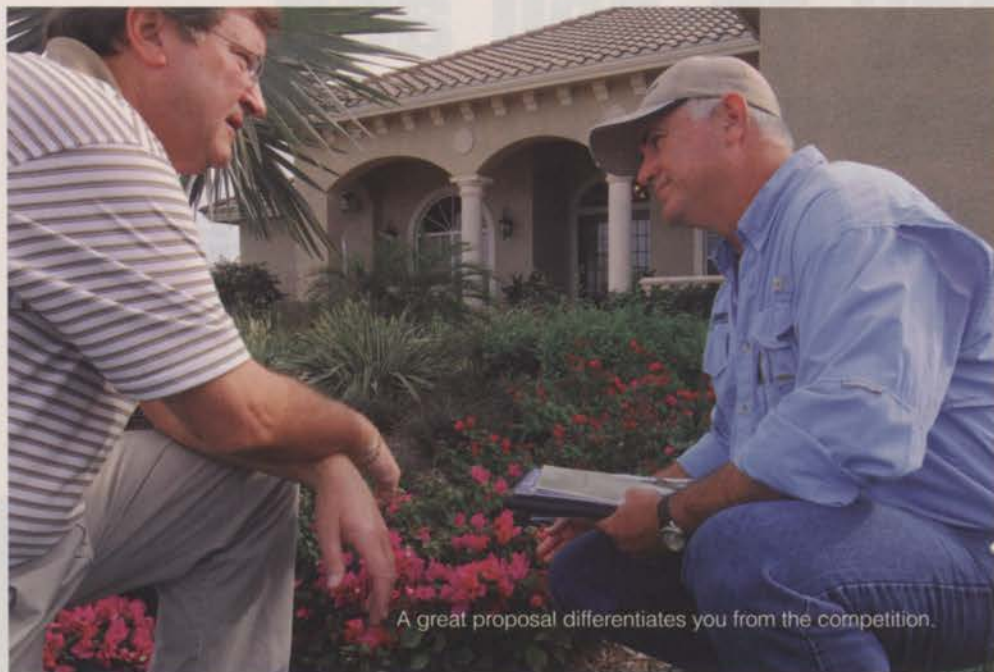
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A great proposal differentiates you from the competition.

Asking for it

A modest proposal won't close the sale.

Use these tips to improve your pitches. By Bill Arman

Acquiring new customers is more important than ever as the industry works to rebound. One key to gaining more customers is preparing great proposals.

Why write a great proposal? It differentiates you from the competition, helps appeal to the buyer's emotion and intellect, and serves as a tool for your commercial customers to help sell others i.e., HOAs, building owners

and managers, etc.

Proposals are also important touch points. A good proposal sets the tone, communicates your expertise and tells clients what your company is all about. A bad one does the same thing – if you can't put a several-page document together, odds are you can't run a solid company, either. (See "Building a proposal" on page 56.)

Key tips for building a great proposal.

When you sit down to write a proposal, keep these six things in mind:

1 FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER.

Your sales proposal is customer-centered. It defines their business, their cur-

rent situation, the financial impact of the proposal and, most importantly, their needs and objectives. Go deep on them.

2 LEARN THEIR NEEDS AND BE A CONSULTANT.

A compelling proposal results from a consultative sales process. Avoid "boilerplate" proposals, or proposals that read like poorly written brochures.

Ask great questions to discover or uncover their needs. Address their needs in your proposal.

Develop a list of 10 questions that gets to the heart of their challenges, and what is important to them in the service provider/customer relationship.

3 EXPLAIN HOW YOU WILL SOLVE THEIR NEEDS.

Be specific by including methodology, scheduling and the staffing required to implement the solution. This reduces your buyer's perceived risk and answers what you

will be doing. How will you do it? How long will it take? Who will be performing?

Your proposal should explain how your service will work to help with their business. The secret of successful proposals is to focus on what the prospect wants to hear.

4 SHOW THEM THE FINANCIAL BENEFITS.

Your proposal measures how your service will make or save money. This provides compelling financial reasons to make a change.


5 SHOW THEM NON-FINANCIAL BENEFITS.

Your proposal converts your service's capabilities into buyer-specific benefits.

These are the benefits that are not easily measured in monetary terms. Things like saving them time and anguish, making their life easier, making them look good, etc.

6 INCLUDE PERTINENT INFORMATION.

Your sales proposal assures the buyer that your organization can deliver on the contract.

It includes a company profile that differentiates your company from the competition and details your certifications, awards and community giving programs. Whatever helps differentiate you from the competition. 

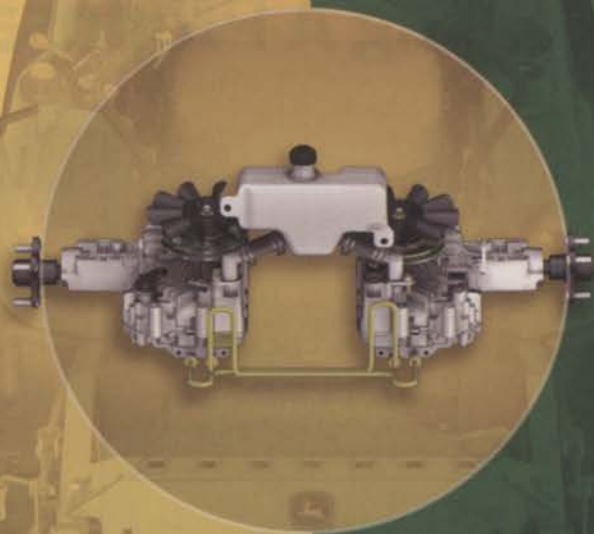
The author is head harvester at The Harvest Group.

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“ The secret of successful proposals is to focus on what the prospect wants to hear. **”**

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The title page

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The cover letter

- Confirm your interest in the project.
- Thank them for the opportunity to bid on the job.
- Include an overview of the process and why the client is important to you.



Customer background and needs identification

- Include a review of their business.
- Identify and address their needs.
- Identify and address their top three to five challenges or pain points.



The proposed solution and implementation process

- Without being too specific, provide detailed schedules on how you plan to solve their problems.
- Provide dates, times, people profiles, etc.
- Be specific to their job. Reiterate your understanding of the prospect's requirements, and make sure your proposal clarifies how your solution will help them. Remember, they want solutions to their problems.

Your profile

- Include a brief overview of your company, your history, your awards, community involvement, association memberships, etc.
- No more than one page.
- This should ensure them that you have the ability to make them happy.



Pricing summary

- Summarize the scope of the job, detail the benefits to their property, provide the price and explain what it does and doesn't include.
- They want to be convinced that you understand what they need and that you can solve their needs.
- Include a call to action.



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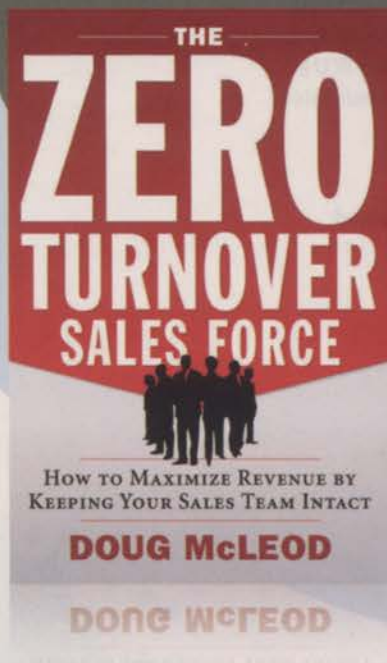
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BOOK EXCERPT

company management had the vision to do the things we'll cover in this book. They surmounted another challenging issue, too: the impatience of top executives who want revenue shortfalls addressed immediately but haven't a clue about how sales works. As we'll discuss later, the majority of CEOs, COOs and other such company bigwigs today do not come from sales backgrounds. They're finance people, lawyers and entrepreneurs. And whatever their calling, they have little patience with anyone who doesn't chirp, "I'll have everything turned around by this time tomorrow." Remember this: The boss didn't get to the big office with a snap of the fingers.

He or she got there with a plan, and that's how we're going to fix your sales force turnover issues. Planning and persistence make it happen – and no successful plan blossoms overnight.

IT'S IS NOT A QUICK FIX. There's no silver bullet that will instantly transform an underperforming sales force. We can't simply write a memo, fire off an e-mail, or call a meeting and expect to turn around a group of people that was hired and trained the wrong way and spends its time unproductively. Top management, of course, will want this.

One of your jobs is to be the wise counsel of patience, perhaps even secreting copies of this book in boardrooms, executive washrooms and golf lockers. And among the first items on your to-do list to reduce sales force turnover is to get the bosses to buy into the idea that these conditions absolutely must exist:

- Your sales force is stable.
- You hire and train the right people the right way in the first place.
- Old-school ways of contacting prospects are tossed out the window.
- The sales manager leads rather than attempts to motivate.

When you have them firmly in place, the enormous expense of turnover will be all but eliminated, and dependable long-term revenue will follow.

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BOOK EXCERPT

If you have the good fortune to manage a brand-new sales force in either a new company or a new division of an existing company, you have the blank canvas on which to craft a neat, clean beginning. Most of us don't have this luxury. We're stuck with the muck that our predecessors – decades of them in many companies – have bequeathed to us. But if we're the ones who have been in charge and if we're being honest (and why not be honest once in a while, just for the exercise?), we may have to admit that the muck is our own creation.

You most likely have "if this, then this" scenarios in place for your salespeople: If this idiot doesn't make budget again, he's gone; if she blows one more close, she's out of here; if they don't pound those phones, cold calling exactly fifty or a hundred unsuspecting prospects today and every day, the whole wretched bunch of loafers is history. That's it, period, the only way to do it.

And when they're gone, you'll start all over again.

If this sounds familiar, take comfort: You're not alone. Most sales forces are in constant states of flux. Likely suspects are recruited. New hires cycle through the training regimen. Veterans (some of whom have actually been there for months or years) pound the phones, make the cold calls, work on the presentations, dance the challenging Buying-Cycle Boogie, and try to bring home the bacon. The High Priest of Negotiation struggles to feed the God of the Budget. And somewhere down the hall or up the elevator or across the time zones, there is the Voice on the Phone. This voice rules your life. It may couch its words in more or less conciliatory language, but the message is always the same:

The investors/board/shareholders/Big Cheese is/are all over me about revenue. You've got to hit those numbers! If you don't, roll those fakers out of there and get some hot bodies that can sell. And if you

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can't do that, I'll put somebody in your chair that can!

You can only rage, meditate, work out or bend paper clips so much before you begin to question whether the way you've been doing things – the Old School way – is in fact the right way.

CONSIDER SOME TANTALIZING WHAT-IFS.

Given the scenario we've just laid out, you might even begin to ask yourself some important questions – some thought-provoking “what-ifs”:

What if you weren't actively recruiting salespeople all the time?

“Wait,” you plead, “I can't do that! There has to be fresh talent in the pipeline. You never know when somebody will quit or I'll have to bounce 'em out of here. When that happens, I'll need a

fresh sack of meat or two to cover the business!” This is true, unless you've created a sales force that experiences little or no turnover, in which case your need for fresh troops will obviously be very, very small.

What if your staff was at full speed right now, without working up the new hires?



There's no silver bullet. There's only vision and hard work.

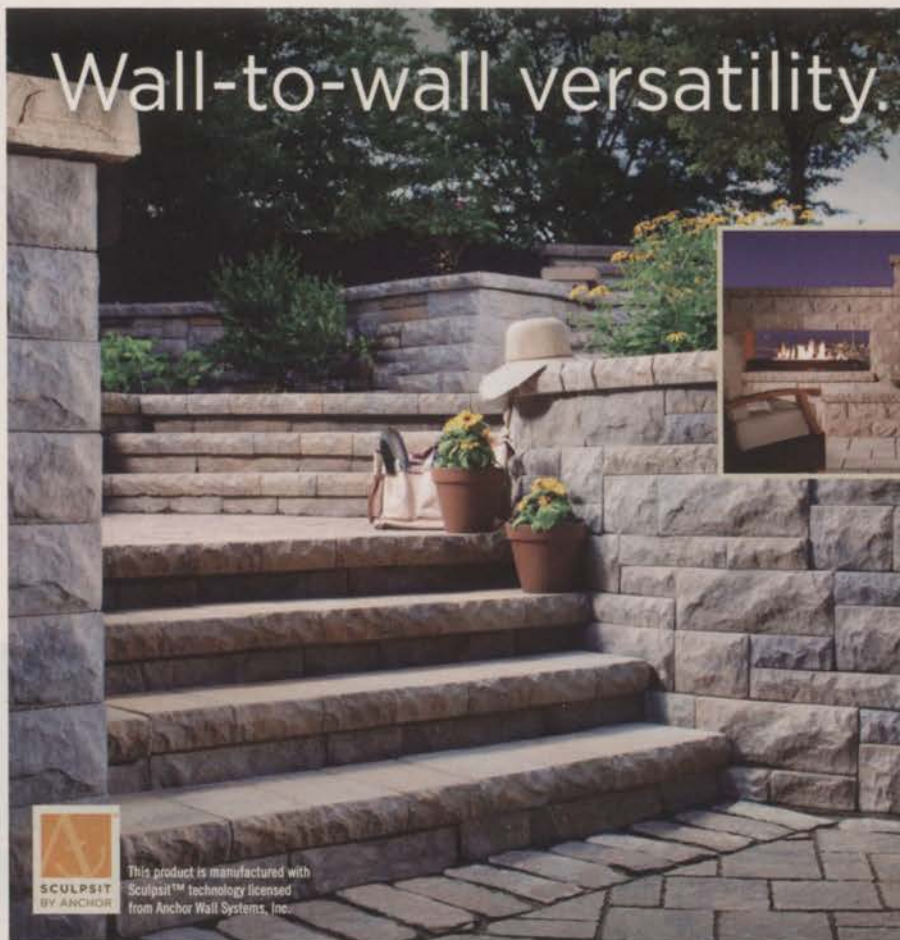
In the zero-turnover environment, you seldom have to wait for one or more recently hired salespeople to finish their initial training and get up to speed. That costly and inefficient start-up period evaporates when you rarely have to bring new people aboard. Of course, it's

laughable to think that every salesperson is going to perform at the same dizzying level. If that were the case, we'd all be phoning it in from the Bahamas. But while individual skill levels and sales outputs may vary, lack of turnover keeps the entire sales force intact, focused, and heading in the same direction. And when you're managing a bunch like that,

life gets a whole lot easier.

What if you didn't have to fire someone this week/this month/ever?

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BOOK EXCERPT

really rather not ruin lives, upset families and overcrowd the unemployment office, then you're as normal as someone like us is going to get. In that case, what you would rather do is lead the sales team, coach your salespeople, exercise your creativity, and go forth and dominate the market. In short, you would rather do what you do best instead of constantly feed an eating machine that sucks in unsuspecting souls at one end, digests them, and then spits them out the other end. That's a treadmill to oblivion. But it doesn't have to be that way.

This book shows you how to create a selling environment that not only makes people want to stay aboard, but actually makes it possible for them to do so. Remember, though: There's no silver bullet. There's only vision and hard work.

Back to the top of the chapter: What if you really did have the same sales force 90 days from now that you have today?

A tantalizing question, indeed. But before we begin to roll out the answers, let's look at what really happens to the bottom line when sales turnover is a fact of life.

STARTING TODAY. Take a serious look at the turnover in your sales force over the last three years. If the number is north of one or two a year, it's too high.

Talk to every person on your team who came from a competitor. Find out why each of them left that former job. Zero in on the turnover issues that the other guys are experiencing. You'll be amazed at what you learn. By the end of this book, you'll be able to avoid repeating the problems that are bedeviling your competitors. Advantage: you.

Go ahead and dream. What if you were out of the hiring and ramping-up business and were able to spend all your time leading an intact sales force? Plot out a plan of action that assumes the presence of a sales force that's always tuned up and ready to go. How different does that look from the results you're getting now? **L**

The article was excerpted from "The Zero-Turnover Sales Force: How to Maximize Revenue by Keeping Your Sales," by Doug McLeod. ©2010 Doug McLeod. All rights reserved. Published by AMACOM Books, a division of the American Management Association. For more information, visit www.amacombooks.org.

MAXIMIZE YOUR MULTIPLE

Things you can do **today** to make your company worth more down the road.

By Brian D. Corbett



Editors' note:

This is the first of a three-part series from *Lawn & Landscape* on exit strategies for business owners. Watch for next month's installment, which focuses on how to get as much money out of a sale as possible.

So, how much is your company worth? Chances are, you have a ballpark figure in mind based on what you know your earnings to be combined with the country club conversation about "multiples of earnings" and industry gossip about who got the highest multiple from which buyer. The true value of your company, however, will not be determined by industry gossip, but by fundamental valuation methods and how you choose to run your business on a daily basis.

Whether you're hoping to cash out tomorrow or in 10 years, you can take steps now to pinpoint the value of your company from a buyer's perspective and maximize

your multiple on that value. Armed with the knowledge of how the market will value your business, you can steer and track your company's value so you know that you're not just growing the top line but the intrinsic value of the enterprise as well, ensuring that you will exit at the right time for the most money.

The first step is recognizing that value is more than just a multiple, and beginning to see your company's value through the eyes of a buyer. While the multiple is significant, it means nothing unless you know what's behind the definition of earnings on which it's based.

While accountants and financial advisers employ dif-

ferent methods to determine the value of the company, the method most used by buyers and investors interested in green industry companies is an analysis of EBITDA, which means earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization.

An EBITDA valuation isolates the cash profits from variable accounting and financing decisions, enabling interested parties to compare the profitability of multiple companies. When determining what multiple your company warrants, your successor will be highly focused on your company's EBITDA, as well as a host of non-financial factors, including reputation, quality of services, personnel,



Corbett

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

revenue by service type and client retention, among others.

We'll examine each of these non-financial factors in the coming months. For now, let's break EBITDA down to basics.

EARNINGS. EBITDA begins with earnings. Higher earnings and significant anticipated earnings growth result in a higher valuation in the mind of the buyer. While much is said about the correlation between purchase price and gross revenue, buyers determine the price they are willing to pay by starting with your earnings.

Earnings are determined by subtracting the operating expenses of running your business, including direct costs of the job, indirect cost related to field operations and the overhead it takes to run your organization from your revenue.

While the buyers understand that no one wants to pay more than their fair share in taxes, significant personal expenses in excess of market-based compensation understate your company's earnings and could make it harder to sell your company. Remember, it's only with a willing and knowledgeable buyer that we can maximize fair market value. With solid accounting and high profit margins, however, your revenue doesn't need to be in the top 50 of the industry rankings to get a deal done. After all, it doesn't matter to a buyer what your revenue is if you are not making any money. In the words of a favorite landscaping client, "It's not what you sell, but what you keep!"

It doesn't matter to a buyer what your revenue is if you are not making any money.

INTEREST. Your successor's goal is to determine the actual profits he will reap from your company over time. The interest you're paying on third-party debt, bank lines of credit and equipment loans is largely a function of the choices you make – whether to

buy new or keep running your existing fleet and how you finance that equipment and your working capital. When a successor buys your company, you will likely pay off the debt you owe at or prior to closing, and the buyer will begin to make his own financing choices. Thus, a potential buyer will add back to your earnings the amount you pay as interest expenses to third parties. Any interest income you receive on cash balances, however, will be excluded, since you

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will likely be able to distribute most or all of the cash prior to closing. These adjustments allow the buyer to consider the potential effect of his own plans for leverage on the company post-closing.

TAXES. Buyers are not concerned with the state and federal taxes you're paying on your company – they're concerned

with the taxes they will have to pay. Your buyer will likely employ different tax strategies than you, or might opt to convert your company to a different corporate form, like an S corporation or an LLC. All of these decisions may change your company's tax rates. The buyer will add back the amount you paid in taxes to your earnings, just as he did

with your interest expenses, and for the same reason – to get a big picture of the profitability of your company before he makes his own strategic decisions about taxes and capital structure.

DEPRECIATION AND AMORTIZATION. Depreciation is simply the cost of an asset spread out over the expected useful life of the asset. Amortization is the term used when the assets are intangible, like trademarks, goodwill and brand recognition.

There are a variety of ways to manipulate the value of a company's assets, including the useful life of the asset, the accounting method used to determine depreciation, and the scrap value of the asset. EBITDA focuses on cash profits, and depreciation and amortization are non-cash expenses. To evaluate the profits the buyer could derive from your company, he will add all depreciation and amortization expenses back to your earnings so that he can start fresh with his own asset valuation methods and strategies.

CONCLUSION. It's important to note that while EBITDA is the preferred tool for comparing the profitability of different companies, your company's EBITDA may be quite higher than the real operating cash flow buyers seek. This is due to the fact that EBITDA does not take into consideration the cash used to fund your capital expenditures. Different types of buyers may scrutinize capital expenditures to varying degrees – financial investors may deduct your "cap ex" from earnings in order to model their returns.

That's a lot of accounting speak, but EBITDA is an important concept to understand as we take the series on to the next issue, where we will profile the three most common transaction types for the owners of green industry companies – strategic third party sales, private equity recapitalizations and ESOPs – and explore which of them might be the right solution for your company. **L**

The author is managing partner of CCG Advisors, Atlanta. Send him an e-mail at bcorbett@gie.net

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HANDLING HEADACHES

Taking care of negative comments about your company the right way can enhance your reputation. By Jeff Korhan

You will eventually encounter someone on the web who challenges your perspective in the form of negative comments posted about you or your work. Be prepared to quickly address these unflattering remarks.

BE FIRST ON THE SCENE. It's surprising how many businesses do not take advantage of Google Alerts to monitor their web reputations. Speed is of the essence when your reputation is at stake.

If you can be the first to address a concern, you can more easily shape future opinions. Much like being the first one at the scene of the accident, everyone who follows tends to trust the eyewitness, which can be you if you're actively managing your brand with Google Alerts.

GET PERSONAL. You need to

get personal – put a face on your business by presenting your own image; don't hide behind a logo. This alone minimizes negative comments because people tend to attack companies or institutions, not other people.

When you comment on blogs or forums, you'll sometimes be asked to sign in with Facebook or Twitter. This procedure uses OpenID to pull in your image, assuming you've properly uploaded it to your social media profiles.

Another method is to register an account with Disqus.com, a free service that inserts your image and contact information when you're commenting and catalogs your comments for future reference.

BUILD A SOLID FOUNDATION. You've earned your reputation, and one little scratch

is not going to bring it tumbling down. However, this only works if you have valid proof on the web. This is one of the many benefits of blogging. Your blog tells your story. Reasonable people, and especially your fans, will weigh this body of knowledge against a solitary comment to draw a reasonable conclusion.

Plus, remember that your blog posts are indexed by Google. If a negative comment should arise, it will be surrounded by favorable content for all to see.

DIFFUSE AND ILLUMINATE. Skillfully addressing negative comments can actually enhance your reputation. It gives you the opportunity to use the situation to reinforce your credibility. Plus, you'll learn more about how to shape public perception. With a little bit of luck, you can even turn a naysayer into a fan, or at least an interested follower.

“It can be tempting to prove how much you know or how right you are. Avoid this tactic.”

You know your business better than anyone else does, and you should use that to diffuse negative comments. Suggest that the commenter doesn't have a complete understanding of the situation, but never be defensive.

Begin your response by thanking them. Why? They're giving you the opportunity to

address a concern that others may also have. It also works wonders for diffusing any negative energy. Then affirm their perspective. “Mike, (be personal) I can understand how one (be indirect) may come to that conclusion if they are not familiar with” Now clarify why someone could come to that unfounded conclusion, and try to provide documented proof. This allows them to save face. The intelligent person will understand and back off.

It can be tempting to prove how much you know or how right you are. However, the one who says less is usually viewed more favorably. Brevity is a form of not needing to defend. When you're defensive, you're viewed as an emotional teenager. Avoid this tactic.

LET IT GO. Be the first to let it go. Rest your case. Some people love a fight. You're not there to win a battle, but to address what needs to be addressed so that you can get back to your business. Many negative commenters' tactics are to bait you into an unnecessary fight, and one that will get indexed by Google for everyone to see.

We're entering uncharted waters where we'll be increasingly visible on the web. Do you all that you can do without compromising your values; then, gracefully move on. If you follow the steps outlined here and seek the highest ground, you'll be fine. **L**

The author is a new media marketer who works with green industry leaders to maximize their web visibility, reputation, and referrals. Tell him what you think at his blog, jeffkorhan.com.



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You get what you pay for

If you pay for production, that's what you'll get. And it may be at the expense of quality and profits. By Brad Johnson

What do you pay your technicians for? I would venture to say that most workers in the lawn care industry are paid mainly for showing up for work and putting in their time.

Nothing gets done without investing hours into the work, but to be more successful, a business owner must measure and pay employees for reaching the goals of the company.

Call it a bonus, incentive pay, commission, whatever you want – it's paying for performance and results. After all, that's what lawn care operators want, and that's what customers deserve. I'm an ex-school teacher; one frustrating aspect of my former profession was the fact that I was doing a better job teaching students than many of my peers down the hall, yet I was getting paid less simply because they had more years in the system. That's not fair, nor is it in the best interest of the students.

When I entered the business world as a lawn care operator, I wanted to pay employees based on their contributions to the company and according to how they grew and serviced their customer

base. At my previous businesses and at my current company, LawnAmerica in Tulsa, Okla., all team members are paid not just a base salary – for putting in the hours – but they also earn incentive pay.

Many lawn care companies pay a commission on production – usually about 5 percent. We measure and incentivize much more than production. Production is important, but service, growth and profits are just as important, so we measure those factors and pay employees incentive pay based on performance.

If you pay for production, that's what you get. And it may be at the expense of quality and profits.

HOW WE DO IT. We currently have five team leaders who manage 12 route managers and six technicians in the field. Depending upon the position, their performance and the team's performance,

25 to 38 percent of their total annual salary will come from incentive pay and profit sharing.

We measure many areas of our business that affect growth, quality and profits: things like the number of re-sprays in a route, response times for an estimate and first applications. We measure what customers think of our service, through something called a Net Promoter Score (more on that later). We measure net customer gain, which is a great indicator of service quality and customer satisfaction.

And the bottom line – we measure profits, and we share 25 percent of those profits with all team members.

EVERYONE SELLS. We've never had dedicated salespeople at LawnAmerica, because everyone is selling all the time. While most of our customers come from referrals, we also invest in marketing and advertising. Everyone learns how to sell, and puts a lot of effort into growth of our customer base, in large part due to the fact that we pay people for growing the company.

For example, our route managers this year will earn \$25 incentive pay for each net customer gain per month. With an average net gain of 60 customers per route, that leads to an extra \$1,500 pay. That's good motivation to work harder to save a customer from cancelling, and

push harder to sell more accounts. And by incentivizing the net gain and not just sales, their focus is not just on obtaining new customers, but on keeping customers.

With this pay structure built into our system, our field staff especially loves new customers and growth – just like I

do. But unless employees are rewarded directly for growth of your customer list, are they going to be as passionate about growth as the owner? Not likely.

SETTING GOALS. At the start of every season, we sit down as a staff and set goals,

“ Call it a bonus, incentive pay, commission, whatever you want – it's paying for performance and results.”

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EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

most of which are then built into the incentive pay structure to reward team members. For example, if a route manager hits his goal of average response time to complete a re-spray of 1.5 days (including weekends and rain days), then he will receive incentive pay of \$100 during each of the three months in spring, and \$75 during the summer months. The same holds true for other time-sensitive service areas, such as evaluations and first applications. So again, frontline employees have an

incentive to perform well, are accountable for results and will be responsive to service issues.

I decide the financial value of reaching these goals each month. I project what employees' base salaries and total incentive pay will be when planning our financial budget. We have a monthly plan that shows the financial rewards with hitting those goals. We measure constantly, and post charts and spreadsheets at the office for all to see and monitor. Some of the goals are individual, some are teams and some are for the total company. Our office staff spends a lot of time in tracking and measuring these results, but the time invested is well worth it.



Johnson

customer surveys, and is a simple way to measure customer promotion (by asking whether customers would refer us to others). In many lawn care companies, it's management and maybe a few dedicated employees who are as passionate about pleasing customers as the owner is. We use the NPS to constantly gauge how our customers perceive us and to respond when it's not up to par.

At the end of the season, if a particular route, or an area, have met their NPS goal (69 percent in our case), they receive a bonus divided in two payments in December and January.

In the case of the five team leaders and upper management, that bonus is substantially more. Our employees are passionate about pleasing customers, which leads to happier customers, a stronger company, higher profits (hopefully) and a happier owner.

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EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION

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Hitting time-sensitive goals*

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*Example is for hitting average response time goal of 1.5 days for re-sprays; evaluations and first applications incentives are similar.

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BOTTOM LINE. And the bottom line is profits. At the end of the year, we take 25 percent of total cash profits, and divide it among all employees depending upon their salary. So with our profit-sharing plan in 2009, employees earned from about \$900 to more than \$4,000 as cash bonuses just before Christmas. By sharing in profits, employees have more at stake in the business, and are rewarded for good performance and results.

Our incentive pay leads to employees who feel they have ownership over their jobs and the company. They are not owners. They have no money invested in the company. They are not at risk every day as I am. However, they do have some freedom and autonomy to work and act as owners, and they feel and perform like they have a stake in the outcome. This creates more of a team atmosphere. It makes everyone accountable for specific and measurable goals.

Our incentive pay plan has grown and evolved over the years. It sometimes takes time for employees to understand and buy into the potential of it. It also takes a smart and hard-working employee to fully realize the upside potential of our incentive plan. It seems to work.

We grew about 13 percent last year, and appear to be on track to exceed our budgeted 10 percent growth in 2010, with current projections to end up at about 12 percent growth this season. That's without a dedicated sales force, without tele-marketing and without spending a ton of money on advertising or buying customers. By spring, we'll be past the 8,000 customer mark after 11 years in business.

While our incentive pay plan is not the only reason we've grown, it does play a major part in any success we've experienced. And, our best, smartest, and hardest-working employees really love it, as they put more money into their pockets by achieving more. **L**

Upping the ante

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The author is president and owner of LawnAmerica, Tulsa, Okla.



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Come together

Mark Borst combined two existing services to create a special division – and company growth. BY LINDSEY GETZ

Mark Borst, president and founder of Borst Landscape & Design in Allendale, N.J., realized that he could be doing more to capitalize on his clients' needs. He wanted his clients to think of his business as a one-stop-shop for all of their maintenance requests. So he launched the estate services division of his business in early 2008.

This new, comprehensive package combines lawn maintenance and garden services into a single unified program. Lawn crews keep grass fresh and regularly trimmed while the garden and maintenance team handles planting and

pected to take a hit in the estate area. We assumed that people would cut back on the flowers or decide they didn't want as many visits," he says. "But amazingly, the service has stayed. It hasn't grown, and may be down 2 or 3 percent from where we started off, but in these times that's good. The estate division has definitely held its own."

The way the service works is the mowing and garden crews each come out separately to the site. "It's a comprehensive package with the full service – it's not like our mowing crews are installing the flowers," says Borst. "We



Currently, the company focuses on marketing the division internally to its existing clientele. Borst says it doesn't really make sense for him to push the service with new customers because of the commitment involved with crews being on the property regularly.

"It's not something you can just jump right into," he says. "The client has to get a feel for the company and how we operate, and as they start to like our service and feel comfortable with us, we ultimately wrap them into taking the full package."

And he keeps marketing simple, using word-of-mouth and ads included with the company's monthly newsletter and client invoices.

To date, the reaction from clients has been positive.

"The response we've gotten from customers is 'Thank goodness I don't have to deal with four different companies to get this work done.' They appreciate the one-stop shopping, especially in this economy," says Borst.

And the numbers certainly demonstrate that success. Borst estimates that the estate service division brings in roughly 15 percent of the company's \$7 million annual revenue.

"The service fills a previously underserved niche market," Borst says. "The estate service ensures thoroughly tended, well-designed landscapes while offering owners the convenience of hiring a single company." **L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Royersford, Pa.



Borst Landscape & Design's new estate division combines its maintenance and garden services to provide clients with a higher level of service.

care of annuals and perennials including detailed pruning, perennial cutbacks and periodic plantings, so that the landscape is maintained year round.

"We were already offering both services and it dawned on me that we should just package them as one deal," says Borst, whose company does around 90 percent residential work. "We want to be everything to the client so they don't have to go anywhere else for their maintenance needs.

"With this economy, we definitely ex-

have the mowing crew come out once a week and then send a garden crew every other week to fertilize flowers, maintain the gardens, do seasonal change-outs and more."

Of course, the packages are customizable and Borst bases the pricing on the client's requests. "We do leave room for flexibility so that clients can add things or take them away in the middle of the season," he adds. "For instance, they may decide they want more summer color and upgrade their package."



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Holding back

Proper design and plant selection were key elements in the drought-tolerant landscape installed at the Georgia Governor's Mansion. *By Lindsey Getz*

While Georgia's historic drought was declared over in June, companies are still feeling the repercussions. Along with the subsequent economic downturn, it's been estimated that the drought has caused more than \$1 billion in lost sales as well as the loss of 25,000 jobs. The state once had more than 75,000 employed by nursery growers, landscape firms, garden centers and irrigation contractors.

Both the Georgia Green Industry Association (GGIA) and Governor Sonny Perdue recognized the importance of demonstrating that Georgians could

have a beautiful landscape while still conserving water.

A recent renovation project at the Governor's Mansion created a need for new landscaping. It was the perfect, high-profile project that would demonstrate water efficiency and good landscape management practices to Georgians.

Mark Fockele, president of Gainesville, Ga.-based The Fockele Garden Co. was hired as the landscape designer, while dozens of volunteers, many of whom were GGIA members, offered their time, services, and materials for installation. The design focused on a landscape gar-

den that would require limited supplementary water once established.

"Our object was to show that this could be done – that the garden could still be very lush and beautiful, instead of looking like a desert," says Fockele. "It's all in the technique: proper soil preparation, drip irrigation, limited turf, appropriate mulching, grouping plants by water requirements, creating shade and, most important of all, proper plant selection."

The plant selection included more than 1,100 plants of nearly three dozen varieties like Asiatic Jasmine, Creeping Sedum, Blue Thrift, Golden St. John's Wort and daffodils, among others.

"What was so great about Mark's design was that he was able to include a wide and interesting variety of plants

“Our object was to show that this could be done – that the garden could still be very **lush and beautiful**, instead of looking like a desert.” – Mark Fockele

that were still all drought-tolerant," says Chris Butts, GGIA director of legislative, environmental and public affairs. "It was all kept very low maintenance yet it certainly changed the look and feel of the landscape."

One of Fockele's biggest challenges came after installation. "It was very difficult to get the governor's staff to stop over-watering the plants," he says. "The staff was finding it hard to gauge when the plants had gotten enough water. But an illustration I like to use to help teach people how to water is to think of it like baking a cake. You can follow the recipe exactly, but you don't really know if it's done until you stick a toothpick in it.

It's the same with dirt – you have to be willing to stick your finger into it and feel whether it's dry, moist or soggy. You obviously don't want dry or soggy."

Fockele also says many people don't realize that an overwatered plant looks a lot like a thirsty one. There's wilting in both cases. The lesson learned is that installing any water-efficient landscaping requires education to ensure it's being properly maintained. Though it took several visits to make certain the irrigation was just right, Butts says the result has been a great example for the state and a plus for the industry.

"Any time we can demonstrate effective water conservation creates great

exposure for the industry," he says. "This project has shown that Georgians can continue landscaping without being large consumers of water. Even though we're out of the drought now, there were some very valuable lessons learned from it." **L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Royersford, Pa.

DESIGN DETAILS

Company: The Fockele Garden Co., Gainesville, Ga.

Revenue: \$2.8 million

Client/service mix: 50 percent residential, 50 percent commercial

Employees: 38

The Georgia Governor's Mansion

Project area: 5,500 square feet

Total labor hours: 120 hours

Total design hours: 15 hours

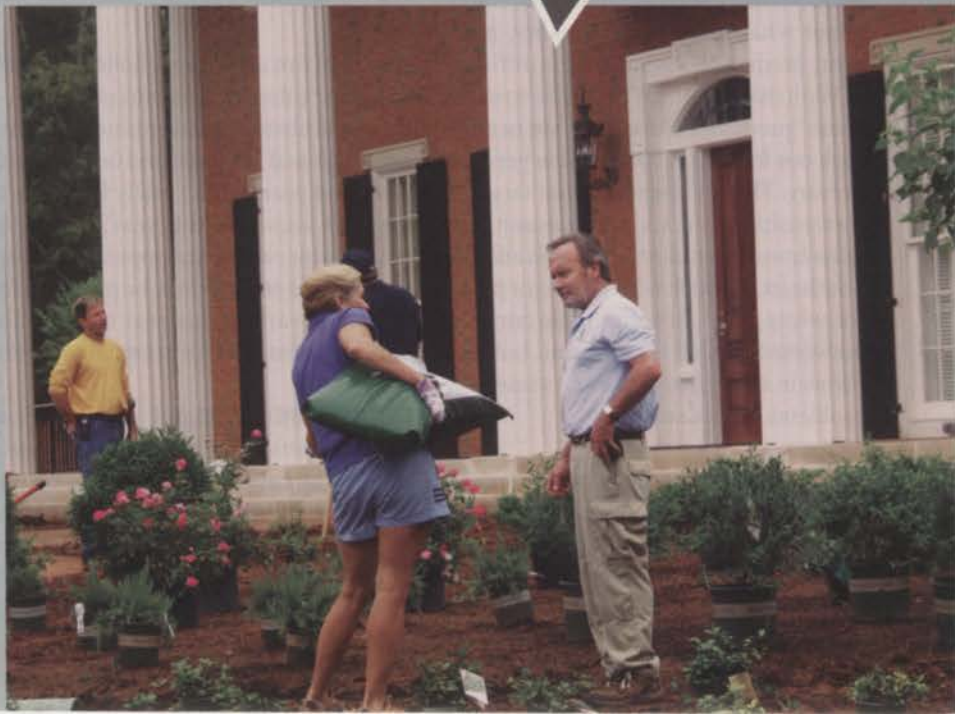
Key plant materials: A variety of drought-tolerant trees, shrubs, groundcovers, annuals and perennials; many of the plants are native to Georgia

Key hardscape materials: None

Equipment used: Compact utility loader, trencher



Dozens of volunteers, many of whom were GGIA members, offered their time, services, and materials to install the new lush but drought-tolerant landscape at the Georgia Governor's Mansion.



The usual suspects: (clockwise from top) a fire ant, cutworm and white grub.

Forecasting threats

Insect pests to watch out for in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

By Rick L. Brandenburg

Forecasting insect pests in the landscape is challenging. Sometimes we take into account how cold or warm the winter has been and try to make a prediction. Other times we reflect back on how serious certain pests were in the previous year and try to make an educated guess. Other times, we observe long-term trends with a certain pest and we can make a fairly confident statement about what to expect. In reality, however, predicting insect pests is difficult.

With that in mind, I'd still like to make some "predictions" for what we need to look out for as the 2010 season gets underway. This will be somewhat targeted for transition zone and warm season turfgrass from the mid-Atlantic area and the Southeast. I'll stick with the major pests: the white grubs, fire ants, mole crickets, cutworms and fall armyworms, but also throw in a few thoughts about some new problems we see surfacing.

FIRE ANTS. Fire ants continue to spread and impact more people each year. Almost without exception I'll get questions as to whether or not the winter will affect the fire ants. Based upon the rapid



spread of fire ants throughout the South and their introduction into new areas, I think the obvious answer is no. Fire ants are tough and resilient, and bounce back year after year. I don't really foresee any negative impact of this year's relatively cold winter on fire ant populations during 2010. In other words, be prepared for full-scale warfare this year to keep fire ants suppressed to an acceptable level.

CRICKETS AND GRUBS. Soil insects such as mole crickets and white grubs are rarely affected by cold weather, but can be impacted by dry weather. I anticipate plenty of mole crickets and plenty of white grubs to go around in 2010. Rainfall is often the biggest factor in determining

the overall abundance of these pests. If it's really dry during egg laying (spring and early summer) then fewer eggs may survive. Wetter years often favor grubs and mole crickets and egg hatch often occurs a little earlier, as well.

CUTWORMS AND FALL ARMYWORMS. Cutworms are hardy insects that survive the coldest of winters and seem to do well even under dry period and wet periods. Cutworms are one of the most reliable pests we experience – it seems like they're always out there, but fortunately not at serious levels. The fall armyworm on the other hand is a very serious pest of all types of turfgrass and can do a lot of damage to sod, sports turf, home lawns,

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INSECT PESTS

commercial properties and golf courses. It's not the least bit tolerant of cold, and even in a mild winter it overwinters only in the extreme South. This means armyworms survive the winter only in southern Florida and right along the Gulf Coast. Well guess what happened in those areas in the weeks right after

Christmas? It got cold, really cold and most likely set back the fall armyworms. At the same time, that was in late December and early January, so there will be adequate time for the fall armyworm populations to recover.

Fall armyworm problems in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic states have

a lot to do with the migration into those areas from their overwintering sites. Weather patterns moving up from the Gulf Coast are in the spring and early summer can result in an earlier arrival of the moths of this pest. Once they arrive they are capable of several generations. It appears one of the strains of fall army-

Figure 1. New pest problems such as the sugar cane beetle are typically misdiagnosed. **Figure 2.** Fall armyworms seem to be more common each year in the Southeast and often start near landscaping or the edge of the property. **Figure 3.** The maintenance of high quality turf often makes seldom seen nuisance pests, such as these ground-dwelling bees, into a major problem **Figure 4.** Fire ants continue to spread throughout the South and are even becoming a threat in buildings.



▶ Figure 1.



▶ Figure 2.



▶ Figure 3.



▶ Figure 4.

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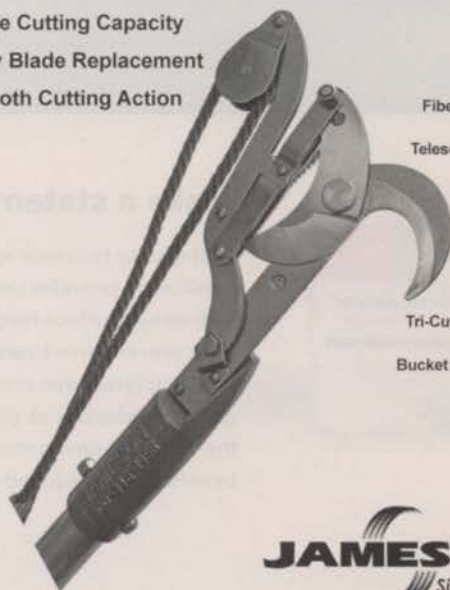
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worms that overwinters in Florida has a strong preference for hybrid bermuda and perhaps the increase in problems in recent years is that the proportion of fall armyworms of this strain keep increasing. It's a sneaky pest that catches us by surprise, but be aware that during the summer and early fall it can attack and the infestations almost always start along the edges of the turf. Birds feeding in the turf are often an early indicator and newly sodded and sprigged areas are particularly susceptible.

CLIMATE CHANGE. No, not that climate change. I'm talking about the turf climate, the ecosystem of the turfgrass we manage. For those of you who have been in this business a long time, you

know that the means by which we manage turfgrass, the cultivars we use, the expectations for the appearance of the turfgrass have all changed dramatically. In other words, the climate has changed. It only makes sense then that the pest problems we deal with in turf are going to change through time as well. When I first started at North Carolina State University 25 years ago, I inherited all kinds of publications on insects like sod webworms. In the last two years I have not have a single call about sod webworms in North Carolina and probably had about 10 in the last 10 years. Yet, 30 years ago, sod webworms were a significant problem in both cool and warm season turf in North Carolina.

BUGS TO WATCH. What are the up-and-coming pests now? Well we know that billbugs are becoming more and more

common throughout the South. The hunting billbug is one of the more common species and we're seeing damage on both cool and warm season turf with the biggest increase in warm season grasses such as zoysiagrass, bermudagrass and paspalum.

We're also seeing a rapid increase in what was previously an agricultural pest called the sugar cane beetle. This small black beetle overwinters as an adult and attacks warm season turf and is especially attracted to bermuda and paspalum.

I'm not saying these are the next mole crickets or fire ants that we will have to deal with in the Southeast, but they are becoming more troublesome and as our industry changes, we must anticipate that the pests will change as well. **L**

The author is a professor of entomology at North Carolina State University.

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By Daniel A. Herms, Deborah G. McCullough, David R. Smitley,
Clifford S. Sadof, R. Chris Williamson and Philip L. Nixon

Professional options for treating

EAB

**Emerald ash borers can decimate entire counties.
But research shows that proactive treatment can save the trees.**



Editors' note: This is an excerpt of "Insecticide Options for Protecting Ash Trees from Emerald Ash Borer," which was produced in June 2009 by the North Central IPM Center and distributed with support by cooperative agreements from the USDA's Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) and the U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area, Forest Health Protection. You can download the full report at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

Emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis* Fairmaire), an invasive insect native to Asia, has killed tens of millions of ash trees in urban, rural and forested settings.

This beetle was first discovered in the U.S. in 2002 in southeast Michigan and Windsor, Ontario. As of April, emerald ash borer (EAB) infestations were known to be present in 13 states and two Canadian provinces. Many arborists and tree care professionals want to protect valuable ash trees from EAB. Scientists have learned much about this insect and methods to protect ash trees since 2002. This article is designed to provide the most current information on insecticide options for controlling EAB.

SOIL-APPLIED SYSTEMIC INSECTICIDES.
Systemic insecticides applied to the soil

are taken up by the roots and translocated throughout the tree. The most widely tested soil-applied systemic insecticide for control of EAB is imidacloprid, which is available under several brand names for use by professional applicators and homeowners (see Table 1).

All imidacloprid formulations can be applied as a drench by mixing the product with water, then pouring the solution directly on the soil around the base of the trunk.

Dinotefuran was recently labeled for use against EAB as a soil treatment (in addition to its use as a basal trunk spray discussed below). Studies to test its effectiveness as a soil treatment are currently underway in Michigan and Ohio. Imidacloprid soil applications should be made when the soil is moist but not saturated. Application to water-logged soil can result in poor uptake if the insecticide



As of April, emerald ash borer (EAB) infestations were known to be present in 13 states and two Canadian provinces.

becomes excessively diluted and can also result in puddles of insecticide that could wash away, potentially contaminating surface waters and storm sewers.

Insecticide uptake will also be limited when soil is excessively dry. Irrigating the soil surrounding the base of the tree before the insecticide application can improve uptake.

The application rates for the homeowner product (Bayer Advanced Tree & Shrub Insect Control) and professional formulations of imidacloprid are very similar. Homeowners apply the same amount of active ingredient that professionals apply. However, there are certain restrictions on the use of homeowner formulations that do not apply to professional formulations. Homeowner formulations of imidacloprid can be applied only as a drench. It's not legal to inject these products into the

soil, although some companies have marketed devices to homeowners specifically for this purpose. Homeowners are also restricted to making only one application per year. Several generic products containing imidacloprid are available to homeowners, but the formulations vary and the effectiveness of these products has not yet been evaluated in university tests.

Soil drenches offer the advantage of requiring no special equipment for application other than a bucket or watering can. However, imidacloprid can bind to surface layers of organic matter, such as mulch or leaf litter, which can reduce uptake by the tree.

Before applying soil drenches, it's important to remove, rake or pull away any mulch or dead leaves so the insecticide solution is poured directly on the mineral soil. Imidacloprid formulations labeled

EAB FAQs

What options do I have for treating ash trees? Will insecticides still be effective? Are treatments worth it? Get answers to common questions from clients about EAB treatments at www.lawnandlandscape.com. Search for "EAB FAQs."



EMERALD ASH BORER

Table 1. Insecticide options for professionals for controlling EAB that have been tested in multiple university trials. Some products may not be labeled for use in all states. Some of the listed products failed to protect ash trees when they were applied at labeled rates. Inclusion of a product does not imply that it's endorsed by *Lawn & Landscape*, the authors or has been consistently effective for EAB control.

Insecticide Formulation	Active Ingredient	Application Method	Recommended Timing
PROFESSIONAL USE PRODUCTS			
Merit (75WP, 75WSP, 2F)	Imidacloprid	Soil injection or drench	Mid-fall and/or mid- to late spring
Xytect (2F, 75WSP)	Imidacloprid	Soil injection or drench	Mid-fall and/or mid- to late spring
IMA-jet	Imidacloprid	Trunk injection	Early May to mid-June
Imicide	Imidacloprid	Trunk injection	Early May to mid-June
TREE-äge	Emamectin benzoate	Trunk injection	Early May to mid-June
Inject-A-Cide B	Bidrin	Trunk injection	Early May to mid-June
Safari (20 SG)	Dinotefuran	Soil injection or drench; systemic bark spray	Early May to mid-June
Astro	Permethrin	Preventive bark and foliage cover sprays	Two applications at four-week intervals; first spray should occur when black locust is blooming (early May in southern Ohio to early June in mid-Michigan)
Onyx	Bifenthrin		
Tempo	Cyfluthrin		
Sevin SL	Carbaryl		
HOMEOWNER FORMULATION			
Bayer Advanced Tree & Shrub Insect Control	Imidacloprid	Soil drench	Mid-fall or mid- to late spring

for use by professionals can be applied as a soil drench or as soil injections.

Soil injections require specialized equipment, but offer the advantage of placing the insecticide under mulch or turf and directly into the root zone. This also can help to prevent runoff on sloped surfaces. Injections should be made just deep enough to place the insecticide beneath the soil surface (2 to 4 inches). Soil injections should be made within 18 inches of the trunk where the density of fine roots is highest. As you move away from the tree, large radial roots diverge like spokes on a wheel and studies have shown that uptake is higher when the product is applied at the base of the trunk. No studies show that applying fertilizer with imidacloprid enhances uptake or effectiveness of the insecticide.

Optimal timing for imidacloprid soil injections and drenches is mid-April to mid-May, depending on your region. Allow four to six weeks for uptake and distribution of the insecticide within the tree. In southern Ohio, for example, you would apply the product by mid-April; in southern Michigan, you should apply the product by early to mid-May.

When treating larger trees (e.g., with trunks larger than 12 inches in diameter), treat on the earlier side of the recommended timing. Large trees will require more time for uptake and transportation of the insecticide than will small trees. Recent tests show that imidacloprid soil treatments also can be successful when applied in the fall.

TRUNK-INJECTED SYSTEMIC INSECTICIDES. Several systemic insecticide products

can be injected directly into the trunk of the tree including formulations of imidacloprid and emamectin benzoate (see Table 1).

An advantage of trunk injections is they can be used on sites where soil treatments may not be practical or effective, including trees growing on excessively wet, compacted or restricted soil environments. However, trunk injections do wound the trunk, which may cause long-term damage, especially if treatments are applied annually.

Products applied as trunk injections are typically absorbed and transported within the tree more quickly than soil applications. Allow three to four weeks for most trunk-injected products to move through the tree.

Optimal timing of trunk injections occurs after trees have leafed out in spring

but before EAB eggs have hatched, or generally between mid-May and mid-June. Uptake of trunk-injected insecticides will be most efficient when trees are actively transpiring.

Best results are usually obtained by injecting trees in the morning when soil is moist but not saturated. Uptake will be slowed by hot afternoon temperatures and dry soil conditions.

NONINVASIVE, SYSTEMIC BASAL TRUNK SPRAYS. Dinotefuran is labeled for application as a noninvasive, systemic bark spray for EAB control. It belongs to the same chemical class as imidacloprid (neonicotinoids) but is much more soluble.

The formulated insecticide is sprayed on the lower five to six feet of the trunk using a common garden sprayer and

low pressure. Research has shown that the insecticide penetrates the bark and moves systemically throughout the rest of the tree. Dinotefuran can be mixed with surfactants that may facilitate its movement into the tree, particularly on large trees with thick bark. However, in field trials, adding a surfactant did not consistently increase the amount of insecticide recovered from the leaves of treated trees.

The basal trunk spray offers the advantage of being quick and easy to apply and requires no special equipment other than a garden sprayer. This application technique does not wound the tree, and when applied correctly, the insecticide does not enter the soil.

PROTECTIVE COVER SPRAYS. Insecticides can be sprayed on the trunk, branches

More EAB on the Web

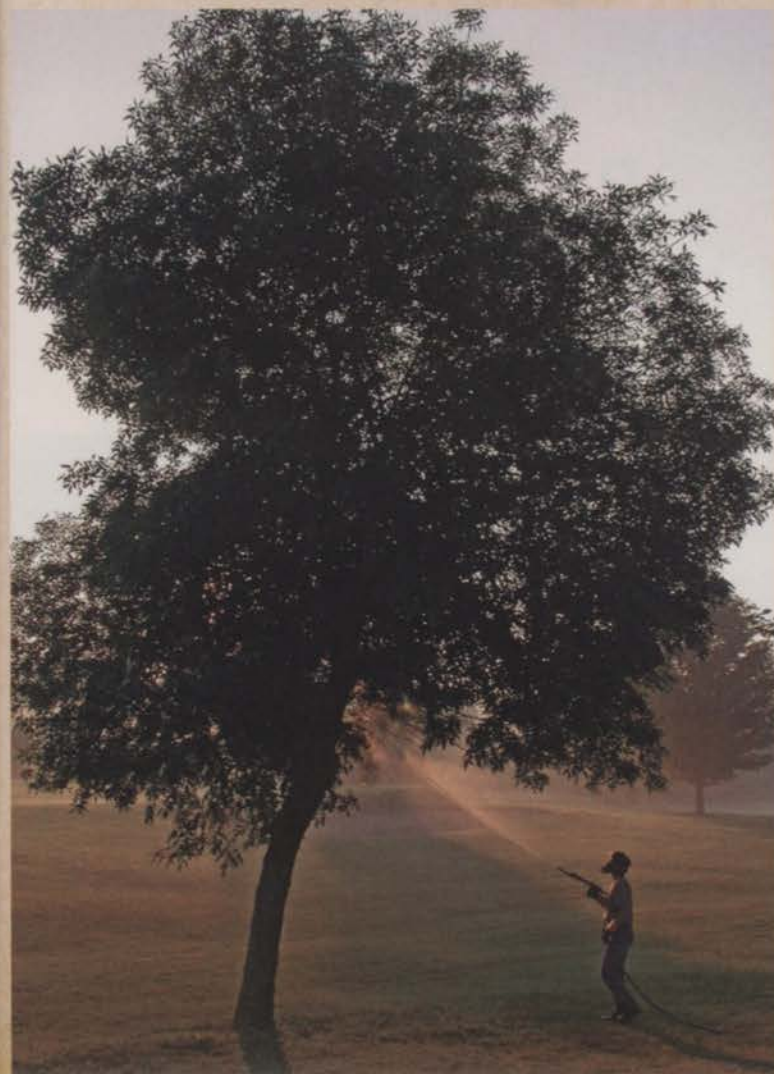
Visit www.emeraldashborer.info to view a series of webinars on the history of EAB, and the latest research on its control.

Visit www.ashalert.osu.edu for a green industry-specific page including research, bulletins and tip for managing EAB, including ash replacement suggestions for urban and woodland plantings.



and (depending on the label) foliage to kill adult EAB beetles as they feed on ash leaves, and newly hatched larvae as they chew through the bark.

Thorough coverage is essential for best results. Products that have been evaluated as cover sprays for control of EAB include some specific formulations



Left: An applicator performs a protective cover spray. Below: A tree care worker loads a spray tank.



EMERALD ASH BORER

of permethrin, bifenthrin, cyfluthrin and carbaryl (see Table 1).

Protective cover sprays are designed to prevent EAB from entering the tree and will have no effect on larvae feeding under the bark. Cover sprays should be timed to occur when most adult beetles are feeding and beginning to lay eggs.

Adult activity can be difficult to monitor because there are no effective

pheromone traps for EAB. However, first emergence of EAB adults generally occurs between 450-550 degree days (starting date of January 1, base temperature of 50°F), which corresponds closely with full bloom of black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*).

For best results, consider two applications, one at 500 DD50 (as black locust approaches full bloom) and a

second spray four weeks later. **L**

Daniel A. Herms is a professor of entomology at The Ohio State University; Deborah G. McCullough is a professor of entomology and forestry and David R. Smitley is a professor of entomology at Michigan State University; Clifford S. Sadof is a professor of entomology at Purdue University; R. Chris Williamson is an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension; and Philip L. Nixon is an extension entomologist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



Tracking EAB

- SUMMER 2002:** EAB discovered in southeastern Michigan near Detroit.
- SUMMER 2002:** EAB confirmed in Ontario.
- FEBRUARY 2003:** EAB confirmed in Ohio.
- APRIL 2004:** EAB confirmed in Indiana.
- JUNE 2006:** EAB confirmed in Illinois.
- AUGUST 2006:** EAB reconfirmed in Maryland. It was first detected in the state in 2003, but was eradicated in March 2004.
- JUNE 2007:** EAB confirmed in Pennsylvania.
- OCTOBER 2007:** EAB found in West Virginia.
- JULY 2008:** EAB confirmed in Missouri.
- SUMMER 2008:** EAB confirmed in Quebec.
- JULY 2008:** EAB reconfirmed in Virginia. It was first detected in 2003, but had been eradicated.
- AUGUST 2008:** EAB first positively identified in southeast Wisconsin.
- MAY 2009:** EAB confirmed in Minnesota.
- MAY 2009:** EAB confirmed in Kentucky.
- JUNE 2009:** EAB confirmed in New York.

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FACTORING IN GRUBS

Many factors come into play when deciding if, when and how to treat for grubs – and how to position your program for customers. By Marisa Palmieri

The last thing a lawn care operator wants is a ticked-off customer, and not many things irritate customers more than white grubs, says Jack Robertson, president of Jack Robertson Lawn Care, Springfield, Ill.

Why? In addition to being gross-looking insects, they're a tasty treat for pests like raccoons, which roll up large swaths of lawn to find them; skunks, which probe for them with their snouts; and crows and other birds, which pull up tufts of turf.

In short, they attract critters that have no problem damaging a previously well-manicured lawn to fulfill their appetites.

CONTROL METHODS. When it comes to controlling white grubs, there are three types of treatments, says Stan Swier, extension professor at the University of New Hampshire. They include:

- Preventive treatments, which occur before summer larva are present (April through early July);
- Curative treatments, which take place when the larva are present (mid-July through August); and
- Rescue treatments, which take place when damage is occurring (fall).

Lawn care applicators are in a difficult spot when it comes to controlling grubs and many turf insects, says Dan Potter, professor of turf and insect landscape entomology at the University of Kentucky

in Lexington.

Why? Because they can be destructive and difficult to predict and the use of older insecticides is becoming increasingly restricted, especially where children may be exposed. Plus, there's the resistance issue. There are many effective products on the market for preventive applications, and although there are no known documented cases of resistance to white grubs yet, it's still concern some people have for the future.

So what's an LCO to do? Potter suggests reducing any unnecessary treatments and not overusing any one class of chemistry.

When monitoring their clients' lawns for grubs, LCOs should take samples of

4-by-4-inch squares (equal to 0.1 square feet) and take 10 samples in a given area (for a total of 1 square foot).

If there are five or more grubs per square foot, treating is justified, Swier says. Other factors to consider when deciding to treat for grubs include:

- The grub species and size of grub; thresholds vary;
- Turfgrass species;
- Turf use;
- Predator damage (skunks, raccoons, birds, etc.);
- Turf vigor – healthy vs. weak turf;
- Time of year – fall vs. spring;
- Tolerance for damage; and
- Budget.

Local extension agents and/or suppliers will have more information about how these factors come into play in your area.

REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS. For example, in areas with high grub populations, preventive treatments may be the norm.

"We learned a long time ago that we don't want our customers to have grubs," Robertson says. The Midwest, where Robertson operates, is a highly grub-

WHY GRUB INSECTICIDES FAIL

Are you having efficacy issues with your grub control programs? Take a look at four common reasons grub applications fail, according to Stan Swier of the University of New Hampshire, to see if you need to make some tweaks.

Timing

Early treatments of neonicotinoids may disappear before fall.



Calibration

Watch out for applicator mistakes: skips and low rates.



Thatch

Binds chemical.



Watering

0.2 to 0.5 inches is best. Irrigate dry turf first, then apply.



INSECT CONTROL

prone region, so it didn't make sense for him to wait until customers inevitably got grubs and got upset about it before treating for them.

"After the fact the customer's thinking is, 'If this is what I needed, why weren't

you doing it?'" he says.

On top of that irritation, when it came to curative applications, customers were burdened with having to water in the product, so now they had to do some work themselves.

"That said, one year we had a really bad grub problem and we told all our customers we're going to make preventive grub control mandatory and if they wish not to have it, they can let us know."

Cruising for grubs



Have you ever seen a truck with a grub on the hood?

Jack Robertson Lawn Care has a unique approach to marketing its grub control service. The Springfield, Ill.-based lawn care company has a NASCAR-ized Ford pick-up painted with a giant grub on the hood. The truck is 4 years old – it was added in 2006 as part of the marketing effort for the company's 30th anniversary – but it's still creating buzz.

"It created a lot of conversation when we first started using it, especially because the rest of our trucks are all white with red stripes and a logo on the door," President Jack Robertson says. "They're very simple. This one is anything but."

Even today, clients still comment about the truck. Last year a client wanted to take pictures of his grandson in the truck.

Robertson, a casual NASCAR fan, came up with the concept to stripe the car in such a way and spent about \$3,000 to do so. It was a joint project with suppliers, which helped offset some of the costs.

Though he says it's difficult to quantify how much business it's brought in, he says it's paid for itself over four years. "We do a large number of grub applications for our accounts," he says. "It's created quite a bit of interest. It creates conversation; conversation is customer contact and from there comes sales."



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Robertson's been operating that way since the 1990s with good results. He says less than 5 percent of clients opt out of the preventive grub control.

ADD-ON SERVICE. Lawn Doctor, the Holmdel, N.J.-based franchise, prefers to handle grub control as an add-on service. It's either a preventive or rescue application – not part of the company's standard Maintainer Care program.

"Grub control is sold to existing customers in the renewal process," says John Buechner, director of technical services, adding that the recommendations to clients to add it is based on history and grub pressure in the area. "It's sold as a custom service to new customers at the time of evaluation or during beetle flight." Lawn Doctor prices grub applications per 1,000 square feet.

The company's bluegrass markets –

the Northeast and Midwest – are the ones that experience the most grub damage. While the percent of customers opting for grub control varies by franchise, Buechner says that 40 to 80 percent of Lawn Doctor's customers purchase preventive grub control.

MAXIMIZING PROFIT. Weed Pro, based in Sheffield Village, Ohio, also goes with the add-on approach.

"It's actually marketed as 'Grub and Insect Control' to our customers," says President Rob Palmer. "We do this because most homeowners don't know the difference between grub damage and other insect damage, such as billbugs and chinch bugs. Often, they see damage in their lawn and blame it on grubs and their lawn care provider."

Weed Pro sees its "total insect control" approach as a way to set itself apart from

“Most homeowners don't know the difference between grub damage and other insect damage.”

— Rob Palmer

how others in the market are selling grub control. Plus, Weed Pro offers a season-long guarantee on the service.

"Our grub control product comes with a strong warranty from Bayer, so we pass that on to our customers," Palmer says.

About 75 percent of clients receive the application preventively, which goes down in late April in combination with

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INSECT CONTROL

a standard fertilizer application. The early-season application also suppresses chinch bugs and control billbugs.

"This allows us to cut down on labor costs by applying it at the same time," Palmer says. "We, of course, charge our customer for the materials, but combining the application allows us to maximize our profits for this service."

MARGINAL CONCERN. In regions where grubs aren't as much of a threat, lawn care companies offer grub control, but it's less prevalent.

For example, in Sacramento, Calif., where Nick Shebert is technical consultant for TurfPro, grubs are a nuisance, not a major problem.

"We get maybe two or three cases out of the 400 I manage where I'll see a grub infestation," he says. "It's nothing like they see back East or in the Midwest.

There will maybe be a couple grubs per square foot, so it's not much for us."

TurfPro does offer the service if treating is justified or if a client asks for it specifically.

"People who aren't from the area will sometimes ask for it," he says. "We explain that it's not a big problem for us, but if they want it, we'll offer it," he says. "Five percent or less of our clients are getting preventive applications, and that's all residential."

For the company's commercial accounts, Shebert will spot treat if he starts to see a problem, but it's rare. For curative grub control, because it's such a small service, Shebert bills clients on a time and materials basis. For preventive control, it's priced per 1,000 square foot.

"Grubs are nowhere near the problem that they were when I was in the

Midwest and East Coast," says Gary LaScalea, president of GroGreen, Plano, Texas. For him, being in a primarily bermudagrass market, grub control is an optional preventive program or a curative application when damage is detected and diagnosed later in the season.

About 10 to 15 percent of customers subscribe to preventive grub control, which is primarily marketed with leave-behind literature and based on technicians' recommendations. The average cost for a preventive grub application is one and a half times that of a client's regular application program price.

"Grub control in our market is quite profitable, but the sense of awareness and urgency isn't as big of an issue here," he says. "The biggest problem in our market is primarily fire ants." **L**

The author is senior editor of *Lawn & Landscape*.

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Labor numbers and loss leaders

I'm trying to get into any market I can just to stay in business. Can I use my same general and administrative overhead numbers for commercial work as residential? Can I use the same labor numbers for construction as I do for maintenance?

Markets throughout the U.S. are down and more competitive than ever. Many contractors submit bids that are below their break-even point; and in some cases, below their direct costs. Pricing for commercial and residential lawn maintenance, fertilization and irrigation service work is also tightening as more contractors are getting into these markets.

The short answer for these questions is no. You shouldn't use commercial rates to bid residential work. You also shouldn't price residential and commercial maintenance using the same labor rates. Here's why:

Maintenance labor tends to be 5-10 percent lower than construction labor. Construction general and administrative (G&A) overhead runs roughly twice that of maintenance per man-hour. Construction work is much more management intensive than maintenance work. Due to its repetitiveness, a maintenance supervisor can supervise twice as many laborers as does a construction supervisor. Normal G&A overhead per man-hour (I call this OPH) for a seasonal construction company runs \$15-\$18, while that of a seasonal maintenance company runs \$8-\$10.

All else being equal, and without including equipment costs, the cost for a \$10 laborer with

just G&A overhead would be \$20 for maintenance and \$28 for construction. That's a huge difference – 40 percent more at this level.

Also, the difference between commercial and residential maintenance G&A overhead, and commercial and residential installation G&A overhead is less pronounced. However, it's real and it is measurable.

Commercial maintenance and installation work is easier to manage. Dealing with homeowners requires more time and meticulousness on the part of management than does the commercial equivalent. This is one of the reasons why \$10 million- or \$20

in what I call a hyper-competitive market. This is a market where there are lots of contractors (often the number is increasing steadily) chasing a limited amount of work.

In a hyper-competitive market, the pressure is for contractors to get creative and bid work at their break-even point (BEP). This means that they are pricing their work without net profit. Material, labor, labor burden, equipment costs are covered as is G&A overhead – this is the BEP. However, no or minimal net profit is added to the BEP. The contractor hopes to make up for lost net profit with enhancement or extras added to contracts. This strategy can work, but it's dangerous. What happens if you don't get work beyond the contract amount? The theory is that you'll at least break even, and you can accurately identify your BEP.

Recessions create this price-war mentality, and you can even justify it to an extent. However, once contractors are driven to pricing work at their break-even point, it takes years for a given market to recover. On the other hand, offering loss leaders in a normal market is a strategy that most contractors don't need to put on the table.

How do you compete? Two things: First, provide excellent service to your customer base. This tends to make them more loyal to you (and your prices). Second, know your numbers. If you have to price work at break-even, know how to calculate your BEP. A little education in arithmetic can go a long way to enhance your bottom line. **L**

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million-plus commercial contractors are much more common than large residential ones. On average, G&A overhead per man-hour for commercial companies is 10-20 percent less than for residential companies. The difference is less pronounced than the difference between maintenance and construction G&A overhead but it is less.

My competitors seem to get every bid. It appears as if they're working for almost nothing. I work at my break-even point or below already. How do I compete?

This situation is not only a reflection of the current market, but it's also a scenario that we often see



JIM HUSTON

runs J.R. Huston Consulting, specializing in green industry consulting. Reach him at 800-451-5588, huston@gie.net or via www.jrhuston.biz. To purchase his book, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/store.

Not just pipes and hardware

Sprinkler and rotor manufacturers are focusing on three things: efficiency, features that create the potential for conservation and contractor education.

Efficiency comes from nozzle design and pressure control that optimizes the dispersing of small, medium and large droplets over near, middle and far distances.

In rotors, nozzle design typically works as follows: the objective is to send the most water as far away from the sprinkler as possible. As the distance from the sprinkler increases, the amount of area covered increases greatly. To “shoot” water to the end of the radius takes a high velocity and a trajectory somewhere between 20 to 35 degrees from horizontal. As the water passes the peak of the trajectory and begins falling, the large drops begin to break up into smaller drops.

Simple physics determines that larger drops maintain a higher velocity and are least likely to be deflected by wind. The mid-range distance from the nozzle gets some water that’s “peeled” from the primary stream by mechanical means such as a dispersal screw, and, to a lesser extent, the outer layer of the stream – through friction with air – becomes unstable and breaks away.

With larger rotors, the near distance usually is addressed by a separate nozzle designed to disperse smaller drops at less velocity that quickly fall to the ground.

Most nozzles do a better job of sending water to the end of the arc, which highlights why head spacing with overlapping cover-

age is absolutely critical to the uniform application of water. Head spacing should *never* be stretched beyond the recommended nozzle radius. All of the principles described for the rotors apply to sprayhead nozzles as well.

Conservation is achieved by how the hardware is utilized ... As an industry, what we need to sell is **water management efficiency**, not just pipes and hardware.

PART OF THE ANSWER. There are new sprayhead nozzles on the market that achieve higher levels of efficiency than was previously possible. Toro won the Irrigation Association’s New Product of the Year (2008) with the introduction of its Precision Series Spray Nozzles. A fundamentally different approach to water dispersal achieves a 30 percent reduction in precipitation rate, matched precipitation and better definition to the edges of the spray patterns. The reduction in precipitation rate is significant because it provides more opportunity for water to infiltrate without run-off.

Another approach to higher application efficiency is Hunter’s MP Rotator. These multistream nozzles have a low precipitation

rate and are relatively wind resistant. They offer an excellent and much needed option in 14- to 30-foot radii. Nozzle families that have matched precipitation rates are vital to efficient irrigation. That inherent potential will be fully realized when the scheduling of the run times matches plant water need, which changes throughout the year to coincide with the length of days and average temperatures.

Manufacturers are resegmenting their product lines for an evolving market created by municipal efficiency mandates and conservation requirements. They are refining key features that aid conservation. These features include in-head check valves, in-stem pressure regulation and specialty features like Toro’s X-flow device, which will sense if a nozzle is removed and shutdown water flow.

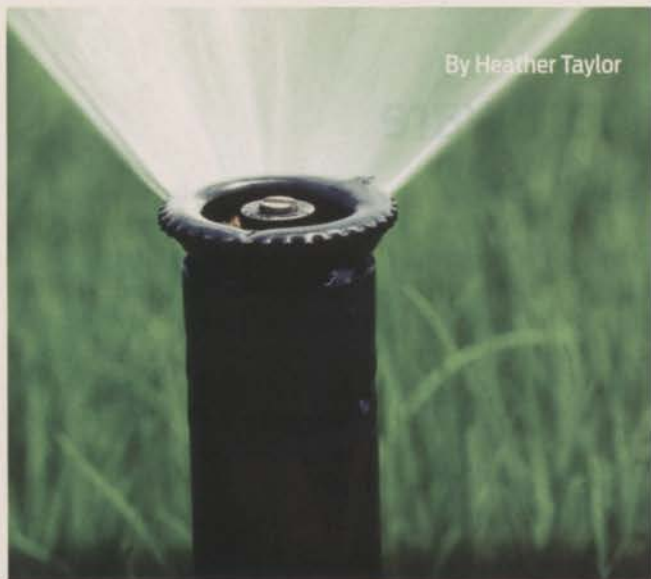
Conservation is achieved by how the hardware is utilized. To capture all the potential for conservation requires an understanding of the basics.

Manufacturers are increasing their commitment to contractor education to enhance the opportunity for their hardware to be put to its best use. For example, Rain Bird’s Web site offers a range of free how-to pieces, as well as tools that help forecast and quantify water savings.

These and other manufacturers’ similar offerings educate and help the contractor sell efficiency to the end user. As an industry, what we need to sell is water management efficiency, not just pipes and hardware. **L**



JOHN OSSA
is the owner of Irrigation Essentials, a Web-based irrigation resource and consulting firm located in San Rafael, Calif. Reach him at john@irrigationessentials.com or via his Web site at www.irrigationessentials.com.



By Heather Taylor

Irrigation investing

Sunburst Landscaping helps customers see their ROI.

In these uncertain economic times, irrigation clients find peace of mind knowing that their investment in their irrigation systems is paying off. At least, that's what Nick Strehle of Johns Island, S.C.-based Sunburst Landscaping has found.

"Whenever possible, we work with our clients and prospective clients about how we can change the irrigation system to be more efficient

and provide healthier plants and trees," Strehle says.

Sunburst offers return on investment estimates and customers have responded well, he adds. "Especially now, people need to make sure their money is working hard and as much as possible for them each and every day."

Irrigation work makes up only 4.3 percent of the company's total sales in a mix of

50 percent commercial, 40 percent residential and 10 percent government work. Still, Strehle has taken steps to prove that his company is an authority in irrigation efficiency. As a result, he has learned that with the right mix of right products, knowledge and a network, irrigation customer satisfaction is within a rotor's throw.

DESIGN OVER PRODUCT. Even the best sprayheads and rotors will be less efficient if the planning is subpar, Strehle says.

"Engineers are great at developing a more efficient water delivery product, but the design stops there," he says. "The products we choose on each job are only as good as our design."

With that in mind, Strehle keeps sprayhead and rotor purchases simple, sticking to the major brands and only a few types. He has adapters on hand to connect to other brands' components.

ALL ABOUT THE NETWORK. Strehle counts on a reliable supplier network to get the right parts quickly, especially since he doesn't keep many

extra parts in stock.

"Sunburst is a smaller company that uses the system of, 'Hey we are out or down to the last one,'" he says. "All of the irrigation parts are located in their own plastic bins. Before each major project, the bins are checked and refilled if necessary. We also prefer to buy by the box or large package."

Sunburst doesn't have a dedicated irrigation truck because the work accounts for such a small percentage of the company's sales. If it did, Strehle would opt for a Dodge Sprinter.

MAINTAINING A CLIENT LIST. Strehle doesn't find it wise to mark up head replacement services. "My dad likes to use this analogy, 'You can charge people \$30 for a steak, but you can not charge them \$5 for a standard cup of coffee,'" he says. "I think the same is true for head replacement. I would run someone off if they wanted their minimum charge plus the cost of the head."

Instead, head repair service functions as a loss leader for the business, he says. He hopes providing outstand-



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
ing service in this area will encourage clients to return to them for other services.

OTHER VITAL TOOLS. Strehle has found other non-irrigation tools useful in spreading the word that Sunburst offers efficient sprayhead and rotor installation and maintenance. For example, being certified helps Strehle keep up with the latest technology. Besides having a bachelor's degree in agriculture, he is an Irrigation Association-certified irrigation contractor; he's also a WaterSense Partner.

Strehle also submits educational articles to the local newspaper, which provides some publicity for the compa-

ny. One of his recent articles illustrated ways to make sure an irrigation system is running efficiently. Of the calls about the articles, the majority are about the irrigation-related topics, he says.

But the one tool that might come in most handy in Strehle's dealings with sprayheads and rotors is an understanding of what customers want. Lately, the most efficient system in the world usually isn't at the top of the list.

"As a whole, individuals have been more concerned with the bottom line rather than a well-thought-out design," he says. 

The author is a freelance writer based in Lakewood, Ohio.

PROFIT IN PARTS

Michael Galli pitches water savings through new, more efficient heads and rotors.

To help his customers save water, Michael Galli, owner of Metamorphosis Landscaping, Milbrae, Calif., has been retrofitting the systems his company maintains with pressure-regulating heads, which can save up to 30 percent more water than traditional models, and his customers love it.

"We don't do the traditional irrigation audit as much; we roll an irrigation upgrade as part of a landscape upgrade," Galli says, adding that he's sold enough of those landscape upgrades to keep crews busy until September. Galli's clients are 100 percent high-end residential, and about 10 percent of his \$1 million in revenue came from irrigation work last year.

Galli sends a letter to each of his clients in February to remind them about what maintenance is due. He always includes a paragraph on improving the irrigation system — that a smart controller can help save up to 40 percent of a system's water costs. Galli says contractors should position themselves as resources for their customers. "First, educate yourself. It's really important to be truly educated about the product," he says. "Clients will buy more from you if they see you as a resource, not a salesman." — *Chuck Bowen*

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Trailers: tried & true

Trailers are one tool most contractors can't live without.

By Lindsey Getz

For Timothy Baird, purchasing an older trailer has been the path toward growing his one-man business. The owner of Mars, Pa.-based Hickory Leaf Landscape bought a 1999 International 16-foot dual axle open landscape trailer that wasn't in the best shape.

"I decided a good way to save money over a comparable new trailer would be to buy this old one and fix it up," he says. "This year I plan to use the trailer to help grow my business by hauling my mowing equipment, landscape materials and debris."

Many contractors say a trailer is one tool they can't live without. "There really is no way of being in the landscape business without trailers," says Greg Bermes, owner, Oakwood Lawn and Landscape, a Fort Wayne, Ind.-based company with about \$300,000 in annual revenue. Oakwood Lawn has four trailers – one 20-foot enclosed, a 16-foot high side, a 24-foot implement and one

10-foot utility – all from Sure-Trac. Bermes says that quality is the primary feature he looks for when shopping for a trailer because he expects it to last a long time.

"Other features I look for are things that will allow the trailer to be used easily and efficiently for as many different tasks as possible," he says. "Sure-Trac's hinge system on the open trailers is unique and allows the gate to be removed easily, locked in the upright position quickly, or laid down on the bed of the trailer. This allows pallets of material to be loaded without the gate in the way."

“There really is no way of being in the landscape business without trailers.”

– Greg Bermes, Oakwood Lawn and Landscape

The ability to customize his trailers is another draw for Bermes. Customization is also important for Ghani Kowsary, president of Kowsary Turf, a sod contractor servicing primarily com-

mercial clientele in Elk River, Minn. He purchased two custom semi/dump trailers from Felling Trailers in 2006. Adding these two trailers has increased his company's efficiency due to their size and versatility. "They're kind of like transformers in the sense that they can do everything we need," he says. "Rather than sending out two or three trucks to a job, we're able to just send one truck."

As part of ensuring a trailer will meet company needs, it's also important to look at the weight they can handle, advises Kevin Payne, owner of TenderCare Lawn & Landscape, based in Derby, Kan.

"Ramps are also very important," he says. "Just because the weight works, if the ramp isn't solid enough to drive a skid-steer loader on, then it might not meet your needs."

TO EACH HIS OWN. When it comes to the right tools for the job, everyone has his own preference. Payne says that his company has found enclosed trailers are not for them.

"We've tried some and found they were OK for small landscape jobs that needed container plants or smaller items, but when you need

to haul around a lot, they weren't very helpful," he says. "I find that an open trailer has more versatility."

For others, trailers aren't the best option. Shayne Newman, CLP, CLT, president of

Yard Apes in northwest Connecticut, says he used trailers for the first 10 years of his business but, over time, found they didn't work for him.


He says they require constant maintenance, don't enough storage and can be difficult to back up.

"We've had issues such as backing into someone's yard and hitting a shrub – just small accidents, but a hassle to deal with," Newman says. "And no matter how many times we re-wired them, it seemed the lights were always going out."

Today, Newman uses Mitsubishi FG trucks with a 14-foot landscape body and a five-foot beaver tail with fold-down ramp. "The beaver tail is removable so that we can plow in the winter," he says. "This setup has worked great for us."

To read about how garden center owner Dan Gapski turned his trailer concept into a business opportunity, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/webextras.

The bottom line is that no matter what specific option you choose, it should be one that will grow your business. For Baird, that's been the case. His advice to others is to opt for the biggest and best you can afford within your budget.

"I could have bought a smaller, lighter trailer in better shape for the same amount of money," he says. "But since I've bought that trailer, I can't imagine having one smaller. To me, I'm always willing to spend more money if it makes my job easier." 

The author is a freelance writer based in Royersford, Pa.

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The 100% List

Sarros Landscaping focused on what it wouldn't change first to find out what it should. By Phil Sarros

In the winter of 2007, I stood on three acres of land with my team of managers, office staff, foremen and laborers – 21 employees in all – and our fleet of late model trucks and equipment. The purchase of this property marked a major milestone in our company's growth and was now home to our rapidly expanding landscape operation. I took in another deep breath, cleared my throat and addressed my team.

Then the economy collapsed.

What ultimately saved our company from failure was the painful but immediate decision to downsize our operation. Our reaction to the economic crisis was swift and expedient, thanks to the data and reporting we used to monitor our financial health. By April 2008, we had sold over half our fleet and recouped most of our money. By July 2008, our property was up for sale and we were operating with only two crews, and just one manager.

Since that time, we have completely redesigned the business model under which we operate. In many cases, starting or rebuilding a company begins by documenting a solid foundation. With the help of a good business coach, this process can be off to a very strong start in a matter of one or two days.

However, it occurred to me that the transformation we made at Sarros Landscaping could in fact be traced to a single, first step, that became the basis for every decision and policy that followed.

I remembered a meeting with my senior staff where I mentioned that we were going to write a "100 Percent List" and, for lack of a better name, the list still appears with that

To create stunning installations for clients, your company needs to be on solid footing itself.



Simple ways to stand out from the crowd

Winning Combinations

As hardscape contractor you are an artist, with a full palette of products, colors and styles that can be intermixed to provide a never-ending choice of designs. Consider brick pavers that tie into a natural set fieldstone path or simply mix two colors of the same material throughout a design. Holland stone borders with Ashlar field patterns and organically curved perimeters demonstrate professionalism and artistry far beyond much of the competition. Paver circle kits shouldn't break the budget and offer elegance to even the most simple designs.

Branch Out

Integrate arbors, pergolas, gazebos, under-deck systems and landscape lighting to give the homeowner a completely finished project. Carry pictures and examples to show the finished look. If you're not sure where to start, just reach out to your local manufacturer's representative for guidance, product knowledge and training. Most have a library of finished project photographs and a wealth of knowledge to help get you started. Alternatively, you can build a relationship with a qualified subcontractor, capable of performing these add-on services for you. These partnerships will add credibility and value to your company and set you apart from others competing for the same project.

Heat Things Up

Suggest fire pits (raised, sunken, square, round, etc.) as an affordable element that will give your clients a reason to invite friends to gather on their new patio. Outdoor kitchens have become incredibly simple with new manufacturers and technologies offering a variety of pre-formed or pre-cast solutions. These design options can encourage clients to increase their budget on a project or, at the very least, give them a great reason to call you back next season for additional work.

same title to this day. This list defines, with 100 percent certainty, every value, action, principal, method or strategy, from which we will not deviate even a fraction of one percent.

Whether you're a contractor who needs to make a change or are just starting out, the 100 Percent List should sit at the core of your principals and beliefs. Don't make it a long list. Entrepreneurs must remain flexible and adapt processes to meet changing conditions.

While there are many possibilities, here are just a few items that a business owner might consider putting on their own 100 Percent List:

BE A DEBT FREE COMPANY. Make a commitment never to borrow money to operate your business. Do not jeopardize your credit, your home, your family and your peace of mind by over-committing your resources and taking on loans that will burden you for many years. If you cannot afford it, you shouldn't buy it.

OPERATE LEGALLY. This one's pretty simple: Just follow the law in everything you do. Ignorance is not a legal defense and you are never too small to have problems. It doesn't matter what your competition is, or is not, doing nor should it ever keep you from selling jobs. If it does, you are not targeting the right clients. I strongly recommend having a trusted attorney involved in all legal aspects of your business.

DO EXTRAORDINARY WORK. Make a commitment to continued education. Test for your ICPI and NCMA certifications. Take the time to admire quality work, especially if it is not your own.

You will never get a bad reputation from fixing a mistake or problem for one of your customers. My grandfather was a blue-collar business owner with an impeccable work ethic and an abundance of common sense. He used to tell me, "Good enough just isn't good enough."

CASH IN ON CREDIT CARDS

Cash might still be king, but a business today isn't going to go far if it doesn't take plastic.

As home prices have continued to fall, the amount of equity available for home improvements has dried up, leaving home owners with their savings or credit cards to finance their landscape and hardscape projects.

"We noticed in the fall of 2008, if you didn't have more than 80 percent equity in your home, after the amount you wanted to borrow, you weren't going to get the financing needed to finish your backyard," says Brian Price, president of Rockwood Retaining Walls, which licenses concrete paver and retaining products. "As we reviewed our plans for 2009, we became

very concerned. How were homeowners going to afford our products, if they weren't able to get financing?"

That concern led Rockwood to partner with First Data Independent Sales (FDIS) Rochester, to create a "Pay As You Go" credit card acceptance program specifically targeted at landscape contractors.

The program offers a flat rate of 2.99 percent, regardless of the type of credit card taken or how it is processed. It charges no fees for applications, set up, customer service or for terminals, Price says.

New technologies such as wireless credit card terminals and cell phone

applications allow payments to happen at the customer's door instead of the back office.

"There is a tremendous advantage for landscapers to take a down payment at the door, with a credit card, instead of having to come back only to realize the sale was lost," Price says. "By offering your customers flexible payment options, especially for down payments, you will close more sales faster, easier and for larger amounts."



SHARE YOUR WISDOM. There is very little of what we are now doing that I would consider proprietary. It is vital that as an industry, we come together and support one another. As a whole, we can command higher pricing and more qualified competition while improving client education. Don't be shy about sharing ideas with your peers.

RESPECT THE SEASONAL CYCLES. As a rule, spring and fall are incredibly busy seasons, summer can be hit or miss and winter can be brutal. Most every contractor understands this cycle, yet they continue to be negatively impacted by it. The most obvious solution to this problem remains the most commonly overlooked. Simply set enough money aside when sales are high to cover overhead when sales are low.

STAY FOCUSED. Know that it is entirely possible to grow your business, command your price, sell jobs on quality and, dare I say the forbidden words, make a profit. The economy has nothing to do with your ability to sell jobs for a respectable profit margin. Some contractors may emphatically debate this point but I assure you that letting go of fears, honestly evaluating your operations and making needed changes are the key ingredients for operating a profitable company with repeatable results. The good news is that as entrepreneurs, we can have all the success and achievement we are willing to create for ourselves.

These days I stand in front of a rented 2,000 square-foot office warehouse. I have six full-time employees and a small fleet of used trucks. I have one skid-steer and a stockpile of hand tools, saws and compactors that are old and scratched, yet impeccably maintained.

A lot has changed since that winter three years ago, but our dedication to the work and growing the business efficiently and profitably haven't.

The author is president of Sarros Landscaping, Cumming, Ga.

A primer on permeable pavers

By Miles Chaffee

With the rising popularity of permeable pavement systems in residential and commercial landscape designs, it is important for landscape professionals to educate themselves about the different materials available for paving options.

The primary purpose in the design of a permeable paving system is to effectively reduce and manage the quantity of surface rain water runoff while accommodating pedestrians, vehicular parking and traffic. Permeable paving has proven particularly valuable in existing urban developments where the need to expand parking areas is hindered by the lack of space due to retention ponds.

By definition, for a surface to be permeable, it must allow for water to penetrate the surface through porous openings. In segmental or unit paving, the joints are what make the surface permeable. Some surface materials, such as gravel, do not have a solid surface and therefore allow water to pass through to the subsurface.

Typically a subsurface for segmental permeable paving would be designed using a crushed stone base that would provide filtration and partial treatment for rain water runoff pollution.

A full filtration system designed for permeable subsurface soils should allow the storm water to penetrate the surface and filter through the base course and the native soils back into the aquifers. If the capacity of the soil to filtrate the water is exceeded, the base may be designed to filter, partially treat and then slowly release the water into a storm sewer.

The different types of permeable paving have pros and cons. In terms of cost, gravel is the least expensive option. The drawbacks are that it requires frequent maintenance and renewal and the high upkeep increases the cost over time. Also, wheel ruts easily form in gravel, which detracts from the appeal.

Permeable concrete and asphalt are next in terms of expense, but studies have shown them to be prone to clogging, negating their efficacy.

Brick, concrete, and natural stone pavers require that the material in the joints be permeable since the pavers themselves are not considered to be permeable. The brick must be the correct type and manufactured to specific requirements in order to be used in paving applications, especially in freeze-thaw climates. Constant freezing and thawing is harder on materials than climates that freeze and

remain frozen for long periods.

No matter the material chosen for a permeable paving project the benefits outweigh the additional costs. Permeable paving can free land designated for retaining ponds and has numerous environmental benefits. Done correctly with durable materials the paving can have a long life span and be aesthetically pleasing.



The subsurface of a permeable paver installation helps filter and mitigate rainfall.



Permeable pavers can free up land used previously for retaining ponds.

The author is founder and president of Milestone and Milestone Imports.

Laying brick

Check out the latest hardscape products from the industry's manufacturers.

To submit product information for upcoming issues of *Lawn & Landscape*, contact Managing Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net or 330-523-5330.

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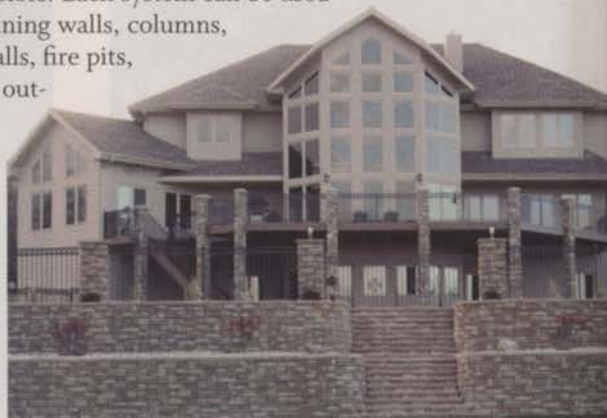


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The Old World, stone-style of Peacock Pavers is now available for residential driveways. The company's driveway pavers are strong, durable and have excellent freeze/thaw characteristics. Made of architectural-grade concrete, they are 3 by 9 by 9, and come in four standard colors: buff, champagne, rice white and dolphin grey. They match the colors of the company's other pavers, so driveways can be designed to blend seamlessly with adjoining walkways, courtyards and patios.

The pavers are also available in a half-inch thickness developed specifically for remodeling projects and retrofitting. Made of architectural-grade concrete, they lend stone-style beauty to floors, fireplaces and other indoor and outdoor applications. Available in a variety of sizes, with trim pieces, they can be installed in regular or random patterns and are as easy to install and seal as natural stone, the company says.



Rockwood Retaining Walls

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Rockwood's complete line of Outdoor Living Kits are easy to build, and are affordably priced, the company says. The kits come complete with everything a contractor needs, even the glue, and include simple, course-by-course instructions. There's no cutting and no estimating. The kits are available nationwide and at all Ewing Irrigation locations.

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Stone Age Manufacturing

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Stone Age Manufacturing produces pre-engineered masonry fireplace kits for indoor and outdoor applications, as well as fire pits, brick ovens, pizza ovens, outdoor kitchen island systems and pergolas, all in kit forms designed for ease of assembly by experienced masons or novice installers. Stone Age products have been featured in several episodes of the DIY Network television series *Indoors Out*, *Rock Solid* and *Man Caves*, and have also been featured on NBC's *Today Show*.

The company's products are designed to offer a faster, more efficient and more durable way to construct popular hearth and outdoor room features, while delivering greater consistency and higher quality than comparable products or traditional construction techniques, the company says. Each Stone Age product is designed for compatibility with our other components, allowing flexibility in project design and customization to meet the requirements of any installation, regardless of architectural or design style. Stone Age also offers a full line of accessories, carefully chosen to enhance the performance and enjoyment of our products.

Stone Construction Equipment

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Stone Construction Equipment, Inc.'s Silver Fox series of forward plates consists of eight models, including a plate designed specifically for optimum performance on asphalt – the SFA3500.

Models in addition to the SFA3500 include a small, 13-inch wide SFP2200/SFP2200A and the all-purpose SFP3000/SFP3000A, the all-purpose professional SFP4000/SFP4000A, and for larger dirt jobs the SFP5100. All models are available with a variety of engines – Honda, Robin, Briggs and Stratton or Diesel engines – for compacting asphalt, dirt, granular soils, sand and paving stones. The eight models can be used for a variety of compaction jobs – foundations, sidewalks, landscaping or asphalt patching and finishing.

The line features a forward-mounted eccentric and a 15-degree ramped leading edge that produces exceptionally fast forward travel speeds and optimum gradeability; a patented one-piece base plate integrated with the extra-large eccentric housing dissipates internal heat over the plate, cooling the oil and the eccentric bearings while heating the plate surface for smooth asphalt compaction; and a synchronized drive system provides energy transfer between the engine and eccentric.

The Stone-exclusive Kevlar belt, eccentric, innovative offset eccentric sheave, heavy-duty centrifugal clutch and engine all operate in unison to increase compacting performance, the company says, and the self-cleaning base plate virtually eliminates dirt build-up for easier maintenance.

A 13-quart removable water tank can be taken to a faucet for fill-ups, and a patented water system directs an even coat of water for the entire base surface. It is connected to the water tank with a Stone-exclusive SnapTek quick-coupler.

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That's intelligent.



*Housed in the weather sensor,
the innovative tipping bucket
measures rainfall to ensure
proper irrigation scheduling.*

Only the new Rain Bird® ESP-SMT Smart Control System combines the ease of Extra Simple Programming (ESP) with the accuracy of weather-based scheduling. Simply follow the prompts, input a few details about your site and programming is done. Then the weather-based control takes over, watering the precise amount you need, exactly where and when you need it. A smart controller that truly saves time, money and water. Now that's The Intelligent Use of Water.™

RAIN  BIRD®