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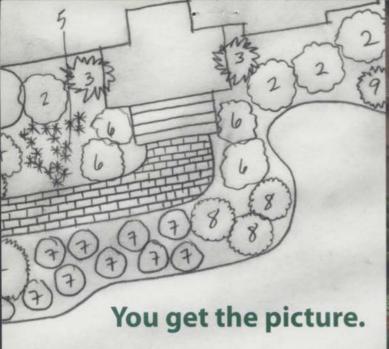
#SOCIAL WEDIA SISSUE

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Changing equipment lines is not a decision to take lightly. Bringing on a new brand can be a real culture shift and a strain on operations, from stocking different parts to training employees on how to properly run the machines. Sometimes, there's a learning curve. That's why Kurt Kluznik, president of Yardmaster, stayed with his equipment brand for more than 15 years, until recently. Kluznik now owns a dozen Snapper Pro mowers. Most of his locations are switching over to Snapper Pro, and Kluznik says aside from being cost competitive, the exceptional service has made him a Snapper Pro advocate. Kluznik compared Snapper Pro to other mower lines and discovered he didn't have to sacrifice quality to get value.

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Lawn&Landscape

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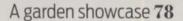
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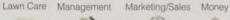
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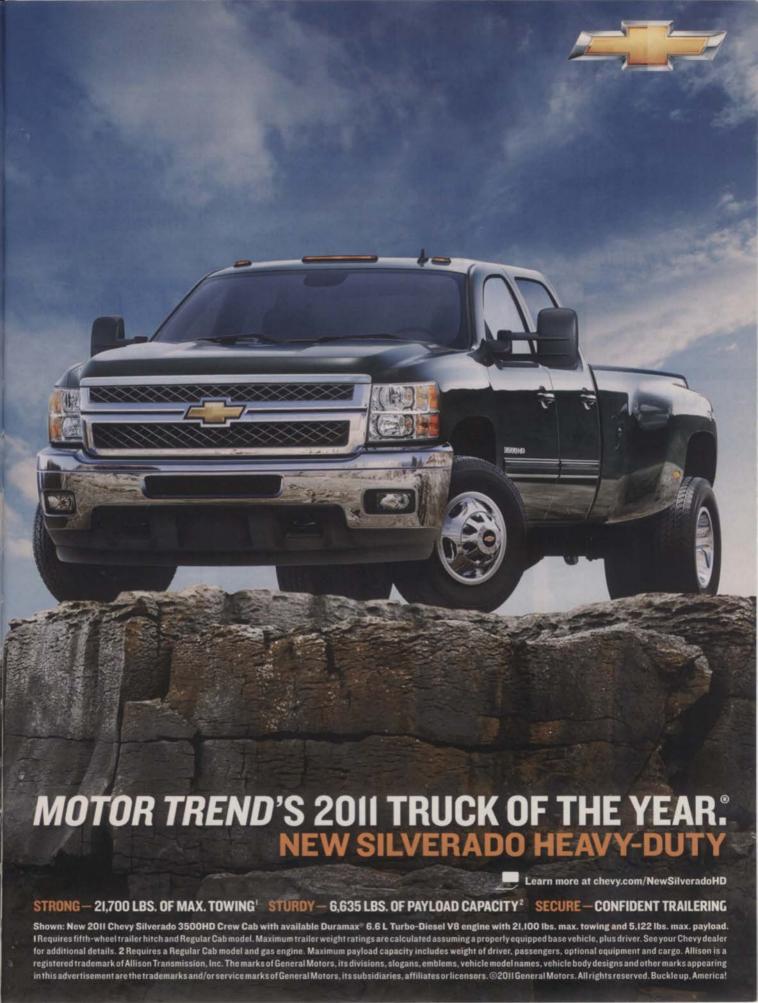




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BUILT TO BE TRUCK OF THE DAY. ENDED UP TRUCK OF THE YEAR.





ONLINE Contents



bit.ly/Ilblog

This month we have some fun with creative commercials and get serious about a New Jersey landscaper who needs your help.



Lawn & Landscape editor Chuck Bowen is skipping summer and looking to fall. We think he's crazy, but who can blame a guy who's jonesing for the GIE+EXPO and GIC shows. Read his post about why he likes them taking place in Louisville, Ky.





Rooting out the causes

The latest Grow Show podcast has the Harvest Group discussing the



reasons for a low gross margin. http://bit.ly/lgmgrowshow

Check out Lawn & Landscape's coverage of the California Spring Trials

For all the video interviews, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/cst

Eve catching

Benary's Big Red begonia made one landscaper slam on the brakes and make a purchase. http://bit.ly/eyecatching



Controlled chaos

Dummen's new Dahlia XXL series won't get too wild in the landscape.

http://bit.ly/xxldummen



Best of both worlds

This plant will thrive in the sun and the shade, and is great in the landscape.

http://bit.ly/bestbothworlds



Outside the industry

Here are some stories beyond the green industry that have universal business lessons.

Social skills

Businessinsider.com has some tips about what to do first when diving into social media. http://read.bi/socialmediadive

Start me up

According to Patch.com, business owners in one Ohio city want to make the area friendlier for entrepreneurs. What's even better is that you can do the same for your town. http://bit.ly/upstartme



Avoid becoming the next GoDaddy

This article from Reuters reminds small business owners they should think twice before posting something to social media accounts. http://reut.rs/godaddysm





Some stories our Tweeps liked:

FACEBOOK CONTEST PROVIDES VALUABLE LESSON FOR LANDSCAPER

http://bit.ly/uglylandscape

GREEN ROOF INDUSTRY GREW BY 28.5 PERCENT IN 2010 http://bit.ly/roofgreen

WHOOPS!

Maybe it was the smell of spring, or maybe it was March Madness. but we were off our game and sent you to the wrong place in our March issue. A link to a blog post about John Jantsch of Duct Tape Marketing and his approach to small-business marketing was incorrect. Here's the correct one. http://bit.ly/ductmarket

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How to read this magazine

s you look through this month's Aissue, you'll see these strange little boxes scattered on the pages.

They're QR codes, and they're the latest way you can interact with Lawn & Landscape. You can use your phone's app store to find an application to scan the codes. I use one called ScanLife for my BlackBerry, but you could also

try i-nigma.com, which works well on multiple phones. You'll need them to access the exclusive content that lies behind all these boxes.

Oh, and one of these boxes lets you enter into a drawing for an iPad 2.

Our cover story this month focuses on social media, and we've tried to give you a little bit of everything when it comes to using things like Facebook, Twitter and blogs. There are primers on how to use the most popular platforms for your business, a guide to using QR codes effectively and an essay from Chris Heiler on the most important question you should ask yourself when it comes to social media: What's the point?

"An objective and well-thought-out strategy allows you to focus only on what's important and ignore what is not," Heiler writes. "So, why are you on LinkedIn? Why did you create a Facebook page for your business? Why did you start a blog?"

An objective and well-thought-out strategy allows you to focus only on what's important and ignore what is not." - Chris Heiler

> The question isn't meant to suggest social media isn't important - it is. For example: Almost 600 million people use Facebook every month. Most of them are women. Seventy-two percent of them are between 25 and 54. A majority of the site's visitors - 67 percent - make more than \$50,000 a year; a third earn more than \$75,000 a year.

Chances are, some of those folks are your customers - or could be. If you can harness the power of these new tools and use them effectively, you'll be on your way to more business and happier customers. So turn to page 58 and let's get started. - Chuck Bowen

To see our QR codes in action and learn more about how they work, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "QR video."



See my video blog at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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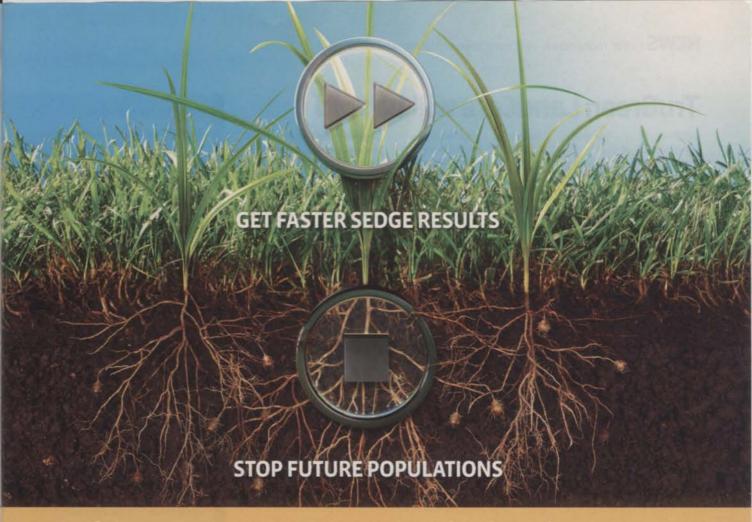
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TruGreen LandCare will be sold

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — The green industry's first national landscape firm, created 12 years ago in an unprecedented and high-value merger, will be sold at a fire-sale price to a private equity firm.

Aurora Resurgence, part of a \$2 billion Los Angeles-based investment firm, should close on its purchase of TruGreen LandCare by April 30. The deal has Aurora buying ServiceMaster's landscape division for \$38 million – a fraction of the \$250 million ServiceMaster paid for it in 1999.

ServiceMaster, TruGreen LandCare's parent company, bought LandCare USA amid a period of heavy merger and acquisition activity for the green industry, and less than a year after the newly formed company went public.

During that timeframe, Tru-Green – which had seen major success in turning around underperforming lawn care companies – acquired a dozen landscape firms, but never realized the same gains on the maintenance and construction side of the business.

When combined, TruGreen and LandCare USA had revenue of more than \$400 million, but ServiceMaster struggled to integrate its many acquisitions into a cohesive business, and the LandCare division has in recent years lost value. From 2008 to 2010, revenue dropped \$78 million, to \$238 million.

Last year, TruGreen Land-Care reported a 9 percent drop in revenue. In 2009, the company posted revenue of \$262 million and \$316 million in 2008. The landscape division makes up about 7 percent of ServiceMaster's total revenue, and employs 4,200 people in 60 branches across 38 states.

ServiceMaster said the deal would have no impact on its lawn care division, TruGreen LawnCare. The TruGreen Cos., which include both the lawn care and landscape divisions, was listed as the largest green industry company on Lawn & Landscape's 2010 Top 100 list with revenue of \$1.3 billion.

Stephen Donly, president of TruGreen, said the sale will create significant opportunities for his company. "In the past, certain important customers may have viewed TruGreen as a competitor since LandCare was a sister company," Donly said. "This is no longer an issue for us. - Chuck Bowen

WANT MORE? To continue reading this story, including more on TruGreen LandCare, visit online bit.ly/TruGreenLandCare. Also, look for Lawn & Landscape's June issue for an update on what the acquisition means for the industry.

OPEI petitions EPA to mandate E-10 availability

WASHINGTON – The Outdoor Power and Equipment Institute and a coalition of small engine groups has petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to mandate that E-10 remain available at the gas pump once E-15 hits the fuel market.

E-15 has been approved for flexiblefuel vehicles, along with cars, light-duty trucks and SUVs made after 2001.

However it cannot be used in off-road equipment like lawnmowers, snowblowers and chainsaws.

Moreover, if it is used in those types of equipment, it could cause serious damage to the machine. Allowing E-15 in the marketplace could displace E-10, allowing people to misfuel or have no choice but to misfuel, said Kris Kiser, executive vice president of OPEI.

"The infrastructure for retail is such that you're not

likely to see (both) E-10 and E-15 offered at standard retail operations," Kiser said. "There is a likelihood that a retailer might be able to make more

money on a higher-content ethanol fuel, there's less energy in it so they might be able to make a little more money selling it. If there's an incentive there, they might not sell E-10. We're just trying to guarantee for some time that if we're transitioning to a new fuel, that an old fuel for old products, including older cars, is still available."

Whether or not the EPA takes up the petition is at its own discretion.

The EPA is expected by early June to rule on what the label at the pump would look like and say to deter consumers from misfueling, Kiser said. But OPEI doesn't think a label will do much good.

"One of the challenges once this fuel becomes available – and it's one of the debates – is a label on the pump adequate enough to inform the consumer. We don't believe it is," Kiser said. "It's just not

Scotts to remove phosphorus from fertilizer

MARYSVILLE, Ohio - The Scotts
Miracle-Gro Co. has launched a
course that will remove phosphorus
from its ScottsMiracle-Gro's lawn
fertilizers, which includes the
brands Scotts and Turf Builder.
The company also will increase
its research and development
on nitrogen use in lawn fertilizer
products.

The company began reducing phosphorus in its lawn food products in 2006. The next step is to remove phosphorus from lawn fertilizers by 2012. Phosphorus will remain in starter fertilizers because the nutrient is essential to the initial root development of grass and it will remain in the organic lawn food lines, the company said.

The exploration of nitrogen technology will begin immediately.

The decisions come after Scotts Miracle-Gro Co. concluded that most lawns can flourish without supplemental phosphorus applications, the company said.

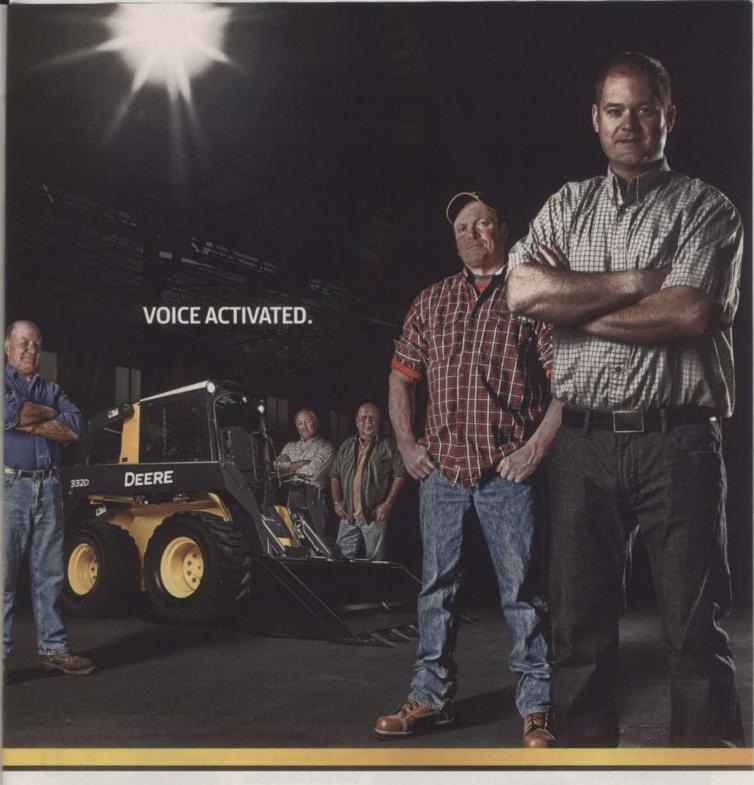
The recent announcement is part of an initiative to improve water quality and conservation in the United States and includes investment in consumer communication.

"We want to provide consumers with the tools they need to create the lawn and garden they want while also being stewards of the environment," said Jim Hagedorn, chairman and CEO of Scotts Miracle-Gro Co.

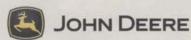
The consumer information proposal incorporates water quality and conservation messaging in advertising, dedicated websites and other digital outreach tools, as well as funding for education outreach efforts with environmental partners and local organizations.

What do you think?

Do you think using a product without phosphorus will get you the same result? Tell us what you think. Email your thoughts to Associate Publisher and Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net.



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how we work in this country. People mostly base their fuel purchasing decisions on price. What goes in the car goes in the can. So you might legally fuel your car but if you put that fuel in a can for your non-road products, your generator or landscape equipment, then you'll misfuel the product."

Tom Buis, CEO of Growth Energy, which along with 54 ethanol manufacturers started the waver for E-15, told EthanolProducer.com that organizations like OPEI

Want more Lawn & Landscape news? Sign up for our five different e-newsletters.



should focus more on supporting blender pumps at retail stations. The pumps give consumers options to choose from multiple blends.

OPEI, auto groups, engine groups and the food industry have lawsuits pending against the waiver to introduce E-15. Still, that might not stop it from entering the market, Kiser said.

E-15 has been approved by the EPA. Once registration of the fuel is finalized, possibly this summer, it will be available for gas stations to sell.

Kiser cautions contractors stay informed on these issues as new fuels become available and manufacturers catch up with requirements.

"We know the effects on

our stuff," Kiser says. "Again, we can design a product, but we know there will be a problem with existing equipment on E-15. And ethanol damage is irreversible, so we very much need the land-scapers to understand if this fuel does become widely available do not use it in products for which it is not approved." – Carolyn LaWell

Tenacity approved for residential lawns

GREENSBORO, N.C. – Syngenta's Tenacity herbicide has received registration from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for use on residential lawns.

The pre- and post-emer-

gence herbicide controls 46 broadleaf weeds and undesired grasses in most cool-



season turf types. It can be used during bare-ground renovation seeding and selective overseeding.

"Tenacity provides a unique tool for professional lawn care operators," said Pat Willenbrock, Syngenta brand manager. "Not only does it deliver pre- and postemergence control of tough broadleaf and grassy weeds, but it can also be used at seeding to ensure new lawns flourish instead of competing with weeds."

Tenacity was granted re-



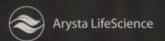


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duced-risk status by the EPA due to its active ingredient, mesotrione, which has favorable ecotoxicity and human health profiles, compared to many registered herbicides, reducing the herbicide load on the environment. Its mode of action fits well into IPM and resistance-management strategies.

Tenacity is not registered for use in all states; LCOs should check with their state

Tenacity breakdown

- Controls 46 broadleaf weeds
- . Comes in 8 oz. bottles
- Can be used on most cool-season turf
- Active ingredient is mesotrione

or local extension service prior to buying the product.

The active ingredient, mesotrione is based on a compound produced by the bottlebrush plant (Callistemon citrinus). Discovered and developed by Syngenta, mesotrione provides systemic pre- and post-emergence control of numerous weeds including nimblewill, chickweed, clover and yellow nutsedge. Additionally, it controls crabgrass both pre- and post-emergence.

Tenacity has been tested and proven acceptable for use on many turf species including the following: Kentucky bluegrass, centipedegrass, tall fescue, perennial ryegrass and fine fescue.

Madness reigns at Reinders' 20th conference

WAUKESHA, Wis. – March madness was not only in the NCAA college basketball tournament this year, but was also evident at the 20th Reinders Turf & Irrigation Conference held March 9-10. The show's theme of "March Turf Madness" applied to both the tradeshow and the weather.

Rain was in the forecast for the first day, but many attendees were surprised to wake up and find several inches of heavy and wet snow on their travels to the Waukesha Expo Center in suburban Milwaukee.



The 20th Reinders conference had a March Madness theme.

This year Reinders partnered with Midwest Athletes Against Childhood Cancer (the MACC Fund) to help raise money for cancer and blood disorder research.

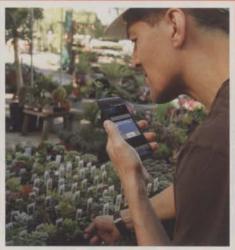
Reinders had a "Turf Madness Double Shootout" basketball game for everyone's entertainment. Attendees had the opportunity to make a donation to the MACC

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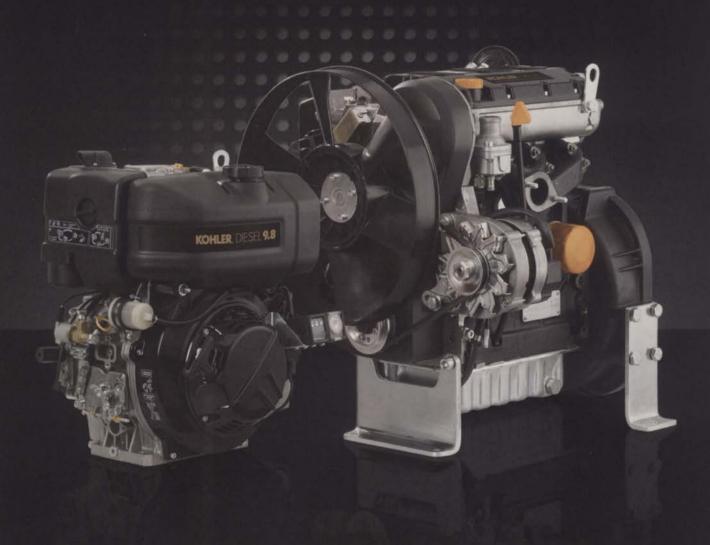
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NEWS ///

Fund and compete side by side with their friends and colleagues to see who could score the most baskets in a minute. Everyone who participated had their name entered into a drawing. Jon Cole of Kohler Landscape Co., Kohler, Wis., was the lucky winner.

More than 35 seminars covered topics for everyone in the green industry. Six different educational tracks ran simultaneously to meet the needs of landscape contractors, lawn care operators, golf course superintendents, sports turf managers, equipment mechanics and irrigation contractors.

Fred Yelverton of North Carolina State University informed lawn maintenance professionals about new and innovative weed control technology as he reviewed a variety of products.

Keeping watergardens in balance was discussed by Scott Rhodes of Aquascape. He pointed out that understanding the ecosystem of a pond is the first step in keeping them looking their best. Learning to be proactive with a natural water treatment regime and solving periodic problems that may arise are also key, he said.

The new trend of using LED technology for landscape lighting was explored during a talk by Darin Ayers of FX Luminaire.

Reinders has hosted the conference and tradeshow every other year since 1973. It brings together national speakers and industry professionals and manufacturers.

The next show will be held March 13-14, 2013.

Water Conference slated for July

FALLS CHURCH, Va. – The Irrigation Association and the American Society of Irrigation Consultants will partner to present the 2011 Water Conference July 21-22 in Broomfield, Colo.

The third annual conference, titled "Water for the Future: The Role of Smart Irrigation," is meant to bring together experts and leaders from business, government and academia to debate water and environmental issues, as well as the industry's role in providing solutions.

"Ultimately, this conference aims to unify our industry professionals in order to pursue more efficient water use in irrigation. ASIC's partnership is a welcome step toward that unity," said Deborah Hamlin, IA executive director.

Confirmed speakers include: Dr. Peter Williams, chief technology officer, Big Green Innovations Division, IBM; Liz Gardener, suburban conservation coordinator, Denver Water; Scott Slater, shareholder, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, LLP, and Jeff Bruce, Jeffrey L. Bruce & Co.

Conference details

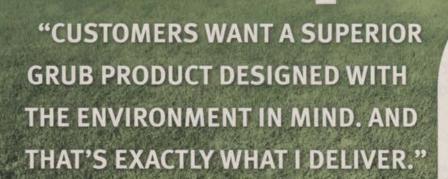
Who: Irrigation Association and American Society of Irrigation Consultants

What: 2011 Water Conference

When: July 21-22

Where: Broomfield, Colo. Why: Discuss water issues and the industry's role in providing solutions.

Registration: irrigation.org



—Chris Paisley Mariani Landscape Lake Bluff, IL



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L&L ON THE ROAD

PLANET hosts Student Career Days

The 35th annual event brought together students from 60 colleges.

By Carolyn LaWell

JOLIET, III. - College students from 60 schools throughout the United States and Canada converged on Joliet Junior College in mid-March to learn, network and compete against each other in industry-related events.

PLANET's 35th Annual Student Career Days was held from March 17-20 in the Chicago suburb and attracted 1,250 at-





At Student Career Days, students, faculty and industry professionals partook in learning and some fun.

tendees, 875 of which were students, according to PLANET.

The event started with a day full of learning from industry experts. The workshops and seminars covered everything from leadership lessons and repairing small engines to irrigation installation and landscape design.

Day two started with an opening ceremony, which included a roll call where each school stood up and chanted to show school pride. For audience engagement and creativity during the roll call, the spirit award and winner of \$1,000 from John Deere was Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture, which only had three students in attendance.

Garret Van Santen, a student from the Canadian school, said attending the PLANET event opens up connections and opportunities for students.

For video interviews with students and industry professionals who attended this year's event, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "Student Career Days."



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L&L ON THE ROAD



More photos of this year's event

Student Career Days also included a career fair, which brought manufacturers, suppliers and landscaping businesses in the industry to interview students

and offer internships and jobs. Paul Hutcheson, a senior at Virginia Tech, is in the process of opening his own garden center. He said he found the career fair helpful because he was able to network and make three or four industry connections he could see turning into

"Even though I'm not looking for a job, I enjoyed the career fair," he said.

business or mentoring relationships.

Attending his first Student Career Days, Hutcheson said he was looking forward to the competitive aspect of the event.

"I like competing in different events that aren't purely competitive, but have an atmosphere of teamwork and learning," he said.

The competitions, which are based on information learned on day one, allow students and ultimately, schools to go head to head.

A final highlight was a keynote presentation by Judy Guido, chairwoman and founder of Guido & Associates. Her message: personal branding.

A personal brand is two things, Guido said. One, it is name awareness: How many people know who you are? And second, it's reputation: What do others think about you?

"Life is not about finding yourself, it's about creating yourself," Guido said.

The 36th Annual Student Career Days will be held at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan., March 22-25, 2012. L&L

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. She can be reached at clawell@gie.net.

Overall Results By School:

- Brigham Young University Provo
- Michigan State University
- Brigham Young University Idaho Chattahoochee Technical College University Of Georgia Penn State

- Virginia Tech
- 9. Columbus State Community College

Overall Results By Student:

- Alex Casillas, Cal Poly Pomona Dallas Gustafson, Colorado State
- University
 4. Humzah Khraim, Chattahoochee
 Technical College
 5. Andy Klittich, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo





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www.lawnandlandscape.com/readerservice - #22



Valent battles chinch bugs

The bugs are becoming little fighters, but Valent has a new way to knock them out. By Brian Horn

TAMPA, Fla. - About 150 lawn care operators from the Tampa and Orlando Fla., areas received, courtesy of Valent Professional Products, a rundown on Southern chinch bugs and how to delay or overcome pyrethroid resistance among chinch bug populations.

Chinch bugs are developing resistance to pyrethroid-based insecticides due to the chronic overuse of such products.

This is similar to the way in which bacteria sometimes becomes resistant to antibiotics used by humans. If an LCO keeps using pyrethroids, they will only kill the non-resistant populations, while the resistant bugs keep breeding.



Valent Professional Products educated LCOs on treating pyrethroid-resistant chinch bugs.









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L&L ON THE ROAD

Dr. Eileen Buss, associate professor of turfgrass entomology at the University of Florida, says it's important to first make sure you have chinch bugs, since damage caused by that pest can be misdiagnosed as scalping damage, herbicide damage, drought stress or even a dog "toilet" area.

To avoid a misdiagnosis, vacuum the affected area and, if chinch bugs are present, you'll know it. "They'll get caught in the filter and you can dump them in a bag," Buss says.

Getting rid of 80 percent of the bugs is considered acceptable in research testing, Buss added, but less control may be achieved where the bugs have become resistant to pyrethroids.

While pyrethroid-resistant chinch bugs are sometimes responsible for unsightly damage to St. Augustine grass, chemical resistance isn't the only threat to a healthy lawn. Lawns need to be kept at the proper height and thatch has to be managed correctly in order for pesticides to get good coverage.

In addition, lawns have to be irrigated properly, because if grass is stressed from lack of water, it won't be able to handle additional stress like that caused by Southern chinch bugs.

Todd Mayhew, regional field development managers for Valent Professional Products, says it is becoming more and more difficult for researchers to introduce new products, and consistently using one product until it doesn't work anymore isn't a good practice.

That includes overusing Valent's Arena Insecticide, which controls pyrethroid-resistant Southern chinch bugs.

"We need to find a way to use all available tools," says Mayhew, who encourages LCOs to rotate products with different modes of action as part of a resistance management program.

Joe Chamberlin, also a regional field development manager for Valent, says everyone has to learn from the past mistakes and not overuse the product.

Chamberlin says Arena should be applied in April or May, and then a pyrethroid can be applied in late summer, making chinch bugs more susceptible to treatments.

"If we overuse Arena like we did the pyrethroids, it will stop working," Chamberlin says. L&L

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at bhorn@gie.net

To listen to podcasts about pyrethroidresistant chinch bugs, visit www. lawnandlandscape.com and search "chinch bugs."



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- More Torque
- · A Low Tone Sound



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- PowerBroom™
- · Pole Pruner
- . Mid-reach Pole Pruner
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Lawn Edger

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EB254

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PS344

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- Fuel economy using 10 25% less fuel than equivalent two-stroke engines
- A low tone sound
- Reduced starting effort with built-in decompression
- Longer engine life due to dual-stage air filtration



shindaiwa

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- Reduction in fumes and a low engine tone (see below).
- Hybrid 4 design has performance-enhancing Power Boost Chamber.
- Hybrid 4 engines feature a built-in decompression that reduces the pressure within the cylinder thereby reducing the effort needed to pull the starter rope.
- Thanks to its fuel-born lubrication system. Hybrid 4 engines may be operated in any position—even upside down—on an extended basis.
- Hybrid 4 products deliver higher torque to the lower end for more power in tougher applications or environments.
- Equipment powered by Hybrid 4 engines is easy to maintain and uses the same fuel mix as two-stroke engines. Unlike conventional fourstroke engines, there is no messy oil sump and no oil level to check and maintain.

- Like all Shindaiwa products, Hybrid 4 engines incorporate premium components and close-tolerance engineering for long life and practical serviceability. Hybrid 4 engines feature a longer piston skirt and a forged crankshaft.
- Besides high-quality components, Hybrid 4 engines also include dual-stage air filtration for cleaner air passing into the engine which increases engine life and reduces internal engine wear.
- In addition to an exceptional life expectancy, Hybrid 4 engines use 10 - 25% less fuel than equivalent Shindaiwa two-stroke engines for even greater operational savings (Fuel economy will vary depending on product use and operating habits.)
- Hybrid 4 equipment carries a 2-year commercial warranty - dependability you can count on.

Vhere's the Smell?

Hybrid 4: It Sounds Good & Smells Even Cleaner!

The first thing users notice about Hybrid 4 products is that they do not sound like a traditional 2-stroke in terms of engine noise and level or tone. But the performance of a Hybrid 4 product will be like music to your ears - it may sound out of the ordinary but the results are extraordinary.

The other thing users notice is the lack of smell - not only from the product but also on the operator after a day of use. Just ask anyone who has used a hedge trimmer lately. Because the emissions are cleaner in Hybrid 4 products there is a drastic reduction in the oily, gas smell that is exhausted from a traditional 2-stroke product.

So if you're ready for a greener alternative to traditional 2-stroke engines look for Shindaiwa Hybrid 4 engine technology.



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code app to learn more





Lawn Tek Landscaping provided the landscaping work for Sgt. Chase Matthews, who was injured during an ambush on his military convoy in Iraq.

Contribution on command

When the workers at one landscaping company got wind that a local needed help, they didn't hesitate getting involved. By Brian Horn

The common complaint of small towns is that everyone knows everyone else's business. That was the case in Kuttawa, Ky., where Lawn Tek Landscaping is located, but in a positive way.

The small town grapevine alerted company owner Kerry Stinnett and his team of the story of Sgt. Chase Matthews who lost both his legs and mobility in his left arm and hand after an ambush on his military convoy in Iraq.

He and wife Jennifer had a daughter and new baby on the way, so when Stinnett heard that Homes for Our Troops would be building Matthews a home, he knew his company had to get involved in the project.

"We're a small community and word traveled fast that he'd been severely injured in Iraq," Stinnett says. "So, I happened to know his family quite well, so it was a nobrainer on our part."

Lawn Tek helped in the project, which included approximately 900 square feet of plant bedding with all the trees and trim.

The plant material included slow growing Buxus 'Green Velvet,' Lagerstroemia 'Regal Red,' Nandina domestica 'Firepower,' Ilex 'Sky Pencil' and long-blooming Hemerocallis 'Stella de Oro.'

Also included were a few maiden grasses and a few *Thuja*, Chamaecyparis 'Nana Gracilis' and a staple plant, *Liriope*.

"We finished lawn and landscape install with Chase's special needs in mind – very low maintenance plant material, slow growing plant material, and river rock in beds instead of mulch," co-owner, Tara Stinnett says.

But the project did have

a couple of hiccups. Consistent rain kept delaying the project, which caused a supplier to have to drop out of the project because of scheduling issues.

"We had to scramble at the last minute and we called another supplier that we dealt with and they stepped right up to the plate and furnished all the plant materials we needed for the job," Kerry Stinnett says.

Even though Lawn Tek didn't participate to get recognized, word got around the small town about the time the company's workers volunteered for the project.

Kerry Stinnett says he's had numerous people he didn't know thank him for the company's efforts.

And those efforts send out a strong message to the community, he says. "We're just not somebody who moved in



Along with Lawn Tek Landscaping providing the lawn and landscape work, Sod was provided by Tri Turf Sod in Paris, Tenn.; river rock in beds were provided by Mr. Mulch in Hopkinsville, Ky., and plant material was provided by Green's Silo in Nursery Paducah, Ky.

here looking to make a quick buck and then leave town like some landscapers do," he says.

While the project would have cost \$10,000 to complete, Lawn Tek was happy to donate their time free of charge. "They're starting out life a little bit behind the 8-ball," Kerry Stinnett says.

"So if we can help out somebody like that, it's the right thing to do. I feel like everybody is going to have tough times in their life and if somebody can help you, that's a great thing." L&L





As the price of gas rises, small business profitability seems to be declining. A recent Discover Financial Services Small Business Watch survey found 76% of respondents said they're feeling the effects of the increase at the pump. Of those, 90% said prices are having a somewhat negative or very negative effect on their operations, a number that is on par with sentiments in April 2008 when the national average for gasoline hovered near \$3.42 per gallon.

53%

There's an increasing divide between skills workers have and skills employers require. More than half of business leaders, 53% to be exact, said their companies have been facing a very or fairly major challenge in recruiting non-managerial employees with the skills, training and education their company needs. The results came despite the unemployment rate being close to 10% at the time the Corporate Voices for Working Families and Civic Enterprises survey was completed.

1998

March belonged to Ford Motor Co., as it outsold General Motors for only the second time since 1998. Ford's boost was aided by a 21% jump in truck sales. The last time Ford outsold GM was in February 2010, but only by 471 vehicles, according to Auto Week.



500,000

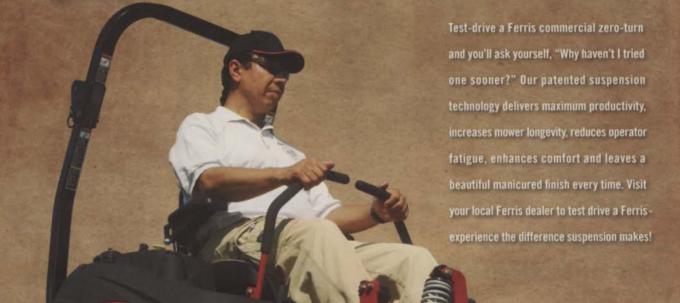
More than 500,000 square feet of green roof space has been installed in Chicago, including at O'Hare International Airport (pictured above). For the seventh year in a row, the city topped Green Roofs for Healthy Cities annual industry survey. The 2010 survey also showed the green roof industry grew 28.5% in 2010, up significantly from an increase of 16% in 2009.

1 in 3

For companies of all sizes, one in three employees may become a flight risk. If they have a choice, employees said they hope to be working for a different employer sometime during 2011, according to Met Life's 9th Annual Study of Employee Benefits.



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SOFTWARE AND WEB OPTIMIZATION

ASK THE EXPERTS is presented in partnership with PLANET's Trailblazers On Call program. Trailblazers are industry leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to give back to the industry. Have a question for the experts? Send it to llexperts@gle.net.

Q: I have a design/build and maintenance company. On the maintenance side, we have about 300 clients. We do about \$1 million a year in sales, but I have four areas of my business that I am trying to improve. Before re-Inventing the wheel, I would like to see if anyone has some thoughts and ideas to help steer me in the right direction.

Q1. Currently, we are using QXpress in conjunction with QuickBooks to do our scheduling and billing. Is there a way to send the schedule to crew supervisors, who would be equipped with a smartphone or similar device, and have them record the job and send the information back to the office for billing and payroll?

A: There are several routing and business management software programs that are capable of taking a customer from start to finish without printing a single piece of paper. Some will use a smartphone (HTC, Android,

iPhone, PDA), and even iPad is being thrown in the mix. Most, if not all of the service software companies, understand the need to have the mobile communication for dispatching, routing and invoicing. Business management software has hit the market hard and strong as the customer is demanding, better, faster and more efficient products so they can do the job in a leaner, cleaner, efficient way. PLANET has partners who offer fully integrated business management software, and they offer demonstrations online that give you the opportunity to experience the software before you purchase it. Taking advantage of these demos is strongly suggested before making your software investment.

Q2. Is there industryspecific estimating software that will help me improve and streamline this process? In QuickBooks, I have a number of memorized estimates based on the type of job, where I drop in the different



quantities and include the estimated time for each activity. But this can be fairly time consuming. Is there a way to do a price check, then go to one place, drop in the prices and have everything automatically updated?

A: Estimating is high tech; software companies have taken the details of the estimator's complicated spreadsheet and integrated it in easy-touse estimating modules. This streamlines your estimating process to make it faster, and consistent, so that more of your staff is able to step in and help when needed.

Q3. Because I provide customized services, I have dozens of different categories of service, I would love to be able to access a database at any time, look at a client and know exactly what we do for them, or when it comes time for a preemerge lawn treatment, push a button and access all the clients and also know how much product to order for a particular job. What's the best way to set up

A. Another strong aspect of a good business management software is the 'customer relationship management' or CRM. CRM is a strategy that focuses on how you interact with your customers. Traditionally, only larger enterprises could think about implementing CRM. But today, all businesses are realizing the importance of this technology.

You now have access to Webbased CRM tools, and business management software companies are integrating it as part of their package. There are some things you'll need to put the CRM software tools into motion. These tools should track the responses and actions of customers. employees and others involved in your business relationships and be able to analyze the data.

By obtaining this valuable feedback, you can develop relationships and improve communication, which will help with repeat business through greater customer satisfaction.

Q.4 I'd like to turn our website into a sales and marketing machine. What is the best way to go about this?

A: A good marketing company or consultant should know how to take your website to the next level. Today's business websites need to be interactive and ever changing to maintain customer attention. They should be positioned in search engines and provide feedback data that can be used to fine tune your marketing, making you the most visible in your marketing area. Driving the customer to your website as the resource in your area is the key, and working within your business plan and budget can be accomplished on several different levels.

If you have a plan, but are only able to implement the plan one step at a time due to budgetary constraints, a consultant can work with you to identify which level requires the most attention upfront to get the ball rolling. L&L

Rob Diaz Land Care, Inc., Las Vegas

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>>And let the snapping begin!

Lawn&Landscape.

Dosko stump grinder

The pitch: Dosko's new 200-6H "Mini" is a foldable stump grinder that landscapers and tree care providers can use.

- It's small enough to travel in your SUV or pick-up; 36 inches long, 23 inches wide and 23 inches high (folded).
- · Weighs 134 lbs.
- · Leonardi teeth provide efficient cutting capability.

Contact: www.dosko.com



Grassbuster mower cleaning tool

The pitch: The Grassbuster cleans under lawnmower decks by removing clogged grass.

- The curved blade tip conforms to the underside of the mower deck.
- The stainless steel blade can cut through the debris on the mower skirt.
- Contains a tough rubber over grip on a polypropylene handle.
- . Retail price is \$11.95.
- Comes with a lifetime warranty against defects in material and workmanship.

Contact: www.thegrassbuster.com



Little Beaver UN-Towable drill

The pitch: Little
Beaver's new HYDNTV11H UN-Towable
drill offers a transportable solution for
one-man hole digging
projects.

- Built with an 11-hp Honda GX340V engine.
- Hydraulic pressure of 2,500 psi and an operating speed of 150 rpm.
- Quick-disconnect fittings allow the operator to connect the power source to other types of hydraulic accessories.

Contact: www.littlebeaver.com

New Holland compact track loaders

The pitch: The three New Holland 200 series compact track loaders were designed based on customer input.

 The self-leveling bucket allows attachments to



maintain the preset location throughout the lift cycle.

- The C232 has a bucket breakout force of 8,585 lbs.
- The C227 is rated at 70 hp with a rated operating capacity of 2,700 lbs.

Contact: www.newholland.com

Ecolawn applicator

The pitch: You can save time and reduce labor and operating costs with the Ecolawn applicator.

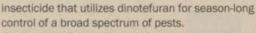
- Ecolawn top dresser is a a multi-purpose and motorized applicator built for professionals in turf care.
- For top dressing, compost spreading, turf renovation, seeding organic matter.
- Ecolawn spreads a wide variety of materials: soil mix, pelletize product, calcite clay and crumb rubber.

Contact: www.ecolawnapplicator.com



The pitch: Controls difficult pests, including armored scales and borers.

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Contact: www.treecarescience.com





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Transtect



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Mixing social media and business

EDITOR'S NOTE: Every month, our columnists give their take on a common topic. Last month they defined what "being green" means to them, and this month they give their takes on using social media in the green industry.

Marty Grunder

love to ask my audiences this question: How many of you think social media is a total and complete waste of time? I often alter the

tone of my voice to help trick the audience into thinking that I believe it's a waste of time.

This usually brings out all kinds of hands, people thinking, finally, a person who thinks like I do. To those I see who have their hands raised, I say, "Why would you not get involved in an opportunity that takes about one hour per week (if you do it right) that helps you make more friends and grow your network?" Let me explain.

Equally important as attracting customers you can work with today is working to attract clients in 5 years and 10 years. Those 24-year-old young

professionals will be in a different spot in their lives in the next five to 10 years and it is important to lay the groundwork now.

By having a Facebook page for your company now, you are starting relationships with people who

could become clients at a later date.

By having a presence on LinkedIn, you are finding all types of possible clients you may be able to work with now and in the future.

Twitter, in my opinion, is less beneficial for the landscaper but still has its merits. The point I make is that you need to have a social media presence. Let me share with you what I have found works.

First of all, I am by no means a social media expert. All I can share with you is what I have found works and my thoughts on the role social media efforts play in the successful marketing of a green industry company.

If I were you, I'd have two Facebook pages. One for yourself and one for your company. I use my personal page to keep in touch with friends and to make new contacts with people I'd like to do business with.

I am careful about what I post on my personal account. I like to post updates about where I have been, what my kids are doing, and then I really like to share business ideas and some sports rants.

I also post pictures of plants and things growing in my home landscape. After all, I want my followers to know what I do for living and that I have a passion for plants.

On my company page, we post plants, photos of job sites, tips, help wanted ads, photos of our people working and other information that helps show our followers we do great work and want to work with them. Take an hour to surf

A supplement to

Lawn&Landscape

Learn about the latest products, ideas and technologies in the irrigation industry.

Irrigation Guide

Drought survival pg. 3

Savings in Santa Clarita Drip irrigation pg. 6

New products pg. 9

CONTROL THE UNCONTROLLABLE















Through wind and hail and blazing sun. Solar Sync is in control. Every day, Solar Sync gathers your local weather data and determines whether or not your lawn needs to be watered. And now available in a wireless version, this revolutionary smart product is even easier to install.

It's not just smart, it's genius.







reserving a landscape during a severe drought can be one of the most challenging crises in the landscape industry. Implementing a comprehensive strategy to restore the balance of the landscape is vital to the soil and the industry.

PREPARATION: It starts with soil.

The soil is the lifeblood of the landscape. Soil, when properly maintained, encourages deep roots. During a drought, plant roots – the storehouse of carbohydrates – are the survival mechanism of the plant.

Preparation for a drought starts with good cultural practices in the soil. Good soil aeration combined with proper fertilization encourages deep rooting. Plants will have greater success in withstanding the devastating effects of a drought if their root system has been cultivated to grow a deeper, extensive root system.

Good soil preparation is not reserved for new landscape installations. Soil cultural practices, such as aeration, can be performed at any time. Spring is the best time because, for most plant material, spring is when a plant's root development is most active.

Soil fertility and salinity, or the amount of salt found in the soil, are important. In the spring, get a soil sample and have it tested at a soil lab. Once results have been analyzed, correcting any nutrient deficiency is the first step.

For turfgrass, spring aeration is essential to encourage deep rooted turf. Ideally, turfgrass should have rooting depths of 6-12 inches. For trees and shrubs, drilling several holes 2-4 inches in diameter, 24-to 36-inches deep around the base of the plant will encourage deeper water penetration and deeper rooting.

Mow turfgrass higher and be careful about applying too much nitrogen fertilizer. Nitrogen encourages top-growth of grasses at the expense of developing a strong root system.

Deep, infrequent irrigation cycles also encourage deeper rooting. Mulch properly placed around trees and shrubs also helps to preserve soil moisture.

WILT: It involves water management.

When a drought happens, it is important to have priorities. Trees come first. The loss of shade from a tree increases water evaporation in the surrounding area.

After establishing a healthy root system, pay close attention to the leaves of all plants. The leaves are the best indicator of a plant's water needs. When turfgrass starts to turn bluish-green, it is time to add water. The wilt symptoms of many trees and shrubs will exhibit leaf



are prepared for, prevail through and recover from water-deficient times.



folding. Sometimes the leaf folding will also display a slight change in color.

Important steps to take – or not take – during a drought include:

Do not fertilize during a drought. All fertilizers contain salts that will rob the plants of any moisture in the soil. Avoid fertilizing the plants until they have recovered. Fertilizing after a severe drought will usually increase leaf and stem growth at the expense of root development.

Do not prune during or immediately following a drought.

Apply water slowly and deeply to the soil. Reduce evaporative water losses by watering after the sun goes down.

Most importantly, physically check the moisture level of the soil. The soil may look dry on the surface; however, with a soil probe or a 6-inch screwdriver stuck into the ground, you can accurately determine how deep and how dry the soil may be.

RECOVERY: Water, water and water.

Recovering trees, shrubs and turfgrass after an extended drought is different for each type of plant. Water, water, water is the key to successful recovery. However, the proper watering cycle for each type of plant is different. Monitoring the soil water level during the process will help insure a more successful recovery.

Trees require deep, infrequent watering. Gently soaking the soil to a depth of 36-48 inches is important. Allow the soil to dry out before watering again. Avoid light frequent waterings that will only penetrate the soil to a depth of a few inches. This will result in shallow roots.

For shrubs, watering to a depth of 18-24 inches is important. Allow the soil to dry out before watering again.

Recovering turfgrass is the most demanding watering regimen. Initially, light frequent waterings are important. Monitor the soil moisture level with a probe or a screwdriver. Once the turf has started to recover, a deeper less frequent watering schedule can be resumed.

After severe water stress, all plant types slow in growth because their metabolism has been significantly reduced for survival. The water initially applied will be slowly absorbed by the plant. Water absorption by the plant will be dramatically reduced until the plant starts to become healthy again. Once the plant material starts to regain its health, it will rapidly use water.

Understanding how a plant recovers from severe water stress is vital to recovery. Nutritional and watering needs vary widely from plant to plant and from location to location. Careful soil monitoring is key to returning plants to a healthy balance following a severe drought.

The author is a speaker, consultant and the owner at Green Water Infrastructure.

Savings in Santa Clarita

The California city is serious about conserving water and money.

The officials of Santa Clarita, Calif., are dealing with dwindling water supplies and rising water rates. But instead of letting these negatives continue, they took action.

With the help of ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance., the city retrofitted antiquated irrigation timers with HydroPoint's Internet-enabled WeatherTRAK smart systems for 700 acres of Landscape Maintenance Districts, including parks, medians and streetscapes.

Though the project is still in progress, as of press time, the city has already achieved immediate budget relief by reducing the cost of irrigating facilities by 25-40 percent. With water rates continuing to rise, savings are expected to increase in future fiscal years, accelerating the city's ROI timeline to between four and six years.

Jason LaRiva, landscape maintenance specialist for Santa Clarita, says the main focus of the program is to reduce the city's consumption, but he also realizes that with water savings come dollar savings.

LaRiva says the voluntary conservation program resulted in no change in the aesthetics of the city's landscape and has been a great example and selling point for homeowners.

"We're not turning our landscapes into desertscapes with cacti and sand as some members of our community envisioned efficient water use," he says, during a recent webinar. "We're focusing on the responsible use of water and irrigating based on plant needs and not a drop more."

Richard Restuccia, leader, emerging technologies in water management with ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance, says the installations are easy and the controllers come with real time remote Internet control.

"With remote Internet control, you don't have to send a crew out to turn off the controllers ahead of a significant rain event," Restuccia says. "You can do it quickly and efficiently from any com-





puter or handheld device with Internet access."

And you can easily turn them back on, if the weather forecast is wrong. In addition, you can customize emails that will alert you when you are having a problem like too much flow. You are signaled to the location and you can fix it right away instead of waiting for someone to see it and report it to you, Restuccia says.

ValleyCrest's team had a five-step plan for the installation process. First, they sent out a discovery team to find all the existing controllers and document the programming at each station.

Then, the discovery team brought back their documents, and they gave them to the installation team, who started planning for the next day. The next morning they took the controllers to the locations. mounted the hardware and returned the documentation to the trailer.

The field survey is then done, which identifies items that affect the programming. At each location, they need to document things like plant types, soil type and root depth.

"This really becomes one of the most important parts of the whole process because this is where we take the infor-

> bit.ly/ webhpp

to hear

the water

webinar.

mation and start the controller programming," Restuccia says.

Finally, ValleyCrest set up a time to review each installation with the city and each side signed off to the process.

The initial test sites were monitored from June through Novem-

ber, and during that six-month period, LaRiva says the city saw water consumption reduced 40 percent in comparison from the previous three years.

"We found the most significant savings are achieved through the transitional seasons: from summer to fall and winter to spring. During these seasonal changes, the weather can go through significant changes that historically would have required constant manual program adjustments," LaRiva says.

Restuccia says the payback period a customer can expect to achieve varies,

> but he narrows it down to 24-30 months. He adds that there is no general, expected amount of time to get a project up and running.

> "It varies by size, but it can be turned around in a reasonable period of time," Restuccia

says. "A couple of weeks you can be up and running if you wanted to be very aggressive and wanted to go forward with this."

The author is an associate editor with Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at bhorn@gie.net.



5

Not your typical system

Drip irrigation applies water slowly, but the technology is quickly taking off.

As concerns about water shortages, restrictions and price increases have gained momentum, so has interest in certain forms of irrigation. In parts of the country, the days of using sprinklers to water flowerbeds are not only being replaced with methods of water conservation but overhead systems have even been banned. The trends have given way to a rise in popularity of drip irrigation.

"The drip segment of our industry is growing faster and has been growing faster than the overall segment of our market," says Mike Baron, Toro's national specifications manager for water management products. "And that is because the need to conserve water and improve irrigation efficiency has been working."

An increase in the use of drip technology has been seen in both residential

and commercial landscapes. And while it's more prevalent in the Southwest and drought-stricken states, it's a form of irrigation that everyone can stand to benefit from using.

How drip works

Unlike a traditional sprinkler system that rotates to reach a broad area of lawn and landscaping, drip distributes water to a smaller, more central location.

"Basically, drip irrigation delivers water slowly at low pressure directly to the root zone of the landscape plant material," says Dave Palumbo, irrigation products sales manager at Rain Bird.

The drip system is woven throughout the plant material either directly above or below ground and water is emitted in gallons per hour, not gallons per minute. "The idea is we are applying water very slowly at or near the root zone so that we lose almost no water to evaporation, or to landing or being placed where it doesn't do the plant any good," Baron says. "By eliminating those sources of water, you increase the efficiency when you use a drip system over more conventional methods."

Drip systems can be used in any situation one would find regular irrigation techniques, but is mainly seen in flowerbeds and containers. While it can be used for turf and is gaining popularity for turf irrigation, some manufacturers caution using the technique because maintenance can cause challenges.

That said, there are two basic approaches to drip technology.

For sparse planting, tubing - usually

Unlike a traditional sprinkler system that uses rotors to reach a broad area, drip irrigation delivers water slower and at a lower pressure directly to the plant materials root zone.





polyethylene – is laid in lateral lines to carry the water to the plant. Emitters are placed in the tubing that circles the plant to carry water directly to the roots. "You don't want to be watering that open space because it's not growing anything, so you don't need any water there," Baron says. "What we call drip emitters are placed near the plant. You typically like to have two emitters, one on each side of the plant."

For denser plantings, dripline might be more suitable. This technology already has emitters built into the tubing, which is usually PVC or some form of polyethylene, and the emitters comes with different spacing (i.e., 6 or 9 inches apart) and different flow rates.

"In that case, you collate around the plant material and you can either bury the tubing with mulch or put it on top of the ground," says Stuart Spaulding, technical service manager at DIG Corp. "Dripline is more suitable for an area where you have a lot of plants close together, say ground cover or flowerbeds

where you want to receive total saturation of the entire bed," he says.

What contractors should know

While drip can be a more efficient way to irrigate, if the system isn't installed and run properly, it still wastes water.

"It all comes down to proper water management," says Mark Hall, district sales manager at Netafim USA. "You can waste just as much water with drip as you can with spray. It's all how you run your controller."

The three components contractors need to pay close attention to are water pressure, filtration and run time.

"Technically speaking they should know that it operates at lower pressure than a sprinkler system so they should put in a pressure regulator if necessary," Spaulding says. "Also, drip systems usually utilize a filter, which a conventional sprinkler system doesn't, to keep the water relatively clean and keep the emitters from clogging."

A traditional sprinkler system can op-

erate anywhere from 30-60 psi, experts say. But a drip system needs to be below 50 psi and can run as low as 15 psi. Also, because the water rate is gallons per hour instead of gallons per minute, a filtration system can go a long way in keeping clean water circulating.

"The third (point for contractors) is that the system probably needs to run longer," Palumbo says. "Because the flow rate is less, you need to run it longer than you would a conventional irrigation system."

Because the water flow rate is a different measurement, it might take some time to get the water schedule down, Baron says. Contractors will need to look at the different plants and understand their exact watering needs.

While there are technical aspects to think about, the systems aren't that difficult to put in if you have the proper training, Spaulding says. "I think there's a little bit of confusion about that," he says. "Some people might think its tedious and time consuming, but if you do a little bit





of research and get a little bit of training it's no problem at all."

The experts say organizations like the Irrigation Association and many local college extensions offer classes.

Baron says new contractors hesitant about installing drip systems can also spend \$30-\$40 and experiment with connecting the tubing and a hose. "Don't be afraid to punch the tubing, connect the tubing, take emitters in and out, flush the

line and then throw it all away," he says.
"I think it's a mindset of, 'I've never done
it before, am I going to screw it up?'"

What to emphasize when selling drip While drip has been around for decades, manufacturers say there's been an instal-

manufacturers say there's been an installation boon as the public becomes more educated about the technology.

States such as California, Arizona, Nevada and Florida are leading the way with installations taking place, but it is spreading throughout the country. Retrofitting has also become popular.

To understand the reason for the growing trend, all one has to do is look at the numbers. Industry experts say those using drip can save anywhere from 25-70 percent on water usage. The number can vary widely based on proper management of the system, but other benefits include not having water spots on cars, windows and houses — anywhere the wind or rotation might take the spray from a traditional sprinkler system.

Experts also say there is a misconception that the system costs a great deal more to install. "Installing it might be a little more expensive, but it all depends," Palumbo says. "It depends on if you're going to bury the system or leave it at grade. There are some variables that make it tough to say it's always more expensive or it's always less expensive. But it's very comparable."

When selling drip systems to clients, the benefits are important to point out. But it might not hurt to take a few extra steps. For those just installing the systems, teaming with a good designer is one way, Hall says.

"Contractors say, 'People won't pay for a design,' but a lot of it has to go into how you sell it," he says. "If you sell it properly to a customer, they'll realize the value of a design and that is going to make for a better job. And actually, the contractor will probably make more money."

Another recommendation is to use visuals in the selling process, Hall says. Take photos before a system is installed, during and after to document the work.

"When the contractor goes to the next client, they can say, 'This is what it achieved. Before we had water spotting on the windows, now we don't. Before our plants were yellowing, now they're not,'" Hall says. "You can tell them in three years, all of the money you've spent, you can get back and this is how."

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. She can be reached at clawell@gie.net.

DRIPTIPS

Joseph H. Fortier has been working with drip irrigation for more than 30 years. He started in the wholesale industry selling the technology and now is water conservation manager for the Las Vegas branch of ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance and president and founder of Mojave Water Management, a landscape irrigation and water management consulting firm.

"The biggest benefit to drip is No. 1, you're going to save water; No. 2, you're going to have healthier plants," Fortier says. "There are a whole list of benefits to it. It can reduce weeds and pests. It's great for versatility."

Here, Fortier gives tips for using drip technology.

Schedule properly. Plants have different watering needs. "Scheduling drip can be one of the most challenging things. The reason I say challenging is because if they don't install the drip irrigation system to approximately meet the plants water needs, then you end up having to water to the plant that needs the most water and you end up overwatering the other plants. It's very important in the beginning to adjust the emitters to the individual plant water needs."

Install enough emitters. "The biggest mistake I see is people not balancing the water needs for the plants, especially



One benefit of drip is water savings.

trees." A contractor can't put four emitters around a 25-foot canopy tree and expect it to maintain a healthy root system because it's not going to get enough water.

Pick a quality product. First of all, pick a product that is available to you and easy to service. "If you don't have service when there's a problem, then it's a lot harder for a contractor or their customer to take care of the issue." Second, quality is important. Don't just buy the cheapest product. "That pertains to any irrigation, but especially for drip irrigation. I've seen poly tubing deteriorate in three to five years, especially when it's exposed to sunlight."

Run tubing properly. Drip irrigation is especially beneficial for slopes because the water is running so slow runoff isn't as prevalent. "One of the common mistakes I see on slopes is people not running the tubing horizontally, they run it vertically and then they wonder why it always drains out the bottom end."

The PortaPump

The pitch: A portable trash pump for clearing water from irrigation breaks/leaks. flooded areas. construction/



installation zone and ponds or retention areas.

- . The 33 gpm trash pump is powered by a commercial grade 35cc Honda
- · A half-speed trigger lock will keep your work area clear of water even if the pipe is still leaking.
- · The Honda engine pumps water through 100 feet of hose or up a 20-foot rise without losing pump pressure.

Contact: www.seagointernational. com

Guill extrusion threelaver technology

The pitch: Guill Tool & Engineering's tooling utilizes three

layers to



produce the necessary tubing for efficient and environmentally safe drip

- . The head/die engineering utilizes a spiral flow that handles three layers.
- · Allows almost any type of polymer to be the bulk of the material inside the tube, hose or pipe.
- · The drip irrigation crosshead/die is designed to produce a tube that uses virtually any type of three-layer construction.

Contact: www.guill.com

Air valve enclosures

The pitch: Metal Cabinet & Fixture Co., a Span-O-Matic Co., offers NEMA 3R vandal resistant, knock down air valve enclosures.



- · Aluminum and stainless steel enclosures come with an orbital random finish that allow for graffiti removal without touch-up paint.
- The enclosures come with a lift-off door that is secured with your pad-
- · The steel enclosures are powder coat vellow or purple.

Contact: www.spanomatic.com



Wire and valve tracker

The pitch:

The Armada Tech Pro800 improves on existing industry



offerings to provide the latest technology available in irrigation wire and valve locating and troubleshooting.

- · Features a rechargeable 12-volt transmitter battery.
- · Has triple AC buzz and hum filter. and a new wireless connection/ broadcast mode.
- · With 20 percent more transmitting power, the distance one can track cable increases.
- · Wireless coupling to cables through the broadcast mode means you don't have to connect to the wires to get a tracking signal.

Contact: www.armadatech.com

Irrigation controller

The pitch: The 710xxxP battery operated controller from DIG Corp. employs the latest engineering improvements for better opera-



- . The controllers are powered by one, 9-volt battery and wrapped in a compact housing design that provides waterproofing capability.
- · Operates in conjunction with DIG's 2-wire DC solenoid and are available with 3/4-inch to 2-inch inline valves.
- . Station run time from 1 second to 12 hours in 1-second increments.

Contact: www.digcorp.com

Sprinkler Buddy

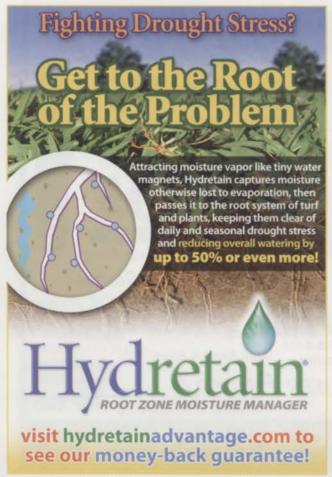
The pitch: The Sprinkler Buddy allows professionals to identify pop-up sprinkler heads in the lawn preventing accidental damage to the pop-up sprinkler head or water source.



- · Allows the user to custom fit the Sprinkler Buddy regardless of the shaft diameter of most major brands or models.
- · Prevents grass from growing between the shaft of the sprinkler head and indicator itself.
- . The Sprinkler Buddy is made in America from a flexible, 100 percent recycled material and has the highest UV resistant rating available.

Contact: www.sprinklerbuddv.com

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Rain Bird STP Plus

The pitch: The STP Plus is a flexible. entry-level professional irrigation controller.



- · When programming a zone, all irrigation schedule information is displayed on the controller's screen.
- · Comes in four-zone, six-zone and nine-zone models, offering independent programs for every zone to provide more versatile irrigation control.
- · The back-up battery operation saves the controller's time and date for up to one week in the event of a power outage.
- New user-adjustable intervals for the second, third and fourth watering start times on a zone offer greater flexibility to those users who want to run additional cycles for shorter periods of time.

Contact: www.rainbird.com



RainPerfect pump

The pitch: The solar-powered RainPerfect pump makes it easy to recycle rain water.

- . The RainPerfect pump and solar panel install on to most standard rain barrels and provide pressure through an ordinary garden hose.
- . The pressure from the RainPerfect pump is enough to run most low pressure sprinklers and water the
- · With the solar panel energized by the sun, there's no need for an electrical outlet.
- · Uses a rechargeable NiMH battery. powered by the included solar

Contact: www.rainperfectpump.com

Revolution Waterfall pump

The pitch: This 5100 gph pump supports a 24-foot waterfall.

- . The internal design allows debris to flow without clogging.
- . Comes with a mesh protective barrier to protect the pump from larger debris.
- · 24-foot maximum pumping height.

Contact: www.smart-pond.com

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Jeff Korhan

This issue of Lawn & Landscape focuses on social media, something many small business owners still have a tough time wrapping their minds around. I know this from speaking on this subject to a number of green industry associations, as well as working with many of you personally.

Social media is nothing more than a platform that allows anyone to communicate pretty much anything they want to at any time – that's it.

You can use social media for whatever purpose you choose. Just be aware that social democratizes media. This means it works best for what the community wants, not necessarily for you or your business.

What you communicate on the social networks, and how you do that, all says a great deal about you and your business to the members of your community. Conversely, what you don't say does the same. While you may not think this is fair, it is nonetheless true.

Social media is a community, and you are part of your community, so your customers expect you to be involved. This is no different than being active in your local Chamber of Commerce or participating at churches or local schools. The idea is to use social media to be more local, what marketers refer to as hyperlocal.

Contrary to what many believe, social media is not a marketing platform, not in a traditional sense, anyway. You don't market at church or your local schools, so approach social media in the same way. Think of this as an opportunity for building relationships to better accomplish your objectives, while also helping others with theirs.

One way to get comfortable with social media is to view it as a new game that we are all learning to play and one that will continue to change as it evolves. It's a game that requires skill, and you cannot develop that if you skip the essential step of showing up.

An ideal place to start is by registering your business with Google Places, Google Maps, and Facebook Places – so you are visible to the respective search engines. I'm sure you are familiar with Google, but you may not be familiar with what is emerging with respect to Facebook and social search. Refer to my article (pg.64) in this issue to learn more about this important topic.

There is an element of fear involved with social media because it opens you up to a potentially large and unknown audience. Some embrace the limelight, others take a moment to consider what to say, and a portion will politely decline the opportunity.

Like it or not, every small business is now its own media company, or should be. It's a new responsibility that we all have to take seriously.

Jeff Korhan is a speaker, consultant and top-ranked blogger on new media and small business marketing at www.jeffkorhan.com; mail jkorhan@glemedia.com.

the Web, study other landscapers' social media efforts, but also look at what some of the big companies in other industries do to see what you can learn.

I use LinkedIn and Twitter less than Facebook. For now, I have my "toe in the water" with each of them, as that seems to be the best way to learn more about them than just sitting on the sidelines doing nothing. The key to social media is to be consistent and to be careful. Pretend that someone like your mom or best client is always watching you, always reading your posts.

Be careful what you post. Offer up advice, have an angle. Think about what you'd like to hear your clients say about you and try to post along those lines. In other words, talk about good service, quality and creativity, and then show pictures that demonstrate all that. Social media is here to stay, and it's foolish not to participate in it.

But, it's foolish to spend hours each day doing it while there are so many other things to do. Social media is like a lot of other things in life: a little bit of it is good for you; a lot of it is bad and can derail your business. So, get into social media, just don't get addicted to it.

MARTY GRUNDER is a speaker, consultant and author; he owns Grunder Landscaping Co. See www.martygrunder.com; mail mgrunder@giemedia.com.

John Ossa

admit to having been skeptical about social media and its relevance to build-

ing a business. That is until two of the most important business contacts I made over this past year were directly because of social media. In one case, it was a matter of reconnecting with someone I had

worked with in the past, and in the other it was a situation of good timing and the great reach of the Internet.

The platforms may be relatively new, but we are still talking about "Business 101." Your business needs customers. Twitter, for example, makes it easy for your business to be found or discovered by potential clients.

Another aspect of being found is the person that is found *first* stands the best percentage chance of getting the customer.

It may not matter that you are more qualified than the other competitor in your market. If people find the other person first, you may lose the opportunity. Social media can be a great tool for augmenting your presence and enabling you and your business to be discovered by potential customers.

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INDUSTRY VOICES

never exposed to the "social norms" and conventions for reaching out that many of us take for granted. Many young people today will never know what a phonebook is. They will, however, be very quick to understand what your business is made of, because they readily access third-party information about your business via social media or consumer feedback platforms that connect people and give them a forum.

Social media offers another important avenue to reaching customers. It offers the chance to share a side of the business or the dreams behind it that let people know more of what you stand for, and just who the real people in the business are. You can tell your story on a more personal level, than traditional media outreach.

That said, this opportunity cuts both ways - the informality of the media should never cloud your judgment about what is appropriate to put into the "electronic town square" that is the Web. Courtesy, respect and the Golden Rule are ever so important now that it is even easier to cross certain boundaries than it was in the past.

To promote your business, it is worth thinking through what the core truth is that people will remember about your presence and communication.

Something relevant, something meaningful and something different in a positive way will get noticed. Anything else will be treated as noise - people might listen for a while, but will tend to treat you less seriously.

So think through how you can engage, entertain and educate possible customers. If you do this in a way that is fun, real and easy to understand, you will leverage the media to its highest benefit for you and your business.

JOHN OSSA is the national accounts director at Irrigation Water Technologies America and owns Irrigation Essentials. Mail jossa@ giemedia.com.



Jim Huston

Fred Flintstone is probably better qualified to comment on rocket science than I am to do the same on social media. However, social media "fossils" like me might have their place and provide some value.

Wikipedia states, "Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of Web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue." A communication and relationship revolution is taking place that is driven by both technology and propensity. Without the technology, nothing new would happen. Without the propensity (the desire and the inclination to act like social beings), the technology would merely sit on our shelves and wither.

WHAT'S HAPPENING. Social media allows individuals and groups to connect, interact and change behavior at the speed of light. Twitter, YouTube and Facebook have been credited, at a minimum, with accelerating the revolution in Egypt that saw the downfall of Hosni Mubarak,

The film "The Social Network," directed by David Finch and starring Jesse Eisenberg, chronicled the founding of Facebook, It won three Oscars and lost five. I saw the movie, and I'm still trying to figure out what the fuss is all about.

THE FIRST SOCIAL MEDIA REVOLUTION.

In the book "1,000 Years, 1,000 People: Ranking the Men and Women Who Shaped the Millennium," the authors rank the most influential men and women of the last millennium. At the top of the list is Johannes Gutenberg, 15th century inventor of the movable-type printing press

Why did the authors place him at the top of their list? I'd say that it was because he started the first social media revolution. Europe and the world were changed for the better and forever.

For the first time, books were massproduced and put into the hands of the masses. Literacy was no longer the sole realm of the aristocracy and the intelligentsia.

While not operating at the speed of light as today's social media revolution, the result of Gutenberg's invention connected

men and women in a way never previously seen. He paved the way and laid a foundation upon which the Reformation and Renaissance were built.

PROPENSITY FOR CHANGE. Jim Collins in his classic "Good to Great" tells us that technology is a productivity accelerator. It can only add to what is already there. It is not an end in itself.

If we do not have the propensity for change, technology does us no good. Tom Peters in his book "Thriving on Chaos" tells us that we need to embrace chaos - see it as the norm. We also need to realize that chaos breeds opportunity. To survive and thrive in the current economy, you have to do both.

First, you must be willing to face head-on the current economic situation. Second, you need to prepare your team to look for new opportunities in new market conditions. You and your team need to be willing to reinvent your company and provide new and/or Improved products and services.

CHANGE TO WHAT END? All of this tumult. needs to be tied to morals, ethics and values. That is the primary concern for what is happening with the Middle East revolutions. Revolution to and for what end(s)? Will this social media revolution lead to democracy or another (perhaps worse) totalitarian regime?

CONCLUSION. Social media today provides unparalleled opportunities for the green industry company that is willing to embrace them. However, you have to be prepared to do so. You have to do your homework, break out of your mold and explore new technologies. Talk to someone - your teenage son or daughter, nephew, niece, etc. - who can show you how to use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. And remember to put it all in perspective. Without the proper morals, ethics and values to drive this revolution, the results will lead to destructive ends.

As for Fred Flintstone: he, Wilma, Barney and Betty adapted and had a hugely successful TV show in the early 1960s. Not bad for folks who lived with dinosaurs. Just goes to show you that there's hope for all of US. LAL

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25 years and growing

U.S. Lawns President Ken Hutcheson reflects on a quarter century of growth, and how he'll nearly triple the company's revenue.

en Hutcheson has big goals. From his home base in Orlando, Fla., he runs one of the largest franchise companies in the green industry – one he helped start 25 years ago. But he's not finished.

The president of U.S. Lawns wants to grow from his current stable of 200-plus franchisees in 34 states to all 50, and bump revenues from \$102 million to a level that would put them among the top five firms in the industry. (In 2010, that meant revenue of at least \$272 million.)

"We don't look for incremental growth," Hutcheson says. "We look for exponential growth, and that's been from day one."

We caught up with Hutcheson to talk about what it's like to work as a division of The ValleyCrest Cos., the future of the landscape industry and how he'll reach those lofty goals.

What's your average day at work like?

Usually we sleep in 'til about noon. (Laughs)

And then you play golf the rest of the day.

Yeah, schedule a late brunch and then decide what time we're going back up. (Laughs) Send that one to Burt and our typical day will change dramatically very quickly I'm sure.

I use a line a lot, and that is, "Right person, right position, right time." Everybody knows the right person, right position. Those are cliché. People write books about that, right? "Right seat on the school bus."

But I think what so many

people miss is right time as well. Today my role is to be a facilitator of things. My role is to help inspire and motivate franchisees from a very high level.

My job is to be looking five years out. What will we be doing in five years with this company? Are there opportunities that we're missing? Understanding that while we look for opportunity, we also want to remain true to our course, and that's the same course that we laid out 25 years ago.

What is your vision in five years? What does U.S. Lawns look like?

We have some high-level objectives. One is to be in all 50



Now, to break that top five, if my numbers are right, you'd have to more than double your revenue in five years.

achievable goal for us.

If I had not been involved with this concept for as long as I have and if I didn't have tremendous faith in the ability of owners to do what owners do well every day, we would not have publically put that goal out there. It's an achievable goal.

How do you expect to get there?

Well, today we really haven't done acquisitions to speak of. Some of our franchisees will acquire other local companies, and we encourage that if they can find a good quality acquisition candidate.

Although, that's not a significant driver of our business at all. Almost all of our growth is organic. It's through what we do every day. So we have two ways to do that.

One is by our existing current franchisees continuing to grow at the same rate they are today, and we have some very significant operators in these local markets. And



then also clearly by adding to the number of franchisees we have in the system. Understanding that when a franchisee comes on, more often than not they're starting from scratch.

Year one, they grow. Year two, year three, year four, year five, they grow. So the bulk of that growth that we see in the next five years will be our existing franchisees following the financial pattern that they've laid out and that we've coached them on.

And ultimately we see that typically being in that million-and-a-half dollar range per branch, and that's what the model has been built around from day one.

What's the biggest change that you've seen in the industry since you started?

People first, tools second. We can build the greatest tools in the world – and I'm talking about processes, procedures, systems – but ultimately people first, tools second.

That's both the home office team that we have here that supports the franchisees and sells franchises, and the franchise owners themselves.

Where will the industry be in five or 10 years?

History repeats itself. There's nothing original in this world. What we can do is look at other similar industries to see how they have matured and evolved over time, and I think we'll see that in the world of commercial. When I look at the maintenance business, I see it continuing to evolve and mature.

I see customers becoming far more educated. I see contractors becoming far more educated and sophisticated.

What other industries do you keep an eye on yourself?

We keep a close eye on the janitorial industry because they tend to serve a lot of similar customers that we do, and they are a very, very mature industry. They also rely completely on labor, which is what we do. We sell labor and expertise, and they do the same. We also watch very carefully the property management industry. These are the management companies that work on behalf of owners managing their properties. We watch that industry, and we've seen the same thing there, that we now have many, many national players in that arena where 15 years ago we had few.

What are your biggest challenges facing U.S. Lawns?

Our biggest challenge is building the right team and managing that team effectively. I don't look outside necessarily. I mean, we watch for threats, but ultimately as long as we've got our eye on the customer, we've got our eye on customer satisfaction, and we build the right team—we feel pretty confident that the success will continue. Grass keeps growing, man.

That's good. You've got some insurance there.

Look at the last four years. The most dramatic changes in the world that I've seen in the last four years going from '06 to the end of 2010. We've seen the world change so much, and in fact in our regional meetings in 2006,



Ken Hutcheson wants to push U.S. Lawns into every state and more than double its revenue in the coming years.

our topics of conversation in our seminars and sessions were on building the bench, taking advantage – or being aware of opportunity cost. It was all around how will we get the work done. In '07 we started to see a little bit of a blip on the horizon.

We saw residential construction slowing. We still didn't feel anything in unemployment yet, but we started to have some nervousness in the market. In '08 there was a significant change when we saw residential construction absolutely stop in its tracks. We saw the first rise in unemployment even though it was just a minor rise, and we saw a lot of fear in the market. Again, we've had, by the way, record breaking years. Each year we've grown.

In '09 it was – unemployment was hitting 9 and 10 percent and in some markets significantly above that, and we still were growing. In 2010 it was a feel of let's get back to work, which we did, and we had a great 2010. So I look at that and I say, "You know, that validates the

model pretty well." So when I look for the next five years, I trust and hope that the world won't see the change and the tension that we've seen the last five years.

Is there anything we didn't touch on that you think is important for our readers?

We're still working after 25 years with the same set of core values that we had 25 years ago: trust, value, quality, service. That's not changed one word in 25 years. We still have the same vision, and we emphasize this vision and these values at every meeting we have. This is how we open a meeting, and that is our vision is to be the leader in the landscape industry.

And when we talk about being the leader, we don't just talk about being a leader in the industry. We talk about being the leader in your community, being the leader in your family, being the leader in your local company.

The author is editor and associate publisher of Lawn & Landscape. Email him at cbowen@gie.net.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA

he world is full of noise. You – and your customers – are constantly barraged by information. Why would you want to turn up the volume and start a blog or create a Facebook page or start tweeting? Because, if you do it right, you'll cut through the static and have a clear connection with your clients, prospects and community. Social media is connecting people faster than ever before. Your customers are out there, and if you're not, you're missing out.

Lawn & Landscape asked some of the green industry's best social media practitioners for their advice on how companies can use these tools successfully. Their insights on marketing, content and technology follow.— Chuck Bowen

MEET THE WRITERS

The writers for our cover story package this month are some of the green industry's best when it comes to using social media. You can find them all over the Internet.

Diana Lauren Berneker is marketing and advertising coordinator at Moyer Indoor Outdoor, Souderton, Pa., and owner of DLB Creative. Find her on Facebook at facebook.com/dianalaurenb.

Chris Heiler runs landscapeleadership.com. He's on Facebook at facebook.com/ciheiler and Twitter @chris_heiler.

Jeff Korhan is a speaker, consultant and top-ranked blogger on new media and small business marketing at jeffkorhan.com. He's on Facebook at facebook.com/jeffkorhan, on Linkedin at linkedin.com/in/jeffkorhan and on Twitter at @jeffkorhan.

What are you doing out there?

Social media is great. But what, exactly, are you trying to accomplish? By Chris Heiler

ave you jumped on the social media bandwagon yet? Are you ready to jump off already? Or have you embraced it like a kid does a brand new puppy?

If you're like most companies in the green industry who are dabbling in social media, you are probably somewhere in between.

The single best piece of advice I can give you is this: Find your "one thing." In other words, clearly define your single objective as it relates to social media and your business.

Do you see social media as a pointless, giant time-suck? If so, it's probably because you don't have a clear objective in mind. Have you ever asked yourself, "What the hell am I doing this for?"

Well, it's time to find your answer.

ASK YOURSELF WHY. As with anything, your chance for success with social media is much greater when you have a clearly defined, concrete objective. Otherwise, you're just wandering aimlessly. A concrete objective clarifies your purpose and can unite and empower your employees so you're all shooting at the same target.

With a clear goal established, you can then craft a well thought out social media strategy and plan to enable you to reach your goal. When you have a goal, you have something to measure. And you can create benchmarks along the way.

An objective and well-thought-out strategy allows you to focus only on what's important and ignore what is not. So, why are you on LinkedIn? Why did

STUDIES ON A THEME

Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com to learn how Neave Group Outdoor Solutions in New York developed a theme for its social media efforts, and how that helps grow its business.

you create a Facebook page for your business? Why did you start a blog?

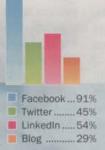
GENERATING LEADS TO BUILDING YOUR REPUTATION. I'm going to outline seven practical objectives for you to consider. Focus on one, but keep in mind that one or two others may become secondary goals.

Also keep in mind, everyone won't have the same objective – a lot depends on the type of business. For instance, a landscape designer may have more in-

Social media BY THE numbers

Lawn & Landscape asked readers to tell us a little bit about their social media habits – what they use, how often and why. Here's what they said.

What social media platforms do you use for your business?



Why do you use social media in your business?



- To market my business to customers and prospects... 88%
- To network with other green industry professionals 55%

ISSUE





What they are and how they can enhance your sales, marketing and customer service.

By Jeff Korhan

uick response or OR codes will likely your green industry business - and for good reason. They give your prospects and customers immediate and local devices - and they are free.

THE BASICS. These square codes are similar to the barcodes that retailers use to track inventory and price products at the point of sale. Both are graphic representations of encrypted data. The key difference between the two is the amount of data they can hold or share.

When you scan or read a QR code with your iPhone, Android or other camera-enabled smartphone, you can link to digital content on the Web. present a text message up to several hundred characters long or activate a phone call.

You can attach a code to any number of physical objects, such as your business cards, brochures or yard signs, Creating a QR code is simple - just enter the appropriate data (such as a website URL) into the QR code generator.

APPLICATIONS FOR OR CODES.

Sharing information that is useful to your prospects and customers is a great way to build interest in your products and services. A blog is one method of accomplishing this that has worked well for me. If you don't have a blog, you could help your customers with an informative YouTube video.

You build community when you share, and one of the popular arenas for doing this is Facebook. You can use Likify (likify.net) to create a QR code that actually brings a fully functioning

terest in building her reputation, while a lawn care company may be focused on generating leads.

Generate leads. Adding leads (preferably qualified) to your sales funnel is a viable objective for your social media efforts. Of course "leads" mean different things to different businesses. Perhaps a lawn care company focuses efforts on building its newsletter list. A garden center may focus on increasing foot traffic. A landscape architect may focus on building his/her blog readership.

2 Increase sales. There's nothing wrong with using social media to increase your sales. The problem I see with many green industry companies is that they see this bottom-line objective as the only reason to participate without realizing the other benefits of social media.

3Stay in touch. Social media is a very effective platform for staying top-of-mind with clients. If keeping in touch with your contacts is your only social media objective, it will be time well spent.

4 Expand your sphere of influence. Social networking is one of the most effective ways to meet like-minded, collaborative people. This could mean on a local level or within your industry on a national level.

This is one reason I love social media: You never know where these relationships may take you.

Build your reputation. How effec-Tive or successful your social media strategy is cannot only be measured in dollars and cents. Sorry, We're living in a new economy: One where attention and reputation are equally valued. If you can draw positive attention to your efforts, boosting your reputation in the process, the dollars will eventually follow.

Build brand awareness. A lot of 6 corporations take this approach with their social media. They just want more exposure in the marketplace. They want to introduce their company to more consumers and, at the same time, stay in front of consumers on a consistent basis. APLD (Association of Professional Landscape Designers) has done a terrific job using social media to build awareness of their organization within the ranks of landscape professionals.

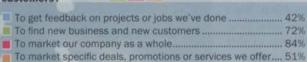
Keep up to date. By simply following a few blogs you can stay in tune with whatever may be relevant to you.

Follow the right people on Twitter and you'll never run out of fascinating, fun and helpful information.

I was asked recently, "How do I build more connections on LinkedIn?" and "How do I get more followers on Twitter?" My answer to both was the same: Why do you need more connections or followers? What is your objective? This is the question you need to start with.

Don't put the cart before the horse. An effective social media strategy and plan can then be developed around your single objective. LAL

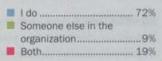
How do you use social media to interact with customers?



How much time each week do you spend using social media?

100	Less than one hour	28%
	1-3 hours	39%
	More than 3 hours	33%

Who at your company updates your social media?





Social Media

Not sure where to begin? Read on. By Diana Lauren Bernecker

66 t's easy to get started. You need to be there." You've heard it many times, haven't you?

Yet, you're still wondering if social media is all it's cracked up to be for your business. Let's get you started with a realistic outlook on using social media to promote your business.

FACE FORWARD. If you haven't already, it's time to set up your own Facebook page. Every project starts with research. Start with competitors' pages. Take into account their communication, their posting frequency and how often their fans respond back.

LOCATE FANS. Put your personal friend base to good use. Anyone who lives in your area should be invited as a fan. Encourage them to share your page with others. You'll also be able to import contacts from your Outlook address book. If you've captured email addresses from your customers, you'll be able to find them easily with this tool.

Now, you've got about 30-50 fans. That's obviously not going to make a big difference. So, what can you do to generate more interest? Start a contest, add

UGLY LAWNS, HAPPY LANDSCAPER

Hicks Landscaping received 2,300 likes on its Facebook page by holding an ugly yard contest to generate traffic to its website. Visit bit.ly/uglylawns to learn how.

links to your advertisements, add a note on your invoices or promote your Facebook page with an email - this is just the tip of the iceberg. Once you get started, much of this will come naturally.

NO NEGATIVITY. And now for the million-dollar question: Are you afraid of negative feedback? If someone has a bad experience today with your company, where will they write the negative feedback? And who will see it?

When moving into my apartment, I had two TVs, the largest of which is a whopping 19-inch flat screen. I called one local cable company whose prices started around \$100. I explained to them that I just needed something basic, cheap.

"Cheap! We don't have cheap service," I heard them yell back to me. After a few minutes battling back and forth, I slammed down the phone. I found their fan page, liked it, and wrote about my experience with the company. Why? Because I knew in return I'd get great customer service. Within an hour, I had a personal message sent to me along with a comment on my post.

How would I have handled my experience five years ago? The company never would have heard how unhappy I was, but my friends would have. The company's potential customers would have had a negative impression.

Now, the company took this opportunity to respond back and handled the problem before it turned into a larger conversation. So now, as a renewed and satisfied customer, you might hear me say, "Wow, they addressed my problem quickly. I must have spoken to a bad egg the first time."

Decide how to handle negative comments with a written policy for your employees. Here's what I'd suggest:

- · If a derogatory or mean-spirited comment is made that does not offer an opportunity for response, the comment will be deleted.
- · If you receive a negative review or comment and there is an opportunity to respond and fix the problem, don't delete it. Show publicly how your company handles problems of this kind. Most people are reasonable; they

LIKE button of your Facebook page to any (pingtags.com) does the same thing with your

One of the most effective uses for QR codes offers by simply updating the landing pages. The QR code doesn't change, just the information it

PRACTICAL USES OF QR CODES, Here are some ways QR codes are being used now, as

What QR codes could link to:

- · How to reach the repair service or contact a technician

The potential application for QR codes is limited only by your imagination. You can count on this area of social sharing and Web marketing to continue to grow. One key reason is QR code capabilities are being enhanced to provide analytics that will allow you to learn more about the behavior of your prospects and

HOW TO CREATE AND SCAN OR CODES

There are a number of sites for generating QR codes and they are all free.

My favorite QR code generator is Kerem Erkan (keremerkan.net) because it offers many capabilities, which includes generating the code in color. Another site that is basic and simpler to use is Kaywa (qrcode.kaywa.com).

Once you have created your code, you need to copy it from the Web. An easy way to accomplish this is with Jing (techsmith.com/jing), which is another free software application.

Scanning a QR code requires you to download a QR reader or scanner to your mobile device.

One that works well on my iPhone, as well as many other brands, including BlackBerry and Android, is i-nigma (i-nigma.com).

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understand that not everyone will be a happy customer.

Sometimes fixing a customer's problem in a big way is even better than the customer having a normal experience. It becomes a referral story and a memorable experience.

TWEETIT OUT. Can you say it in 140 characters? That's what Twitter is looking for, a little piece of your thoughts. Much like a Facebook status, tweeting is the perfect way to get a short message out to the world. Once you start your Twitter page, follow local businesses, community advocates and industry leaders.

LINKED RESEARCH. LinkedIn is a perfect tool for commercial sales. As a professional networking tool, the site allows you to research companies and find decision makers. Your sales team can now call confidently, knowing exactly who to ask for. I began using LinkedIn while working as a recruitment consultant in London to find potential candidates. To head hunt, I'd call and act as though I needed their service, in exchange I was able to receive their contact details. Later, a team member could make contact and start the recruitment process. A little sneaky, yes, but it worked well.

BLOGGING BUSINESS. Earlier this year, I stepped into the blogging world. I started using my blog to promote my marketing consulting company, DLB Creative. It allows companies to share thoughts and ideas quickly and frequently. Posting free guides, helpful tips and current events in your industry are just some of the ways to keep your blog active. Enlist help with the initial page set up, but platforms like Google's Blogger let you post with little difficulty.

Realize that social media sites are tools; they're not the answer to all your marketing needs.

Use them as a way to share information and develop trust. Avoid the traditional sales approach. Today's society reads right through it and stops listening. Instead, be a voice that helps clients achieve their goals. Lal

Social Media



OK, you've got your Facebook page set up and a few posts to your blog. Here's how to leverage your social media connections into real business. By Diana Lauren Bernecker

You feel like you're off to a good start, but you've only got 50 fans on Facebook, 12 followers on Twitter and your LinkedIn profile tells you you're only 80 percent complete. What should you do next?

SNOWBALL FANNING. Facebook is the perfect tool to connect with your residential customers and prospect base. How do you go about gathering new fans? Here are some ways we at Moyer Indoor Outdoor have gathered a larger fan base.

We started by randomly selecting one fan to receive \$25 in Moyer Money each week. Advertising this on our website and notifying current fans, we added more than 75 additional fans.

I then started a new program that encouraged positive feedback on our fan page. Customers who become fans go through a quick three-step process and are automatically emailed a \$10 coupon toward their next service in return. Step 1: Become a fan. Step 2: Write on our wall and tell us about your experience with Moyer. Step 3: Fill out a quick form on our website.

With this program, when we receive a new fan, we also capture their email address. This allows us to further crossmarket additional services. The comment posted on our wall lets us express our expertise to other fans and use as a testimonial.

comment catching. I've found that you need to ask for feedback to receive it. Start from the very beginning by asking your fans questions. Each time someone comments on a post, his or her friends see the comment. This gives you more page views on the newsfeed and encourages their friends to become fans too.

GOOD, HEALTHY COMPETITION. Applications like Wildfire (wildfireapp.com)

LOCK IT DOWN



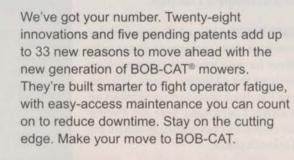
Being connected is great, but be aware of what information you – or your employees – make available to your friends.

The other day, I found my aunt on Facebook, and for the first time I understood why so many people are worried about security. I wasn't even connected to her, and I could see her full address and telephone number. In a moment, I realized that security had very little to do with the sites capability to provide custom security options, instead it was a user error.

When you start your personal Facebook page, use the privacy settings under your account. Don't just assume Facebook will take care of it for you. I'd recommend customizing your settings. If you choose to accept customers as friends or even business connections, you have a few options. Take into consideration the content of what you are posting on your personal page before posting it. You are the face of your business and so are your employees. Under the settings menu you can block certain Facebook friends from seeing your wall. This will help if you choose to share more personal information in posts.

As for your employees, it's important that you start a social media policy. A policy covering use during company time, use of company's name, and information included in personal blogs are just a few of the items that should be included. Alongside this policy, create opportunities for the employees to be involved in your page. You'll want to keep their interaction positive. A great way to do this is through camera phones. Ask your employees to take pictures of some of the lawns your working on – before and after photos and current problems all make good posts and keep customers informed.

MOVE AHEAD. OR BE LEFT BEHIND.



Find a dealer and demo your future at www.bobcatturf.com.



Make Your Move™

www.bobcatturf.com



youtube.com/bobcatmowers

©2011 Schiller Grounds Care, Inc.

help you run professional contests without spending a fortune. To enter our latest contest, you need to upload a picture of your family spending time together on our Facebook wall. One lucky fan will win a full year of tree and shrub care. It can be that easy, it's all about creating a fun reason to be a part of your company's fan page.

EASY TWEET. Although Twitter isn't for everyone, there are some easy ways to be there for your tweeting customer base without the additional hassle. We link our Facebook posts to directly tweet on Twitter. I personally have my Twitter account set to automatically update my LinkedIn status.

GETTING LUCKY. At networking events, I'm constantly getting pulled aside to meet someone new. I was heading out the door from an event and someone velled, "Diana, come meet Kathy." After a quick two-minute conversation, I headed off. The next day we connected on LinkedIn.

Kathy and I commented on each other's posts and sent event invites to one another. Eventually we ended up at the same event and as soon as I walked in, she ran up, said an enthusiastic hello and gave me a hug. Yes, a hug. Imagine being set up on a blind date, meeting for coffee and skipping the dating process, going right to getting lucky. With social media, sometimes it feels like your skipping a step.

WRITERS BLOCK? Blogging is all about a personal style of writing. For a business blog, you'll want one person to be that voice. Not a great writer? No problem. I'd suggest finding a local copywriter. You may even want to start with three to four, give them each bullet points and some research materials.

With any social networking site, you'll need to become a conversation creator. Find interesting topics, comment on others posts, upload photos and share a piece of you. It's a whole new popularity contest, and you want to become the homecoming king. LAL



Social search

Get ready for the marketing game changer. By Jeff Korhan

TRADITIONAL VS. SOCIAL SEARCH. When a prospect is doing a search for a company like yours, they are using keyword phrases in their search terms to describe it. Google searches all the indexed Web content to send them results that are relevant, with location being a key factor. This is one reason you want to have your landscape business registered with Google Places to be easily found by your most important prospects – those that are local. In addition to location, timeliness is also important to relevancy, because fresh content

that has recently been updated is most likely the most relevant. This is why Google gives blogs and other websites that are updated frequently a great deal of credibility, and why you should consider blogging as part of your marketing.

What else is this relevant to? Information being shared on each and every social network including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr, to name just a few. Recently, Google

WHY SOCIAL SEARCH WILL BE A GAME CHANGER. To explain why social is so important to the future of search, I need to introduce a new term – social graphs. Your social graph is a digital map of your personal identity, your primary friends or connections and everything you share with them via the social networks.

have a social graph on Facebook, but one for each and every social network where you have a presence. However, it is essential to know that while Google can see the content on Facebook pages, all of the information on the nearly one billion personal profiles is invisible to them - and that is the game changer. There is more activity on Facebook on any given day than there is on Google. And, the information on Facebook is rich with contextual data.

while also engaging with your friends on Facebook. Your friends may not be customers, but they trust you, and that means they are likely to comment favorably about you. Those innocuous comments are being indexed every day. Be sure your friends know what you do page and have them like it - thereby effectively merging your private and public Facebook social graphs.

PREPARE FOR SOCIAL SEARCH. Here are some easy steps you can take to enhance your social graph on all social networking sites so that you will be prepared for social search.

Keep your content fresh - Social graphs are digital maps that lead us to places. As social graphing is more frequently done in real-time and location, better decisions become possible. While there may a number of businesses like yours that are suitable to someone doing a search, they are more likely to choose you if you have recently engaged in conversations that are fresh and relevant.

Create social objects - In addition to relationships with people, you also have relationships with objects that further define your social graph. Social objects are anything that is searchable on the Web - people, images, videos and music clips.

Share useful content - As social graphs merge, they become mutually more descriptive and complete. For the most of us, our social graphs are largely empty space. This is why it is important to be actively engaging and sharing on the social networks, both on a personal and professional level. When you do this you are managing your destiny - building accurate social content that speaks to your integrity and trustworthiness.

Update your Google profile - Your Google profile brings together the data that is shared on your social networks into one place where Google can easily see it. Google is not perfect, so you need to take this important step to help them help you.

As new technologies emerge to integrate this growing body of social data, you can expect search capabilities to rise to breathtaking levels - giving more accurate, more personal and timelier search results that help you to be found by your ideal customers.





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Social (scene



Landscape professionals share how they use social media to build their brands, capture leads and nurture relationships. By Kristen Hampshire

he way to get "found" today by potential clients and raving fans who deliver referrals to your inbox is to start socializing. Specifically, you need a presence on social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn, or a blog where you can tell your story and provide that free information customers crave.

Industry marketing consultants believe that not using social media is no longer an option: That means at least starting a Facebook fan page for your business, and filling out a LinkedIn profile (completely). "Our future customers are going to expect to find us online," says Chris Heiler, marketing strategist and founder of LandscapeLeadership.com. "Not all of our customers now are on Facebook, but five years from now, they will be, and they expect to find us there. So, in some capacity, a company has to get on board and get active."

Where to start?

"The best thing to do is to get out there and engage," says Jeff Korhan, who blogs and consults about new media and small business marketing. In his 35 years of marketing experience, Korhan says social media is "the opportunity of a lifetime." Why? Well, first of all, it's free. And second, businesses that invest time in developing a following now could set themselves apart from competitors in the industry that are slow to dabble in social media.

Essentially, social media is the new way to go to market: by building friends, linking in with contacts, sharing information and doing so in a non-promotional way. Social media is a key driver for referrals in today's mobile consumer universe.

Lawn & Landscape spoke to three firms to learn how they successfully use various forms of social media to cement their brand and attract fans who could become customers.

Building community

Susan Cohan Gardens

Susan Cohan, president LOCATION Chatham, N.J. EMPLOYEES 1 2010 REVENUES n/a CUSTOMERS 100% residential SERVICES landscape design

Susan Cohan was an early adopter of online content marketing, whetting her appetite for the power of participation and information sharing on garden Web forums. Twelve years ago, that was the only type of social media. So Cohan spent a good decade answering questions and starting discussions, then in 2007 she started her own blog: Miss Rumphius' Rules (www. susancohangardens.com/blog/).

"For the first two years, I had two readers and I was one of them," laughs Cohan, a landscape and garden design consultant. "I didn't know about all the things you need to do to have a successful blog."

Cohan's blog has evolved over the years into a professional platform -

an engaging, well-populated, mixer environment where a mishmash of people gather to read and comment on her posts. This happens because Cohan has dedicated time to seek out a target blogger community, comment on reputable blogs and update her own online news reel regularly.

"The most important thing I learned about blogging is that you have to be consistent and totally authentic in your voice," Cohan says, calling Facebook and Twitter microblogs that complement Miss Rumphius' Rules. (She may post links on these social media sites, but she always creates new content.) Another important thing she has learned: Don't spread yourself too thin on social media. Pick the platforms that work for your business, and use them religiously.

"You can't be (involved) everywhere, and if you are on all of (the social media sites), you are a robot and people won't listen to you," Cohan says, referring to automated systems where a user can program and roll out Facebook posts and Tweets and tools that allow you to post one time across multiple social media platforms. Cohan prefers a more personal approach – and so do her followers.

"Blogging is a visual sport," she says. "People want to see pictures, so I carry my camera with me everywhere." She posts work-in-progress photos from projects, and her weekly feature, Tuesday's Find, highlights interesting garden antiques and finds, along with a question to prompt reader feedback.

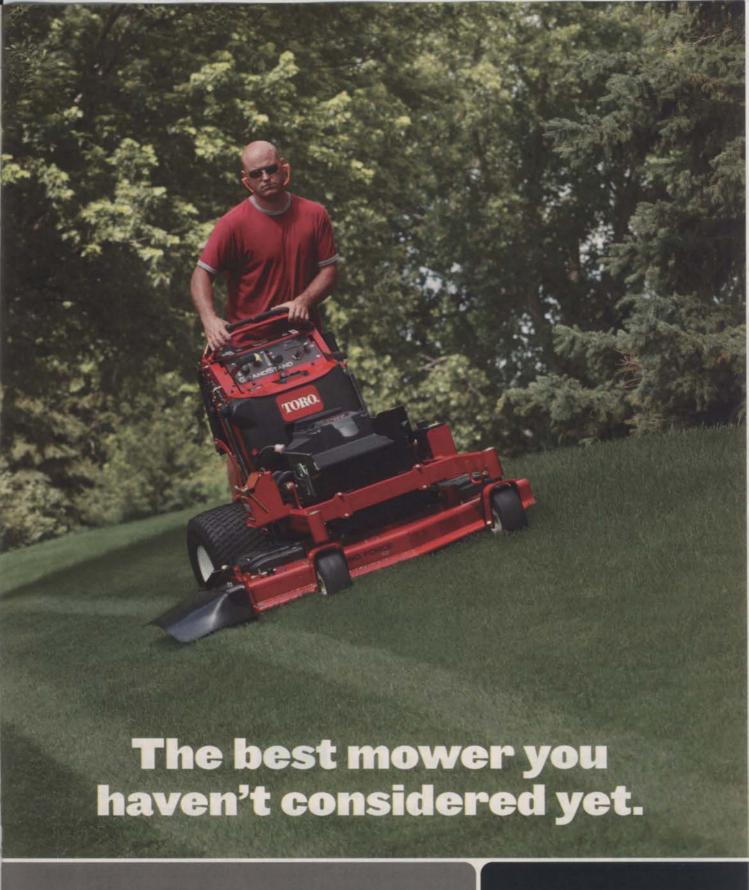
She dedicates time to answer all comments on her blog, "When someone takes the time to comment, you

QUICK TIPS

Limit word count. Cohan keeps her posts in the 300-500 word range. "The single biggest mistake people make with biogging is writing too much." she says.

Don't skip weekends. When do your prospects have time to spend reading blogs? Perhaps not during weekdays when their attention is likely focused on work tasks, family or a myriad of other obligations. So keep information fresh when they're online and reading.

Be real. "Be your own personality – share, and share broadly," Cohan says.



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have to respect their time with a response," she says.

In the past few years, Cohan's blog has cemented her reputation in her field and expanded her network of client prospects. Twitter (@ susancohan) has helped drive new contacts, she says. "But the mistake people make with Twitter is they follow people who are like themselves. I try to follow people outside of my discipline," she says. Cohan follows designers in various fields, magazines and writers. "I establish myself carefully as an authority in my field – someone whose work they might want to look at."

Cohan is active on Facebook (www. facebook.com/susancohan) and this year decided to purchase a Facebook ad. It was ZIP code targeted, and the ad stayed online for 10 days. Cohan got a call from someone who saw the ad, clicked through to Cohan's Facebook page and approached Cohan for services. Cohan admits she was somewhat surprised by the response.

But for \$400, the investment was well worth it. In fact, she has essentially traded traditional marketing, such as sending postcards, for social media like blogging and being active on Facebook and Twitter.

As for keeping up with offering this experience, Cohan commits to blogging three times each week, spends about an hour each day on Twitter and five minutes updating Facebook. She focuses on quality followers. "I don't care if I have 100,000 followers on Twitter," she says. "I can't service 100,000 clients. I'm really looking for engaged followers who I can spur into action in some way."

That way is usually a referral: a follower has a friend, who has a friend, who sends that person to Cohan's blog, who checks out her portfolio, who then calls Cohan for more information. And having a web presence is essential today, she says. "It's important to share, and share broadly," she says. "And be your own person. Be the voice."

Creating a following

Bartlett Tree Experts

Scott Jamieson, vice president LOCATION headquarters in Stamford, Conn. (100 offices around the world) ESTABLISHED 1907 EMPLOYEES 1,500 2010 REVENUES \$160 million CUSTOMERS 50% residential; 50% commercial SERVICES full tree services, soil management

Twitter has become somewhat of a pet project for Scott Jamieson, vice president, Bartlett Tree Experts. While the corporation has its own Twitter and



Jamieson

Facebook accounts, Jamieson's handle, @ChicagoTreeMD, is not all about the business. It is, however, all about trees. To gain a sense of control over what is a vast, diverse universe of online talk, Jamieson has taken on Twitter as "a personal mission to understand it and build some community."

"The power in Twitter is individual," says Jamieson, explaining why he decided to open his own Twitter account a year ago after talking with a marketing professional who advised him to dabble in social media. "Can companies tweet? Absolutely," he says. "But people want to know who is behind that tweet. Who is Bartlett Tree? When it's Chicago TreeMD, they know that tweet is from me."

Jamieson's goal is to deliver worthwhile information in a light, concise, interesting format. Twitter is just the platform to serve up this order.

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QUICK TIPS

Give, don't sell. Social media is not a platform for direct selling. "You'll turn everyone off," Jamieson says. "It's a place to connect - think of it like going to a networking session. You want people to know what you do, but you aren't running around saying, 'This is what I do!'

Consult with a pro. Not sure where to start with social media? Develop a strategy and get advice

Have fun. The thing about these networks they're social. So have fun with them. "Try it - it may or may not be for you," Jamieson says of social media. "There are times when I think, 'I don't have time for this. But there is value - so I

"People want something of value," he emphasizes, underscoring how the old days of output marketing - sending the public a message - have been traded in for two-way, relationship/information based sharing. People want to learn, and they want to get to know you. "Give me information. Make me laugh. Make me want to connect with you," Jamieson says.

"The main thing with Twitter is this building of community that does not have a direct linkage to sales," he adds. "It's networking, building trust, creating a sense of community and expertise - 'If I want to learn about trees, I'll go to @ChicagoTreeMD.' I'm hoping at one point I'll connect (followers) to the business."

There are certainly links. For instance, Bartlett Tree has been involved with helping the Toomer's Corner poisoned oak trees at Auburn University in Alabama. He made the connection via a tweet. "From that perspective, I'm providing insight that followers might find useful and ultimately retweet," he says.

Jamieson shares insight from trade shows with on-the-spot tweets. He has attracted people to his booth this way.

People have even approached Jamieson at shows and events after recognizing his photo from Twitter.

"I have seen amazing things where I connect with people, tweet with them and go to a trade show and then people I have only seen online come up and say, 'I know you,"" Jamieson says. "It's like you know them through conversation and you can just pick up."

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But how does a company achieve a personal connection? The key, Jamieson says, is to ensure that tweets and Facebook posts are congruent with the brand. A company needs a strategy: a plan that integrates social media into the overall marketing picture.

"I see us working hard corporately

to establish a social media strategy," he says.

"As a larger corporation that has been more traditional marketing focused, we are trying to work hard at having social media as an integral part of our complete marketing strategy. It's not a separate thing."

Delivering information

Revolutionary Gardens

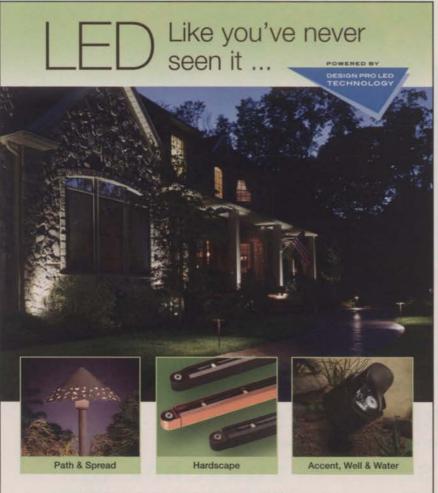
David Marciniak, owner/lead designer LOCATION Manassas Park, Va. ESTABLISHED 2008 EMPLOYEES 1 2010 REVENUES less than \$100,000 CUSTOMERS 95% residential; 5% commercial SERVICES landscape design

Once you get into the groove of blogging, when you miss a daily post you feel like something's missing. "The whole day you feel off," says David Marciniak, owner and lead designer at Revolutionary Gardens, Manassas Park, Va.

"My blog is my website," Marciniak says of http://revolutionarygardens. com. Information sharing is his mission and a way he differentiates his business from competitors. "We're not building rockets," he says. "Homeowners want information to be accessible to them, and there is reciprocity at play if they find someone who is willing to share that information. It advances me as the authority."

Marciniak started blogging in 2008 when he took his business full time. "It was definitely a lousy time in the economy," he says, adding that social media has allowed him to cast a wider net, capture more leads, prompt referrals and nurture relationships so those friends eventually become customers. "There are only so many hours in a day, and social media allows you to be in more than one place at a time, and it gives you cheerleaders who help move you forward," he says.

Most of Marciniak's social media time is spent blogging. He posts four days a week, Monday through Thursday – and sometimes Fridays, if he has photos or a tip of the day he wants to share. He doesn't worry so much about length. "You don't need to be churning out 'War and Peace' every time you sit down at the computer," he says. "What amazes me is how much people really dig on seeing



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progress photos or job-site photos, or even plan drawings or renderings."

Marciniak spends about a half-hour writing each blog. He spends an hour daily on Twitter (@revgardens) following threads. Facebook (www.facebook.com/RevolutionaryGardens) reinforces his blog: He posts links to blog updates, and posts photos and other teasers that eventually guide "friends" to the blog.

As for LinkedIn, Marciniak is still playing with ways to utilize this tool. For now, he treats it as an online resume. His business cards contain a QR code on the back that takes contacts directly to his LinkedIn profile. "They can add me as a contact – it's a short-hand way to exchange business information," Marciniak says.

Converting friends into clients isn't Marciniak's focus for social media. But he notes that the sales closing rate for people who find him through his blog is about 60-70 percent. That's because clients can essentially prequalify themselves by reading his blog.

"They get a sense of the type of work I do, my business philosophy and my personality," he says. "At that point, they can decide whether this is the level of service they want."

Meanwhile, Facebook drives in leads from his vast network of contacts, which includes friends of friends who learn

QUICK TIPS

Tap into time-saving tools. Marciniak follows Twitter threads, but he uses a tool called TweetDeck to stay organized. (This helps muffle all of the noise on this bustling network.) Try this free tool by visiting www. tweetdeck.com.

Be consistent. Your readers expect fresh content, so if you decide to blog or use social media like Facebook, make a commitment to "be there." "By telling yourself this is a key component of your business, you will make time for it." Marciniak says.

Schedule your content. Marciniak uses a WordPress editorial calendar plug-in that works like a desk calendar. He can plan posting topics and write drafts. "If I have an idea, I throw it up in draft mode on the calendar and when I get a chance, I can flesh out that post," he says.

about his business from job-site photos he posts. "Where the value comes in is through those referrals – where someone who is in my network shares a post or photo with someone in their network, and that comes back to me," Marciniak says.

But using blogs and other content

marketing tools only works if you're consistent. People have high expectations: They want updates, often. "If you decide to blog, you have to be firm and steadfast in your commitment," he says. "You have to make time for it."

The author is a frequent contributor to Lawn & Landscape.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

To help out busy contractors, each month throughout 2011, Lawn & Landscape will run a review and synopsis of a business book either from the accepted literary canon or a more modern classic. The fifth installment is Malcolm Gladwell's "Outliers: The Story of Success." The rest of the year's

Linchpin

Seth Godin

How to Win Friends and Influence People

Dale Carnegie

212: The Extra Degree

Sam Parker

7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Stephen Covey

The Prince

Niccolo Machiavelli

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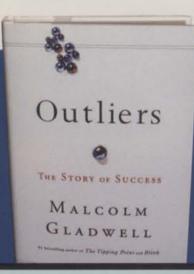
Getting Things Done

David Allen



OUTLIERS: THE STORY **OF SUCCESS**

By Matt LaWell



By now, Malcolm Gladwell is as much a brand as he is a writer with big ideas. All of his books are in paperback, stacked on tables near the front of any major bookstore. His stories run for thousands and thousands of words in The New Yorker, and folks will read every one of them because few writers are able to fit everything together so well and help us understand our own culture.

The Gladwell brand is so prevalent now that even satirical websites, like MalcolmGladwellBookGenerator.com, have popped up.

So when Gladwell published "Outliers: The Story of Success," a few years ago and the book's idea did not match those posed in his first two best-sellers, most critics hammered him. That is not to say that "Outliers" is a bad book. To the contrary, there is a reason Gladwell has sold truck loads of books.

He can tell a story and he can explain ideas more clearly than just about anybody else with a notebook and a keyboard. Is the big idea in "Outliers" - that success in any field has as much to do with circumstance as it does with hard work - as revolutionary as those in "Blink" and "The Tipping Point"? No. But by painting portrait after portrait of success, Gladwell does manage to provide a bit of a blueprint for business owners, regular employees, even folks who just want to get ahead.

The age of great American tycoons is probably over (best to have been born around 1830, Gladwell posits), and there will be few opportunities again to rise to global prominence in computer development (a 1955 birth would have been best), but opportunity is still out there. Just put in your 10,000 hours and be ready when it knocks.

Some other practical business advice from a book that breaks down more than a few misconceptions:

Want to succeed? First put in the hours.

Every time Gladwell writes another success story - whether in American computer development or even youth hockey - the magic number really does seem to be about 10,000 hours. If you devote 10,000 hours to your craft, you will be proficient no matter your job description. "Practice isn't the thing you do once you're good," Gladwell writes. "It's the thing you do that makes you good." If you work eight hours a day, five days a week, that works out to about five years.

Enough is almost always enough. Gladwell writes about geniuses for a couple chapters and reaches the conclusion that, eventually, above-average intelligence is often as useful and productive as genius. An IQ of 110, the general rule for success in graduate programs. is equal to a genius IQ of 180. Sound odd? Consider the NBA. A 6-foot-3 player stands a better chance of making it than a 6-2 player, who stands a better chance than a 6-1 player. "But past a certain point, height stops mattering so much," Gladwell writes. "A

basketball player only has to be tall enough - and the same is true of intelligence. Intelligence has a threshold." It might help to hire someone with graduate degrees, but how many do you need in the office?



Buy these books.

Be assertive. Gladwell also writes about plane crashes for a chapter, and about why certain pilots tend to crash more often. One reason, he finds, is mitigating language. Hints and suggestions don't mean as much as statements and commands. "We will do this" will likely lead to more results than "I think we should try this." Be clear. Be direct. Make your point. L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



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Mauget





A garden showcase

Jacobsen Landscape turned a former garden center into a free meeting space for local groups – and a subtle sales pitch.

By Chuck Bowen

n the midst of the toughest economic climate in recent memory – a recession that hit the metropolitan New York/New Jersey area particularly hard – one landscape business made a substantial commitment to an investment designed to give back to its neighbors and, in turn, open up possibilities both in business and community service.

Now in its 31st year in business in the competitive northern New Jersey region, Jacobsen Landscape Design and Construction has its headquarters and primary design center in Midland Park, N.J. – about 20 miles from downtown Manhattan. A second design center and showcase for its work opened as an outdoor Landscape Gallery in historic Barnstable Court in affluent Saddle River, N.J., a little more than two years ago.

This was, as owner and founder Glenn Jacobsen, recalls, just about when the financial markets were in free fall.

"When we started the Landscape Gallery project in July 2008, it was exactly when our core customers – those in the financial and service industries – were getting hit the hardest," Jacobsen says.

"It was bad timing. (The



economy) had an impact, no doubt. Everybody saw their stocks go down, liquid assets. We've been affected twice in business in 33 years – that and 9/11."

SET UP. A lot of landscape companies have display gardens where they take clients and show them around. Jacobsen's Landscape Gallery – housed in a former garden center – takes that idea and adds another element – usable space donated to local groups.

"It's free of charge," Jacobsen says. "As long as it's a nonprofit group, it's free. Art shows, chamber meetings, networking groups, churches. It's a unique, outdoor setting."

And while the idea proved a good one, it did put financial strains on the company – a new lease payment, six weeks of renovations and staffing costs coupled with a reduction of business in 2009 made it a tough year.

At that point, "it really wasn't pulling revenue or leads. But we saw the turnaround in '10, when we had dedicated sales from the exposure. We saw a marked increase in '10," he says.

LEADS AND NEW BUSINESS.
The three-year investment

at this new location is now paying dividends through a better connection to its customers and to its core Northwest Bergen County community, Jacobsen says. He's reluctant to give specific numbers, but says the facility has resulted in "significant business" and solid leads for his company.

"It gave us exposure in towns we haven't done enough business in. The leads that came in (from the Gallery) are larger-sized jobs, just because of the location," Jacobsen says. "We got involved in the school systems, chambers of commerce, community groups. It's not just a place, it's a space to engage.

"That's what makes it work. You can't just put a building up. You've got to be engaged in the community. It's an effort, it's a cost too. A physical location is one thing, but you need to have relationships with whoever's in the town."

In the past year, Jacobsen hosted nearly 20 community-

based meetings and cultural activities at the Gallery, including landscape educational seminars, garden club meetings, church member activities or Chamber of Commerce gatherings.

"This goes well beyond increasing the exposure of Jacobsen Landscape," he says. "It is more about becoming a part of the business and residential community that has been so good to us for so long."

BOTTOM LINE. Of course, the investment is not all about giving local groups a free place to hold their events. The bottom line, as always, is the bottom line.

"Clients today are more discerning than ever with their money and what they are willing to spend on their properties, and this gives us more visibility and legitimacy in their eyes when deciding where to invest." Jacobsen says. L&L

The author is associate publisher and editor at Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at cbowen@gie.net.

MAY 2011

Lending outside the box

The tough economy has made room for unique capital opportunities. By Lindsey Getz

On Fitch used to be able to secure money at the "snap of his fingers." But ever since the economy tanked, it's become an increasing challenge to get a loan - more than 10 percent of small business owners expressed increased difficulty in getting credit, according to a survey from the National Federation of Independent Business.

"In November 2009, we started looking at some different venues and came across

Merchant Cash & Capital," says Fitch, who co-owns, along with Shirley Hatten, Jamestown Feed & Seed and Lawn Center in Norge., Va. "They take a percentage of your credit card sales to pay back your debt."

Since its inception, Merchant Cash & Capital (MCC) has provided funding to more than 7,500 merchants and currently funds approximately 2,000 small businesses nationwide. By "buying" a fixed percentage of future credit card revenues and advancing that money up front, the company provides a unique type of funding that avoids some of the hassles that may be associated with a more traditional loan. Once the capital is available, MCC begins to collect an agreedupon percentage of the daily credit card sales until the loan is fully repaid. It eliminates the need to write a monthly check and there's no risk of



Don Fitch and Shirley Hatten found an easier way to get a loan.

late fees. Funds are automatically transferred with current credit card batches.

MCC CEO Stephen Sheinbaum says it's an opportunity that's well positioned for landscape business owners. "Landscaping is an industry that has a great deal of seasonality to it," he says. "We understand the ebbs and





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FINDING FINANCING

flows that come with this type of business and can provide them with the working capital they need in the offseason, understanding that spring will come and revenues will eventually pick up again."

Securing capital during some down time is exactly what Fitch says he needed to do. "It was our slow period and we really needed some funding," he says.

"We used the money to do some exterior work and upgrade our facility. Our feeling is that as we come out of this recession we're going to be rocking and rolling. We invested money into our product when nobody else did - maybe because they couldn't afford to. We've already started to see a difference in doing that."

One of the things that Fitch liked most about the MCC process was how quickly cash was available. "It was our experience that if you put in the request for the loan on Monday, you're funded by Friday," he says.

The fast timing was one of the main reasons Fitch chose to go this route instead of a bank loan. "We didn't need to provide a ton of documentation and go through a long process, basically promising our first born," Fitch adds, laughing.

The biggest downside, says Fitch, is the interest. His



Fitch says he used some of the loan money to upgrade the facility.

arrangement with MCC allowed them to take 17 cents on the dollar of credit card sales. "You're definitely going to be paying a lot more interest than you would on a conventional loan," he says. "But it comes out on a daily basis and if you're doing well with credit card sales, you'll pay it back quickly."

Fitch says his best advice to other landscape business owners who might be considering this type of loan is to do your homework.

"You have to do some research and make sure vou can work with the numbers," he says. "If you're unsure, I might suggest starting out small and seeing how it works for you before taking out a bigger loan. But for us, we did start out with a big loan and it worked well." LAL

The author is a frequent contributor to Lawn & Landscape.







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HIRING LESSONS



ohn Wingfield Jr. was on a medical mission in Peru last year. That meant two weeks away from his business distractions, customer meetings and cell phone service.

As the president of Eagle Landscape near Forth Worth, Texas, it wouldn't have been shocking for Wingfield to have a pretty full voicemail box, especially because his company just started a handful of new jobs.

But when Wingfield finally could get a signal, he wasn't happy with what he heard.

"I got back on day three," Wingfield says, "and I had all of these phone calls from property managers saying 'Who the hell are you?"

Not exactly what you want to hear from your customers.

Confused, Wingfield returned the calls to the upset customers and explained that he possessed signed contracts between them and his salesperson, "Sue."

Except, the customers had no idea who she was, and had never met her.

"That's when I put two and two together and realized, uh-oh, we're in trouble," Wingfield says.

It turned out Wingfield had been conned. The salesperson, "Sue," never sold the contracts. She just told Wingfield she did and had fake ones created. In fact, not only hadn't she sold anything, she was working for a rival company when she should have been working for Wingfield. She was also

charging the company credit card with \$60 increments, making it look like she was entertaining potential clients, when she was actually buying her groceries.



"It was about a \$30,000 hit for me in six months from all the cash out flow," he says.

And it could have been worse. Wingfield was ready to buy \$30,000 worth of equipment and hire more people because of the new jobs.

"Had we'd really been awarded those jobs, we would've had to start another crew and hired more people, which means when I'd came back, I would've had to fire all those people," he says.

But it wasn't as if Wingfield hadn't done some due diligence. When he hired "Sue," he was under the impression she had sold \$1 million worth of work for her prior company.

Wingfield even saw the contracts of the work she sold.

At least, that's what he thought.

"She had shown me contracts, which I now know were just forged contracts that she had written," he says.

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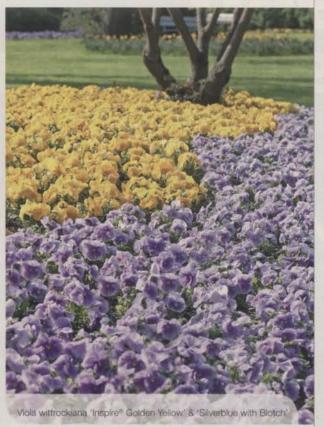
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HIRING LESSONS

But Wingfield wasn't going to let her get away with it. Owning a company that is approaching \$3 million in revenue, Wingfield could handle the \$30,000 a hit, but a smaller company wouldn't be so lucky.

"My fear was she was going to keep doing this to employers, and I felt that I had an obligation to have it stopped," he says.

"Because if she did this to a small company, that would have put them out of business and ruined that family's income."

Having been through litigation before, and knowing "Sue" had no money, Wingfield took her to small claims court.

He was able to recoup the unauthorized credit card charges (she signed an employee agreement, which prohibited her from such charges), and he was also able to get money back for a laptop she claimed was stolen, but Wingfield was able to prove otherwise.

Through all of this, Wingfield learned a few lessons. He paid "Sue" less than the market value for a quality salesperson, but now is paying more for a salesperson, and that has paid off.

"I was desperate for a salesperson and I tried to take the cheap, easy way out, and I paid the price for it," he says. "You've got to pay what people are worth."

When Wingfield hired "Sue," he thought he'd be able to train her. But, as an owner, something always comes up, and you run out of time. Now, he has weekly staff meetings where he hears what sales people have in the works, as well as reasons why a sale fell through. He also likes documentation of potential customers visited and details of expense reports.

Though Wingfield says he hires selfmotivated employees, there is nothing wrong with staying informed on what they are doing.

"The lesson that I learned was just really to do your diligence and hire the right people, hire people with experience and not hope for them to figure it out on their own," he says.

"There's a big difference in an owner or a manager of a company micromanaging an employee versus keeping track and holding employees accountable."

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at bhorn@gie.net.

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Structure in the garden

Look for these new flowers and shrubs that will help your customers add shape and form to the landscape. By Sarah Martinez



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Proven Winners ColorChoice's new Bloom-A-Thon azaleas are now available from Greenleaf Nurseries. These re-blooming azaleas are initially available in four colors: lavender, red, white and double pink.

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Small is the new big in flowering shrubs

By Ryan McGrath

Small is the big trend for flowering shrubs. You can examine this fact yourself by simply strolling around an average neighborhood developed in the last several years. What you'll find is a smaller lot, filled with a bigger house and a lot less yard.

In fact, according to U.S. Census data, lot size has dropped from a median of about 10,000 square feet in 1990 to 8,500 square feet today.

What does all this mean? It's simple. Homeowners have less room to work with in their landscaping and gardens.

Here at Spring Meadow Nursery, we are still selling larger-sized shrubs as strong as ever. Compact shrubs are no doubt a growing trend, given the popularity of our newest introductions

SHRUBS NOW FITTING HOMEOWNERS IN BOTH SPACE AND LIFESTYLE.

Not only do homeowners not have room for a 10-foot tall shrub, they don't have time to prune it. For good or ill, taking the time to prune shrubs just does not fit most American's on-the-go, smartphone-Facebook lifestyles.

Using naturally compact shrubs eliminates the need for regular pruning. This makes even more sense given the average homeowner likely doesn't have the knowledge of how to prune the correct way.

The National Gardening Association's annual National Gardening Survey in 2007 revealed only 2 percent of survey respondents would qualify as master gardeners and only 7 percent called themselves "gardening enthusiasts." The rest (91 percent) were self-described nongardeners, casual gardeners or "just cut the grass," reluctant gardeners.

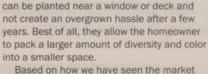
These irregular gardeners don't have the time, interest or knowledge of how to prune their plants. They want something they can just plant and enjoy, year after year, all year

contact info

long - without any extra work.

That is why we focus on things like disease resistance, drought tolerance, reblooming flowers, year-round interest and deer resistance.

These new shrubs will fit in any sized garden. They



Based on how we have seen the market respond, giving homeowners flexibility and working in smaller spaces are important selling features of our new compact introductions.

As we've capitalized on this trend, we've also seen a significant number of landscapers reach success by including more compact shrubs in their offerings.

For landscape professionals, the trend toward compact shrubs means more options in plant selection for new landscaping. Compact shrubs require less time and cost less to maintain. In addition, compact shrubs can be included in mass plantings to reduce lawn size and mowing.

RECOMMENDED COMPACT SHRUBS.

Here are several new compact shrubs recommended for a variety of garden sites:

Butterfly Bush (Buddlela) – Butterfly bush usually grows about 6 feet tall by midsummer, a problem for smaller gardens. A new cultivar, 'Blue Chip' is a miniaturized butterfly bush, just slightly larger than 2 feet in height. 'White Ball' is another compact variety, reaching 2 to 3 feet tall.

Sweetspire (Itea virginica) – 'Henry's Garnet' is a popular cultivar with long white flowers. This native shrub is easy to grow and stands 3 to 4 feet tall. Little Henry is a dwarf version of 'Henry's Garnet,' which is less than 3 feet tall at maturity. Its smaller size makes it ideal to mix into a perennial border.

Weigela florida – Weigela bushes grow to a height of 6-10 feet tall, with a similar spread. Their arching branches produce pink, white or red flowers in late spring to early summer. Newer cultivars also offer interesting foliage. 'Minuet' is a dwarf plant less than 3 feet tall. Two newer cultivars, Midnight Wine and My Monet, stand just 10 to 12 inches tall.

All of these compact shrubs will work in today's home landscaping, large or small. L&L

The author is a marketing specialist at Spring Meadow Nursery in Grand Haven, Mich.



THE SAFE SIDE



Safety and training case studies shared at GIE+EXPO highlight the importance of documenting policies and self-auditing in today's stifling regulatory environment.

Accidents happen. And landscape companies pay handsomely for them by writing larger checks to insurance companies, managing the cost of workers' compensation claims, dealing with lost time and suffering attrition when injured employees don't return to the workplace.

Then, there's the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which is cracking down on known violators. "I promise you, this administration is very, very focused on enforcement," says Chuck Stribling, OSHA federal-state coordinator based in Kentucky.

At GIE+EXPO 2010's Safety and Training Roundtable, Stribling joined four industry leaders to discuss how to implement safety practices in the workplace.

"Safety can make you money – and it can save you money," says Rick Cuddihe, president, Lafayette Consulting Co., Louisville, Ky., who moderated the forum. "We have an obligation as an industry to provide a safe workplace, and that can also provide savings for us."

First thing's first: A company needs a safety program



Stretching before heading into the field can strengthen employees' bodies and prepare them for physically demanding work.

that includes training for employees and documentation to protect the firm in case of an audit.

"If you have a safety program, that's a starting point," says Matt Bland, president, Bland Landscape Co., Apex, N.C. Safety is ingrained in the culture of this 34-year-old family business. "It's a passion my dad had, and it's a passion my brother and I have. The biggest thing is to start writing down and documenting programs so you have something to work from

and something to improve."

Here are some pointers from these panelists: Stribling, Bland, David Snodgrass, president, Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping and Garden Center, Portland, Ore., and Gary Clevenger, national director of construction for CNA Business Insurance.

analyze your risk. Employees are reminded of how vulnerable they can be to workplace injuries every morning at Dennis' 7 Dees. For the last 19 years, every crewmember joins in morning stretching exercises that prevent back injuries. The ritual began when Snodgrass attended a seminar hosted by his insurance company for the forestry industry, which is known for dealing with back injuries.

At the time, it was an issue for Dennis' 7 Dees, as well. "We wanted to do something about that," Snodgrass says.

The stretching does more than strengthen the body and prepare workers for physically demanding work. "It gets the whole company together," Snodgrass says. "We used to just get to work in the morning, then batch out. It also shows that we are willing to do something above and beyond – that safety is important."

Snodgrass took a more specific look at safety several years ago by partnering with his insurance representative to analyze the company's workplace injury statistics. He reviewed a recent report at the forum, showing graphs and numbers: the reality of when, why and how safety is compromised. The results were surprising in some instances. For example, Snodgrass figured that the riskiest months of



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Employee orientation should review safety policies and gear.

the year would be winter, when slip-and-fall cases are more likely.

"But the reality is, the middle part of the season – June, July and August – during our peak months is when we have the most accidents," Snodgrass says. The reason being, "you bring on new hires for the season, maybe it takes awhile to train them, your wheels are turning productivity-wise and you're working full capacity during the middle of the season."

This information helped Snodgrass plan early to pay attention to safety. "That way, we can lower that big incline in accidents," he says.

START SAFETY EARLY. Most employees who get hurt suffer injuries during their first few months on the job, Clevenger says. "Length of service is a big key (with claims)," he

says. "If you want to focus on one place with safety, focus there: new employees."

The average cost of a claim the first three months an employee works at a business is \$22,000. "That new employee is where it's at," Clevenger says. What are these workers hurting? Their fingers and toes – "the appendages."

Orientation training is critical for establishing a culture of safety from the get-go. At Bland Landscaping, new employees go through a thorough review of safety policies, procedures, gear and expectations that takes about a day and a half.

"What we saw was that employees were not being trained properly and it was taking a toll on getting employees up to speed on equipment," Bland says, noting that a safety and training manager facilitates this orientation so the process is centrally controlled and consistent. This was not necessarily the case when training was led by individual account managers and production managers.

Training is effective because employees also understand there are consequences for not following through with company safety policies. For one, safety vests are required to be worn on all job sites, at all times. Bland has a three-strike system for enforcing this rule. "First time

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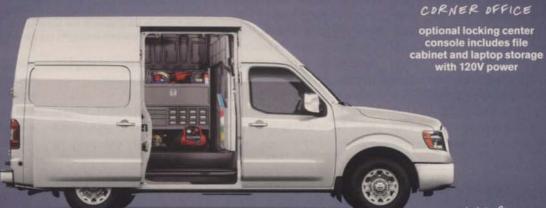


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SAFETY TRAINING

you're seen without a vest, you are sent home without pay," he says. "Second time, you are sent home three days without pay. Third time, you are done."

This down-to-business method is more effective than writing up employees or verbal warnings, Bland says. "We used to be too lenient," he says. "(We decided) if we were going to have policies, we explain why we have them - and we like to reward - but we enforce with an iron fist."

Clevenger says fleet safety is another big issue in the construction field, including landscapers. "Rear-end accidents are pretty severe and the leader (in fleet incidents)," he says. "That speaks to in-cab behavior.

"How many people have a cell phone policy?" Clevenger asked attendees at the session. "Is it: Answer the phone if I call? Or, is it: You can't use the phone while you're driving? You have GPS, laptops, radios in your trucks. In-cab distraction is where (accidents) are coming from - and rushing to jobs."

Truck cabs are cluttered and drivers take on too many tasks while driving. Pick-up trucks are responsible for more than 40 percent of those rear-end accidents, he says. Tools that help enforce vehicle safety include in-cab



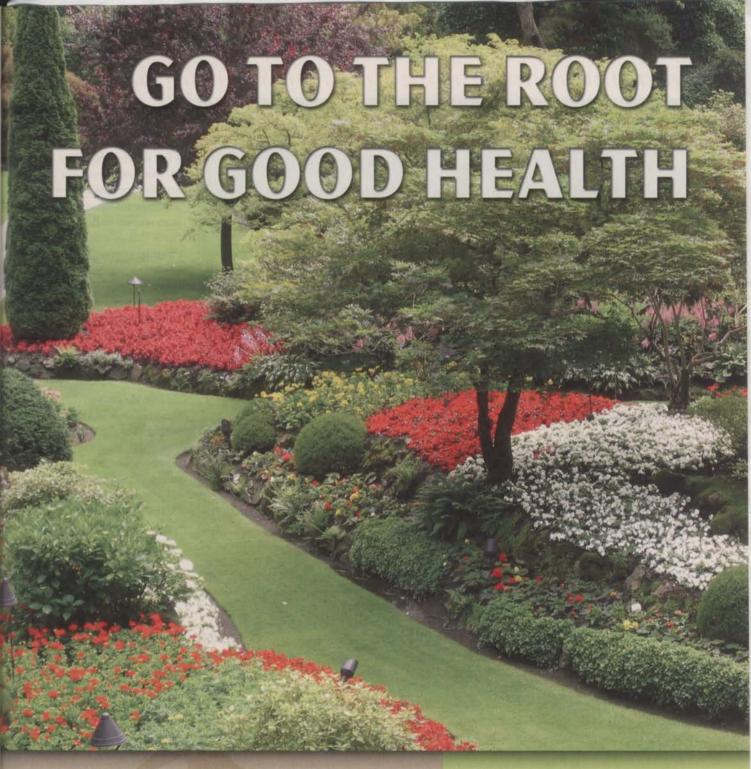
Fleet safety is a big issue in the construction field, including landscaping. Rear-end accidents are the leader in fleet incidents.

cameras that record employees while they drive.

PERFORM AN AUDIT, Bland tells how an OSHA audit prompted his company to prioritize safety training and document procedures. An employee was caught not wearing a safety vest while working in a right-of-way.

"He was sitting on the





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PHC



Companies should conduct their own safety audits that include in-facility and on-the-job inspections by a senior manager and the safety and training manager.

vest on the seat of his lawnmower," Bland says.

Then when OSHA officers inspected the company vehicle, they found other "little things" – violations that added up to a \$24,000 fine. Bland had documentation of safety practices and negotiated the fine down to \$6,000. That fee was later dropped to \$2,000 after a meeting with the safety manger and a laborious OSHA review of the company's safety processes.

Safety STARS

Tap into a free safety program and pick up training and policy pointers from industry peers. The STARS Safe Company Program (Safety Training Achieves Remarkable Success), a PLANET initiative, connects companies with the goal of reducing risk associated with the green industry.

For information, visit www.landcarenetwork.org/ riskmgmt/stars.cfm or call 800/395-2522 for details. "They were lenient that first go-around," Bland says. "If we are caught with the same violations again – and these were not that serious – it can get very expensive and difficult for your insurance relationship. We said, instead of looking at this audit as adversarial, let's talk about how we can fix these compliance issues."

Not wearing the safety vest was the culprit of Bland Landscaping's OSHA audit. Actually, Bland shares that OSHA officers were headed back from lunch and on their way to a large construction job to conduct an audit when they spotted this violation. So they took a detour by auditing Bland's firm first.

The good news for Bland was that his processes were documented. The company has been conducting its own safety audits for about eight years. Those audits include in-facility and onthe-job inspections by a senior manager and the safety

and training manager. "We evaluate the work process," Bland explains. "Are all safety vests on? Is anyone operating equipment they are not certified to use?"

Stribling shares that companies don't have to wait for the audit to learn what potential violations loom at their companies. OSHA's "good guy" side is consultation services: a rich resource companies can tap into to learn what areas of their business need fine-tuning or a complete overhaul.

Each state OSHA department, and OSHA's federal office, has a consolation services arm that focus on training and education. They perform free audits and provide resources to help businesses avoid an audit.

"There is a wall between the division of compliance and the division of education and training," Stribling assures skeptics. "Consultation visits are not public record – by law, (others) cannot get a copy of that information."

OSHA training and education consultants will perform a full audit or focus on areas of concern. Business owners can use this review as a platform for change. Rather than waiting to find out what "little things" could get identified in a true OSHA audit, the consultation red-flags issues in advance.

The time invested in a consultative audit could save companies thousands of dollars. Cuddihe shares that he knows two contractors who were fined \$150,000 after OSHA inspections. "That's the size of the fines we're seeing now," he says. "Can you imagine eating that as a business owner? And these weren't large companies."

Clevenger highlights the OSHA website as a valuable resource for companies. "The PowerPoints are understandable and you can use those for training," he says. "Your tax dollars pay for it."

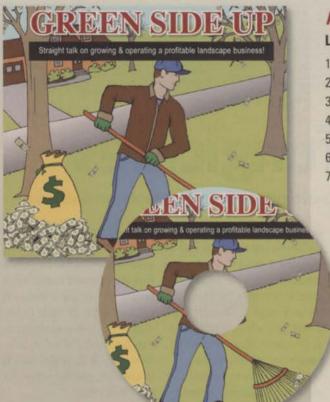
In Bland's case, documentation helped repeal some of the OSHA violations and reduce fines. But documentation also plays a key role in how the company enforces its safety policies and measures the success of their safety programs.

Cuddihe emphasizes how having "proof" of policies on paper is critical.

"If you do have an incident with an injury or an investigation, you can show that you have set plans in motion to prevent (accidents) from happening," he says. "With documentation, your company will be way better off." Let.

The author is a frequent contributor to Lawn & Landscape. Straight talk on growing and operating a profitable landscape business.

GREEN SIDE UP



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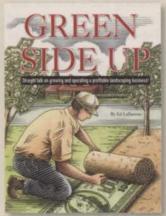
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Upselling fungicides

Create an opportunity by diagnosing customer's lawn funguses and selling a solution. By Matthew Noon

think we all realize how much the weather and climate at certain times of the year can affect our industry. For example, our lawn care company is located in Massachusetts. This can be a particularly harsh climate during certain times in the year. New England's weather can change overnight, and since we run a service business that involves the maintenance of turf, trees and shrubs, we need to be able to react immediately to these changes for our customers.

Typically the climatology of New England means that the growing season can start anywhere from mid-March to mid-April. Within weeks of having a foot of snow on the ground, we can be administering our first lawn, tree and shrub treatment. The drastic changes in weather and temperature can produce lawn funguses.

Although funguses wreak havoc on customers' lawns, it creates an opportunity to diagnose and sell a solution to your clients. By anticipating a customer need, you solidify the perception that you are a lawn professional in the eye of the client.

When a lawn has not been exposed to sunlight for three months, it becomes a breeding ground for diseases and funguses. In March and April when the snow slowly melts, we will see the majority of our clients' lawns covered with snow mold and pink mold. We create a competitive advantage that differentiates us from others in the industry if we immediately expose our customers to these issues and offer them a solution.

Here are a few tips on how to sell fungicide services.

PAY ATTENTION TO DETAIL.

I instruct my team to look

at every possible danger to a client's lawn and to sell a solution. I don't look at snow mold or any other lawn disease as another problem or setback with a "business as usual" attitude, but rather an opportunity that we have to satisfy our clients' needs.

Not only can my lawn technicians find fungus issues to diagnose, but will also include a complete evaluation of other possible issues.

MOTIVATE TECHNICIANS. Getting a team of 15 lawn technicians motivated to get out to your customers' lawns scouting for lawn funguses to sell a solution is a lot easier said than done. Not only must you coach them with effective sales techniques, but you must also create a buy-in for them. A lawn technician is not just going to increase sales without proper incentive. The incentive can be

many different things, and it doesn't necessarily have to be with money. It can be points that are attained to win a flat screen TV or paid time off for example. If cash is the incentive, then a commission can be used for each sale. Whatever it is, make sure it is creative and lucrative for the technician.

REINFORCE EXPECTATIONS.

Think of your lawn technicians and team members as an extension of your sales force.

Be sure to also reinforce the selling concept to them on a daily basis. What are your goals for fungicide sales per week? What progress are you making in meeting these goals? Do you talk about this every morning when technicians walk through the door? Constant reinforcement is critical for a sales campaign to be successful.



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FOCUS ON OPPORTUNITIES. Another example of a fungus sales success story was last summer. In the early spring, it rained literally each day. Due to the incessant rainfall, a lot of our fertilizer products were not being absorbed appropriately because there was no sunlight

to allow the grass to extract nitrogen. In other words, our lawns were nitrogen deficient and red thread was breaking out everywhere.

The phones were fungicides



Get a field guide to ID common fungicides.

ringing off the hook with numerous complaints. Many companies would get defeated and bury their heads in the sand. Not our company. I looked beyond all of the problems and focused on the opportunity that would arise from the erratic weather. It was yet another chance to fill our clients' needs in a time of crisis.

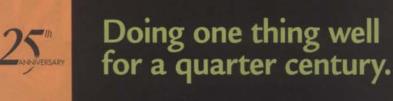
We had weekly meetings on the condition of our customers' lawns and how to educate them and sell them a solution to their problem. When lawns were being overrun with red thread, we sold a fungicide treatment which took the worry away and we assumed the responsibility of eliminating the problem for them at a cost. That summer our June and July sales numbers increased by 30 percent.

Although many times customers will complain about the additional cost of taking care of an unforeseen issue in their lawn, most of them understand as long as you fulfill your promise to eliminate the problem. You must also constantly educate the client. This process often falls to your team and it is imperative that they know how to communicate with the customer to explain the problem and to deliver a solution.

BE PROACTIVE. As professionals we have to be proactive with our clients. There is nothing worse than to hear that a competitor of ours told their customer that red thread will "go away" on its own with proper amounts of sunlight and fertilizing. The client wants results and they are willing to pay for a solution. When we do not react to our customers' problems, they will not value our service and the customers will challenge our expertise in lawn care. Once credibility is lost, you've probably lost that customer.

We need to be proactive and anticipate the problem. We, as the experts, must take the control and be ready to take care of the business relationship. By doing so our customers are satisfied, our lawns are green and our pockets are, too. L&L

The author is president of Noon Turf Care based in Hudson, Mass.





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Alternative actions

Tips for lawn disease management that require less reliance on fungicides. By Frank S. Rossi

n spite of the general worry about the current economic issues in the United States. the public remains concerned about environmental quality. A 2009 Gallup poll reported that more than 45 percent of Americans are "very worried" about the environment.

When it comes to environmental issues in the landscape industry, it can be summarized into concern over the use of fertilizer and pesticides. To that end, laws are being promulgated to restrict or ban the use of traditional pesticide chemistry. This will present significant challenges for the landscape industry.

Pesticide use in lawn care includes herbicides, insecticides and fungicides. Of these products, herbicides are the most widely used followed by insecticides and then fungicides for disease control. Oddly, when it comes to the severity of a problem that would lead to turf loss, the use is disproportionate. Weeds don't kill lawns, and insects and diseases do.

The question remains that if our lawn diseases can be so devastating and fungicides may only be of limited value; how can we improve our chances in controlling lawn diseases?

Most resistance. In my judgment, if we are not using lawn grasses developed in the last five to 10 years with improved disease resistance, we are not servicing our client properly. This is not absolute, as sometimes a lawn grass adapts to growing environment and thrives; however, improved varieties may often lead to enhanced water and fertilizer use efficiency.

I often wonder why we don't develop regular renovation plans that work to introduce improved grasses into our lawns. This is especially true for lawn pest problems where we have had a history of insect or disease pests. For example, if lawns have struggled with surface feeding insects, why wouldn't we plant endophyte-enhanced grasses we know provide natural resistance?

The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program has been conducting trials with all the major turfgrasses for the last 30 years. In those years, we have seen enormous increases in disease resistance. For example, let's take gray leafspot.

Gray leaf spot was such a devastating disease of lawn height turfgrass that many university personnel were simply not recommending the use of tall fescues and perennial ryegrasses. Breeders began to investigate resistant ecotypes from around the world, and within five years of research there was a palette of resistant varieties available that have made this problem almost obsolete.

It is time we start investigating this avenue for enhanced turf performance. We may also find that if our customer's lawn improves, we find a new revenue stream, and, in the end, we use fewer fungicides. Maybe you could call it "lawn refresh" or "shifting to sustainable"?

Cultural shift. Often the only aspects of lawn management we can control directly are the cultural practices. How we mow, water and feed can have profound influences on lawn disease management. The same principles apply as did for the growing environment, in that maximizing plant health will help reduce the need for fungicides.

Mowing with a sharp blade and at the proper height that allows for good turf density and excellent rooting are the first steps. However, one factor is known but often unable to be adjusted and that is mowing frequency.

As we strive to reduce our fuel use, often by reducing mowing frequency, the grass leaves can remain wet for longer periods of time. This persistent leaf wetness, especially with warm temperatures into the evening hours, creates ideal environments for foliar diseases such as dollar spot, brown patch and Pythium.

In this case, mowing may not solve the problem, but air movement will. It is well established in research that air movement across a turf that leads to disruption of the leaf surface will



Laws restricting pesticides create a greater focus on alternatives.

reduce foliar diseases. This may require some brush removal to create "alleys" for air to move through.

Interestingly, there is some research that suggests early morning irrigation that knocks the dew and condensation off the leaves may reduce certain foliar diseases. However, in 2010 most of the disease problems I observed with lawns were because of lawn irrigation, not in spite of lawn irrigation.

Most lawns are overwatered, as many statistics will show. But worse yet is the lack of uniformity of the irrigation systems. Most systems do not apply the water uniformly over the lawn. This means there are persistent wet and dry spots.

Often the lawn is irrigated to the dry spots to avoid overwatering the wet spots. This leaves the dry spots wanting for more water. In 2010, with prolonged periods of dry weather, many areas relied on irrigation in the absence of rain and this lead to persistently overwatered and disease-susceptible turf.

There is no question that drier turf is often less disease susceptible. However it cannot be extreme. Therefore we recommend that water be supplied for most turfgrasses to supply between 60-80 percent of water lost to evapotranspiration (ET) in a deep and infrequent pattern to keep plants healthy and reduce need for fungicides.

Turf nutrient management is vital for plant health, vet the primary nutrient often involved in disease management is nitrogen. Nitrogen should be the focus of our programs as we strive to avoid excessive growth leading to lush, disease-susceptible turf. Yet under-supplying the plant with nitrogen will reduce leaf growth and allow for certain diseases to persist, such as red thread and leaf spot.

Reduced risk and biofungicides. The EPA classifies fungicides that are applied at low rates, with low toxicity, low chance for resistance and limited non-target effects as reduced risk. These types of products with active ingredients such as boscalid for dollar spot control, polyoxin D zinc salt for brown patch control and phosphite materials for Pythium should be the cornerstones for disease management.

These products show excellent performance under low to moderate disease pressure. Most of the time for lawns these products will meet your needs for disease management on their own; however, when disease pressure is great, they can still be used to reduce the use of traditional fungicide chemistry.

The author is an associate professor at Cornell University.

For more tips, including climate control, reduce risk bio-fungicides and integrated management, visit www. lawnandlandscape.com and search "fungicides."



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Understanding fungicide registration

How fungicides and other pesticides reach turf and ornamental professionals. By Todd Burkdoll

often speak with lawn and landscape professionals who want to know when that new fungicide they've heard about will be available. Turf and ornamental professionals are also curious why their industry peers in different states can access a fungicide that's not available in their own market.

So why does it seem fungicides take a long time to reach the market, or never become available at all? All new pesticides must undergo many tests and trials to prove they're safe for the environment and won't harm people or animals.

■ So what takes so long?

The federal government heavily regulates pesticide use, which

requires manufacturers to provide extensive data before a new fungicide product can be approved for the market. Because of this, a new active ingredient takes, on average, 10 years to reach end users.

With only a limited number of basic manufacturers investing in new fungicide, herbicide and insecticide modes-of-action, turf and ornamental professionals are seeing less new chemistry.

A recent CropLife America study found that bringing a new product to market reached an average of \$256 million per product in 2005-2008 and the number of products actually making it through the research and development stages to market introduction declined

from four in 1995 to only 1.3 in 2005-2008.

Before the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can register a fungicide, it mandates that manufacturers verify the fungicide won't hurt you or the environment when used according to the label. To prove this, the product undergoes as many as 120 tests which include:

· Human toxicology studies assure users the fungicide doesn't harm humans. Researchers look for any shortterm effects, such as what happens if the fungicide is inhaled or comes in contact with the skin. Researchers also look for any long-term health effects, such as reproductive or hormonal disruptions. These tests are very

similar to those conducted by pharmaceutical companies.

- · Eco-toxicology tests study the effects on wildlife. Researchers determine if the fungicide affects birds, fish and other aquatic animals. Compounds are also tested to ensure non-targeted plants and insects aren't affected.
- · Formulation optimization tests analyze the best way to package the product based on its chemical makeup. For example, researchers may determine the product is best used as a liquid versus a granular. These tests also determine the best method for applying the product.
- · Turf transferable residue studies showcase how fungicide residues may be transferred,



such as on shoes, mowers or maintenance equipment, from treated turf to other surfaces.

Biology efficacy trials
determine how well the product
works for its intended purpose.
Although this data isn't submitted
as part of the federal registration
package, it must be available if
the EPA requests to review. Of
course, this information often
becomes apparent once people
begin using the product – if it
doesn't work, it won't sell.

All trials are designed to determine how, when and where it's appropriate to use the fungicide. For example, if the product is shown to cause skin irritation in laboratory tests, labeling on the product will require applicators to wear protective equipment, such as gloves or long sleeves. Or pre-registration research may determine that a product has the potential for leaching in certain

soil types - that's why the label will say, for example, it's okay to use on turf but not on sand.

These rigorous studies can take up to six years to complete. Once all the necessary data is ready, the manufacturer submits it to the EPA for review.

EPA Approval. During registration review, the EPA thoroughly evaluates all the results. The EPA can take up to 21 months to review a fungicide for turf or ornamental use. If manufacturers are seeking additional use sites on the label, the review time will increase. If the EPA agrees with the manufacturer's findings, the EPA registers the fungicide and the manufacturer receives an approved label. The label details exactly how to use the product to achieve the best results, so those coming in contact with a treated area and the environment aren't

harmed in the process. This is why manufacturers stress that you must carefully read and always follow label instructions.

But the approval process doesn't end there. Once a manufacturer receives federal EPA approval, each state reviews the fungicide. The state registration process typically takes four to six weeks to complete.

However, some states, such as New York and Massachusetts, can take up to 15 months to review the pesticide. California also generally takes longer to gain local product registration because products must pass the California Department of Pesticide Regulation's individual

tests that meet their unique state requirements. In addition, products don't always pass individual state registration because of local laws. That's why you sometimes see an industry peer in another state with access to a fungicide that is unavailable to you.

After many years of review, the product is finally ready to reach distributors' shelves, and ultimately lawn and landscape professionals. L&L

The author is a technical specialist for BASF Professional Turf & Ornamentals and licensed state of California pest control advisor and qualified applicator, based in Visalia, Calif.

A new active ingredient takes, on average, 10 years to reach end users.







new generation of employees has entered the workplace armed with a new set of expectations, and, as a result, has turned the conventional supervisor/supervisee relationship on

Out is the "boss." In is the "coach." And, says Bill Hoopes, former sales training manager at The Scotts Co., supervisors who don't make this transition are setting themselves up for failure.

Speaking at the 2010 GIE+EXPO in Louisville, Ky., Hoopes, who is now president of Grass Roots Training in Delaware, Ohio, said Gen X and Gen Y employees want to be taught, not told.

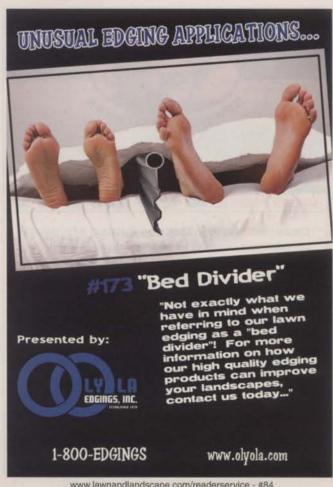
"Mature managers find it hard to change with the times," Hoopes says, "but if you don't

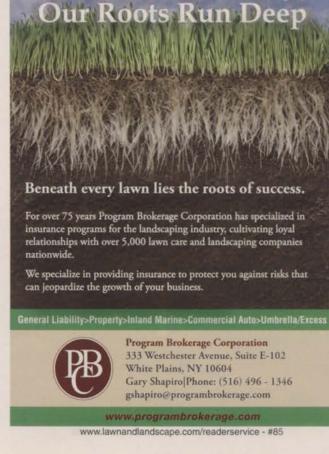
make the change, you're going to have a hard time dealing with the new mindset employees have these days."

Hoopes says the process starts with understanding this "new age" worker, who is much more self-absorbed than his predecessor, and who, consequently, needs to see the value behind any move that comes from management. Basically, knowing how to get this employee to buy in to what the company is doing ensures a better opportunity to get the most from him or her.

Communication is key, says Hoopes, who added that he's talking about real communication and not just the old "because I said so" boss tack that served as gospel in the past.

"Effective communication contains answers to the questions what, when, where, and how," Hoopes says. "Then





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comes follow-up with hands-on coaching to help the team form habits that lead to success. When employees understand, they buy in, and they become motivated."

Hoopes say his experience in dealing with human resource matters over many years convinced him that coaching is the only way to go.

"It saves headaches for sure - for everyone involved," he says. "But more importantly, doing everything right benefits the employee and the company. And that's really what everyone wants when you get down to it." L&L

The author is publisher at Lawn & Landscape's sister publication Garden Center magazine. He can be reached at yyoungblood@gie.net.

Here are some examples Hoopes offered of how a good coach will trump a bad boss every time.

BOSSES	COACHES
Assign tasks	Teach people how to succeed
Use fear	Use positive energy
Polarize positions	Put workers and supervisors together
Say people are lazy	Have faith in people
Rely on stars	Build team synergy
Drive people away	Reduce turnover
Isolate a leader to the point that the staff can't stand him/her	Maximize leader influence
Say "get to work" without properly outlining expectations and teaching the ways of the job and the company	Begin coaching from day one
Isolate too soon	Maximize early support
Believe training is optional	Mandate training
Assign tasks without any regard to the employees' particular skills	Confirm skills and then assign tasks to fit those skills
React if – and sometimes only if – there's a negative result	Follow up on the job
See people as a resource	Treat people as individuals
Dictate, demean and isolate	Listen to, respect and involve their employees in the success of the company

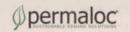




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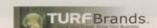
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Holiday lighting

Your customers' spending spirit can serve as a profitable present to your bottom line. By Lee Chilcote

six months before the weather outside gets truly frightful, Ray Reed of R&R Lawn Care in Tampa, Fla., is busy getting ready for the holiday lighting season by developing promotional materials, ordering supplies and contacting clients. By the time the colder weather arrives, he's ready to install his custom-fabricated lighting displays.

Then, a few months before the holiday season begins, the dreaded ads begin to appear. "We hang holiday lights," the ads cry. These claims are something that Reed, who has been in the holiday lighting business for 10 years, finds truly frightful.

"There are a ton of guys that hang lights, but there's a big difference between your average lighting company and ours," he says. "We get calls from customers that want us to troubleshoot things like melted plugs, burned out lights and house damage – that's because they hired a company that didn't know what they were doing."

Holiday lighting is a big business these days. Many upper-income households don't want the hassle of installing lights and are seeking a professional look. The key to success in the holiday lighting business is to understand the product, identify a

customer base that can afford your services and distinguish yourself from competitors.

Breaking into holiday lighting can mean handsome profits. Reed, whose company started off doing landscape work before branching out into holiday lighting, says the average markup on holiday lights is 25-30 percent. His clients pay \$1,800-\$2,500 per year for installation, and because they've already purchased the lights and paid R&R to store them, he's virtually guaranteed their business for years to come.

Reed, who grew his business initially by advertising in newspapers, on TV and on the radio, now generates most of his business from his website or referrals. He closes about 15 percent of his leads. "We focus on households with an income level of at least \$125,000 per year," says Reed, who saves time by pre-qualifying his clients over the phone. "Otherwise, people will waste your time and it's more hassle than it's worth."

Kevin McClure, manager of LKM Mowing and Landscaping in Normal, Ill., has developed his holiday lighting business through referrals and a good website. Up until a few years ago, LKM sent postcards to upperincome neighborhoods well-known for their holiday spirit, but now McClure relies on word of mouth.

He also pre-qualifies his customers. "Our minimum order amount is \$1,000 right now – generally if you spend below that amount, your house will look half-done," he says.

Once Reed and McClure identify possible customers, they meet with them, develop a scope of work, take pictures of their house and draw computerized renderings.

"Once we close the deal, we'll set an install date and do a schematic of the house with the lights numbered," Reed says. "Then we set a take-down date with the client and store the lights for the season. They look at it as a multi-year investment."

About 60 percent of R&R's business comes from existing landscape clients, while 40 percent is new business, Reed estimates. He also gets revenue from up-selling clients on holiday lighting features. "We did an animated Santa display on a house, which added \$2,100 to the original cost of the lighting," he says. "After we installed it, the customer paid \$1,500 per year for us to install, take down and store the lights."

R&R's lights also come with a 15-year warranty, which means that Reed's customers don't have to worry about calling their contractor about burned out bulbs. "They're only buying the lights once, as long as they continue to use our services," he says.

LKM Mowing and Landscaping also gets much of its holiday lighting business from existing clients.

McClure says that while he has seen a decrease in business because of the recession, it hasn't been dramatic. "Our customers aren't cutting lights from their budgets," he says. "They may switch their budgets around to accommodate doing the lights, but it's something that's important to them, especially if they have small children."

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



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Hardscape

Despite the tough economy, there can still be success in this market. By Lindsey Getz

elling hardscape installations like patios, walkways, and retaining walls can be a profitable, but it takes dedication.

Richard J. Angell, vice president and director of landscape construction and operations at Green Legacy Landscapes, the landscape design/build division of Pavers Plus in Grand Rapids, Mich., says that working with hardscape projects can be a big commitment and it should be something the contractor is passionate about if they're going to get involved. Hardscape projects are not short turn-around time jobs like a lot of landscape maintenance projects. It's not uncommon to spend consecutive days or even weeks on a single project.

Green Legacy Landscapes has been involved in all types of hardscape installations from patios and sidewalks to driveways and even bricked city streets.

"For anyone interested in getting started in the hardscape business, they need to understand the basic principles of design construction, including sub-surface soils,

hydrology, both above and below the ground, and the depth of the base needed to support the traffic use on the system," he says. "The single most important phase of the entire installation happens in the grading of the subsoil and the paver bed. We have seen and been replacing patio failures in the past few years because proper subsurface grading and control of the hydrology was not being addressed to its fullest extent. Excavation, drainage, and compaction of the base materials are critical in the performance of the paving system."

In regards to hardscape maintenance, Angell says that most installation contractors do not include any maintenance in the original contract. But it can be another opportunity to make a sale. "It can be added as a yearly maintenance agreement after the work is completed," Angell says.

Angell believes that having success with a hardscaping division starts with strong leadership. A hardscape segment can grow quickly and you need a qualified person to

manage the division. Angell says that fiscal responsibility and knowledge of organizational management and administration skills can help the growth go smoothly. But marketing is also critical, especially in this tough marketplace. It's important to stand out from the crowd. One way this can be achieved is by giving the client an opportunity to view the product in advance and get them excited about the possibilities.

"It's good to have an area to display products that you install," says Angell. "A showroom and high quality photos in a portfolio always help. You can also carry brochures of the manufacturers that you use on a regular basis. And use the Internet and have a section on your website that shows off your work."

Besides a marketing effort, contractors can also be prepared to invest in equipment to make a hardscape division successful. Most landscape contractors have a truck available for moving crushed stone and sand. But Angell also recommends a trailer and a skid-steer that can lift up to 3,500 pounds. "When setting boulders or ledge rock, it also helps to have a grapple hook that swivels to set stone in place," he adds. "And hand tools should include a flat-plate compactor, leveling bars and cutting saws."

With the tough economy, hardscape sales can be tricky, but Angell says that he's finding customers are still interested. In fact, customers have become more educated on hardscaping through TV shows and magazine articles and that's helping make the sales job easier. Angell says that in a typical sales call, the customer already has ideas about what they want. "Fireplaces, outdoor kitchens and waterfalls have become hot items for residential hardscape and this in turn helps our profit margins which should be in the 25-35 percent range," he says.

The author is a frequent contributor to



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Outdoor fireplaces

Gathering around the fire isn't reserved for just the indoors anymore. By Lee Chilcote

Bob Rider remembers the couple well. The wife wanted the outdoor fire-place, but the husband wasn't convinced. Yet when Rider, who owns Rider Stone in Tulsa, Okla., bumped into the husband a week later at the hardware store, he sang a different tune.

"The first week that it was finished, his two sons were outside throwing water balloons right after a cold front had moved in, and they warmed themselves by the fire," says Rider. "Pretty soon, the whole family was roasting marshmallows together."

Rider likes to tell this heart-warming tale when he meets with his customers. It illustrates the dramatic impact that outdoor fireplaces have on people's lives, he says. "I tell my customers if they like being outdoors, the only thing they'll regret is not doing it sooner."

In recent years, outdoor fireplaces have become popular. They add a dramatic, architectural element to backyard patios, provide a gathering place for friends and family and extend the outdoor season by several months in cold-weather areas.

Additionally, modular fireplaces have now become widely available. These new models are high-quality, attractive and easier to install than traditional masonry fireplaces. Manufacturers now offer products that can be installed by workers without masonry experience, thus improving the profit margins for installers.

Selling outdoor fireplaces isn't that hard, Rider says, because upper-income homeowners are investing in their homes. "My customers are people that used to do a lot of traveling, but are spending more time at home now because of the economy," he says. "Fireplaces become the focal point of their outdoor living area."

To market outdoor fireplaces, Rider provides customers with client testimonials and invites them to tour his past projects. "Nine times out of 10, it works," he says.



Maverick Pickering of Maverick Landscaping, which does business in the Kansas City metro area, has the same sentiment. He sells lots of outdoor fireplaces through the photos on his website as well as referrals from other customers. "Outdoor fireplaces account for half our sales calls," he says.

One reason that outdoor fireplaces have grown so popular is that customers also love the convenience of the new products. Because certain fireplaces come in preassembled pieces, installers can also set them up in customers' yards in a matter of minutes to test locations. "When we installed outdoor fireplaces with brick and block, we had to know exactly where they would go," says Rider. "Now the customer can look at it first and make sure it's what they want."

Another selling point is that outdoor fireplaces can be customized to meet clients' budgets. "Eight years ago, you had to be rich to be able to afford one," Rider says. "Today the starting price is \$4,000, making it more affordable." As a result, Rider does fireplaces as stand-alone projects and part of larger backyard renovations.

Yet Rider's customers are not only interested in outdoor fireplaces. He cites fire pits, larger patios and hot tubs as other popular features with his clients. "Outdoor kitchens are also big – there's a whole outdoor living theme in the industry right now," he says.

While Pickering has completed \$200,000 projects before, many of his clients are foregoing larger projects to focus on outdoor fireplaces, he says. "They may decide they can't do the \$75,000 project, but they'll spend \$12,500 on a fireplace."

For companies that are seeking to break into outdoor fireplaces, Rider recommends using them as a hook to grow the rest of their business. "Use them as a focal point, and then sell the whole job," he says. "Once you get the fireplace, you'll probably get the yard, too."

He also recommends completing research on the product you're going to sell, making sure the product is tested and certified. Another piece of his advice: avoid cheap products. Finally, he says that contractors should place the fireplace where it can be seen from two or three different places. Doing the job right means profit margins of up to 60 percent.

Pickering recommends that companies bid projects carefully and educate clients about why genuine products are a better choice. "You have to know the cost of your material and labor, period," he says. He cites an example in which he bid against another contractor that quoted \$8,000 for a fire-place. Pickering told the homeowner that he needed to buy a real stone fireplace. He ended up getting the job – for \$12,000.

These days, despite the economic downturn, companies like Rider Stone and Maverick Landscaping are thriving, a trend that Rider attributes in part to the sales of outdoor fireplaces.

"We would have been out of business if not for the backyard scene," he says.

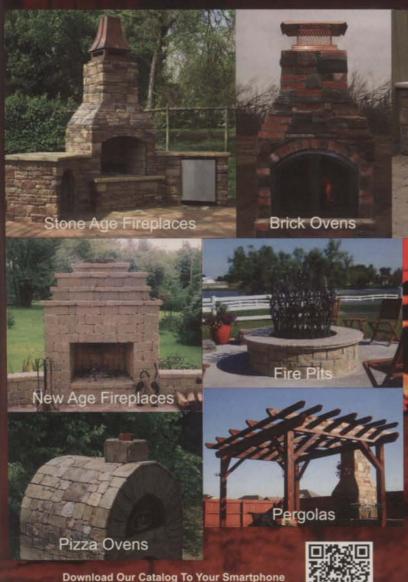
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Lawn care marketing

Using bold signage can be an effective way to pull in potential customers. By Lee Chilcote

im Zylstra knows signs. In fact, he's made signage one of his most successful marketing tools. His signs are big, bright and, most importantly, effective.

"I get calls off my signs every day," says the owner of Tuff Turf Molebusters, a Byron Center, Mich.-based business. "And I've gotten a lot of compliments." Zylstra says he's "ticked off" some people with his signs as well. He says the trick to successful signage is knowing what to include, and perhaps more important – what not to include.

In constantly perfecting his own signs, Zylstra pays a lot of attention to what other companies are doing. He says one of the biggest signage mistakes is including too much information, particularly on intersection signs. "The main thing to remember with intersection signs is that people are driving through and glancing," says Zylstra. "They are not reading. I have seen some very wordy signs including one by a window washing company that I actually had to get out of my truck to read. When using intersection signs, don't list all of the

services you offer. Specialize and pick one service. Keep it is as simple as possible."

Zylstra says that highlighting a specialty helps get the potential client's attention. Once you draw them in, you can discuss additional services.

"If you landscape, try advertising for delivery or spreading of shredded bark," Zylstra suggests. "Put signs in the yard of houses that were just barked and at the entrance of the subdivision and every intersection. The smell and sight are the emotional reaction that will get neighbors to call or go to your website. Afterward, they may decide they need plants or bushes - or even a new patio. Does anybody really want to do onetime services? Not really. But advertising one-time services can get a foot in the door with customers. For example, take vacation mowing. I know somebody that converted an acre lawn into a regular mowing customer because they cut the grass while the homeowner was on vacation."

While keeping the sign short and sweet is important, be sure to include your website information. Zylstra says that driving traffic to his website is his primary goal for any sign he places. "My goal used to be to make them call," he says. "But if they call, you have to pay somebody for 15 minutes of

their time to answer the phone and explain your services and prices. Then you have to drive out or mail expensive brochures. A lot of time and money can be wasted, Instead, my website is a much better brochure that can be changed and updated regularly. It even allows people to request an estimate. By the time the first phone call comes, they already know what we do."

Of course sign placement is also a critical component. Besides intersection signs, Zylstra also places signs in vacant lots and in his customers' lawns, with their permission. Some of the signs he places in customers' lawns have additional information, as they are designed to get the attention of people walking by that have more time to read. With those signs, he mentions core services. "This is also effective in neighborhoods where you have a lot of customers because they can be seen from a long way's away and people in cars will understand you service a lot of homes on that street," he says.

In addition to these signs, Zylstra also has a special sign that he places in his customers' neighbors' lawns. These signs give that neighbor a special offer while letting them know that Zylstra is treating a nearby lawn. It also lists the company's primary services. "Just mentioning that I work on a neighbor's lawn is not enough, especially if that neighbor isn't watering or caring for their lawn," says Zylstra. "There has to be an offer for a call to action."

But it is with these "neighbor" signs, placed to solicit new business, that Zylstra says he's "ticked off" some people. The most irritated neighbor called Zylstra asking him to remove the sign personally.

With incidences like these, signs can have a very short lifespan. As a result, Zylstra advises keeping the budget for signs reasonable. He buys several years' worth at one time to keep the price per sign lower. Overall, Zylstra says he gets about 5-7 percent of his new business from signs alone. Though he's had a lot of success with his signs, Zylstra continues to evolve his signage all the time. He's constantly looking for new ideas to keep his signs fresh and effective.

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.





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Edging

An investment in integrity.

By Lindsey Getz

aking an edging sale is often a missed opportunity for landscape contractors. One reason is that landscape edging may be considered an unnecessary option, either by the client or even the landscaper. But that couldn't be further from the truth, some contractors say. Selling edging is not only a profit booster, but it's an investment in the overall project. In fact, many say that edging isn't just an add-on to the job – it's a necessity.

"The biggest reason why edging is so important is that I feel one of the most critical functions of a landscape is a nice flowing line or a nice straight line," says Brian Diemer, co-owner and vice president of Everett's Landscape Management in Grand Rapids, Mich. "I believe that a well-designed line really makes or breaks the overall project. It can simplify your project, but if done incorrectly, it can also make the project look messy and confusing. When I design something, I'm very particular about how the line is drawn and the right edging helps achieve that."

When selling a landscape project, it's important to educate the customer on the fact that good quality edging will help retain the beautiful design that they just invested in. Position it as an investment in your investment. "I always try to educate customers on the importance of edging and the many benefits it will provide to their landscape from cutting back on maintenance costs to adding to the visual appeal of their overall landscape," says Ryan Davis, landscape architect of Fuerbringer Landscaping & Design in South Bend, Ind. Davis says he always includes edging in all of his landscape designs unless a client specifically requests a space-edge instead.

The proper use of edging will also ensure that the original design is preserved for the long haul. "When my crew installs the



edging, they are installing the very line that we just designed and the edging ensures the integrity of that line will always be maintained," says Diemer. "If you don't have the edging, grass and weeds are going to change that line over time."

The easiest way to market and educate on the importance of edging is with good pictures, says Diemer. Photos can always help sell the job. "Make sure you have good pictures that show a nice straight line or a nice curved line and explain how edging helped achieve that," Diemer adds.

Besides the fact that edging is an essential structural component in landscape design, it is also a revenue generator. The sale and installation of a quality landscape edging represents an excellent opportunity to produce additional revenue. And while it's most often sold as part of an overall job, edging can also be sold as a stand-alone project for enhancement work. Diemer says they do sell pieces of edging or may do edging to help restore an existing bed, but typically their edging sales are part of an overall project. Like Davis, edging is something that Diemer always designs into his jobs.

Of course there's more to selling the idea of edging. The key is convincing the customer that quality edging material is necessary to receive all of the benefits edging can offer. "If you use plastic edging, it can warp," Diemer says. "Some products

are not as uniform or easy-to-use, so finding a good quality product is important. You want something that will really hold up. When you use good quality edging and install it properly, you're able to see the project from the road. That nice sharp bed-line really defines the space and makes a great presentation."

Still, some homeowners may pressure their contractor to install a cheaper product. This is when education becomes critical. The plastic edging sold at big-box stores can crack, separate at the joint and come out of the ground after just one season.

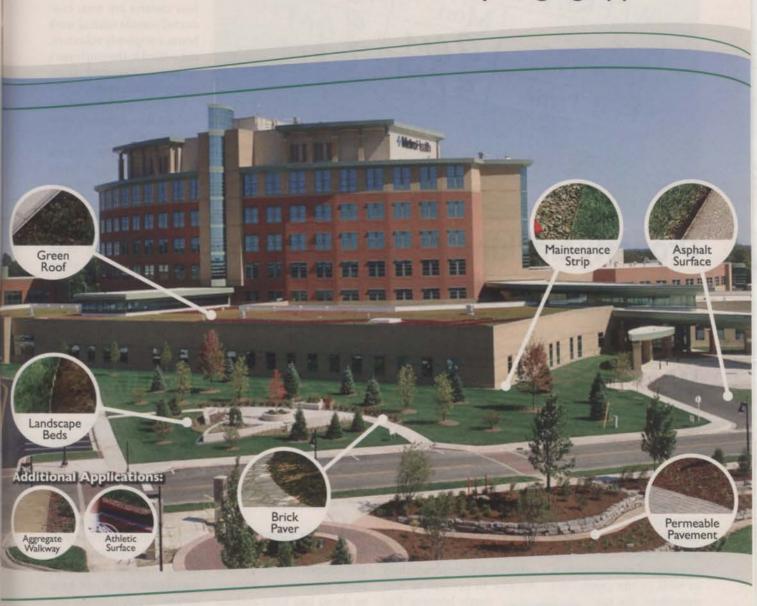
Though the tough economic times have made landscape jobs a bit harder to find overall, Diemer says that it hasn't affected the sales of edging. Customers realize it's a necessity. "It's really a crucial part of the overall project so it's still an easy sell once you get the job," he says. "Customers do understand and appreciate the value of good edging once you design their project. They want to maintain that design."

In the end, edging is not only a necessity to the project – it's also the icing on the cake. It's going to help make your project look its best. Davis adds, "When edging is installed properly within the landscape, it gives the project a much more finished and professional look."

The author is a frequent contributor to Lawn & Landscape.



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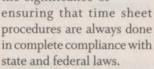
Properly tracking employee hours

Time sheet procedures and documentation can keep landscapers from being sued. By Steven Cesare, Ph.D.

This is the seventh in a series of the top 10 most serious HR mistakes landscape contractors make. To read previous installments, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "Cesare."

hile landscapers understand the administrative role of using a time sheet to capture an employee's work hours, they remain naïve about its underlying legal importance in protecting their company's financial standing and their own personal assets. Specifically, the Fair Labor Standards Act allows employees to sue their company as an organization, as well as the company's

executives, the employee's immediate supervisor, and/or human resources staff, personally for altering a time sheet. That risk illustrates the significance of



That risk exposure is based

on a lack of detail in designing, completing and storing employee time sheets.

TIME SHEET CONTENT. Time sheets typically lack sufficient detail in documenting an employee's testimony that may be used by the company as exculpatory evidence, when sued by that same employee in the future. With added detail, employers may be able to prevent or win

costly lawsuits. For example, time sheets should contain the following attestations to minimize potential employee claims:

· "By signing this time sheet you are acknowledging that your work hours are correct and that you were not injured while on the job or at work for the period

covered. If your work hours are not correct or you were injured on the job during this period, do not sign this time sheet and notify your supervisor immediately."

· "If your paycheck is incorrect, notify your supervisor immediately."

TIME SHEET PROCEDURES.

Employers must be careful and compliant with all time sheet procedures. Failure to do so can have serious impact on inevitable unpaid overtime allegations. Sage recommendations include:

- · Establish a policy that defines the beginning and end of the workweek and workday.
- · Never ask an employee to work off the clock; time sheets must capture all work during a workday.
 - · Pay employees for all

after-work meetings or training. These events can only be omitted from a time sheet if four criteria are met: conducted outside normal work hours, completely voluntary, not related to the employee's job and no other work is concurrently performed.

- · Never alter a time sheet without the employee's written approval.
- · Time sheets must track the exact number of hours worked each day and the total number of hours worked during the workweek.
- · Ensure employees are "completely relieved" of all work duties during their meal periods.

RECORD KEEPING. Federal law requires that employee time sheets be retained for two years. Landscapers should verify this standard with their respective state laws.

SUMMARY. Landscapers must realize a time sheet is more than simply a weekly receipt for working.

If designed, used and managed properly, a time sheet can document evidence capable of minimizing, refuting and defeating several potential employee complaints; complaints which can have serious organizational and personal impact on a contractor and company. LaL

The author is an industrial psychologist with the Harvest Group, a landscape consulting firm. Send your HR questions to scesare@ giemedia.com.

For more on tracking employee hours, visit www. lawnandlandscape.com and search "Cesare.



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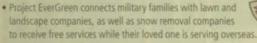




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- These popular programs have garnered attention on TV and in newspapers across the nation including Mike Rowe's Dirty Jobs and NBC's Nightly News.

GreenCare for Communities

 Creating a focused effort on select communities across the United States, this program brings industry professionals, consumers and anyone who's passionate about healthy green spaces together to improve their city and surrounding areas.



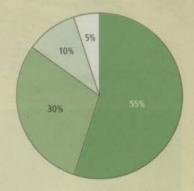
- Over the last four years, our message has made a positive impact in: Akron, Ohio; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and from the corridor spanning from Greensboro to Raleigh, North Carolina.
- . In 2011, Project EverGreen will bring our message to Ft. Myers, Florida.

GreenCare for Youth

- . By reaching out to children of all ages, we can create a greener tomorrow.
- The Art of Green Spaces Competition, sponsored by Birds and Blooms, encourages students to use all forms of art to share how they feel about the green spaces in their lives.
- Golf bag tags, featuring messages on the benefits of green spaces, are given to participants of the GCBAA Sticks for Kids program.
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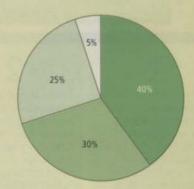
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Run a successful property management service

Everyone strives for consistency. And property management can offer that in the form of a solid customer base, steady revenue and annual profitability.

"But it's extremely competitive, and you have to be super efficient to make money at it," says Scott Neave, president of Neave Group Outdoor Solutions based in Wappingers Falls, N.Y. "It takes years to develop good staff, good processes and good clients."

He should know. Property and snow

management make up 65 percent of Neave Group's business.

Offering property management has helped the company because it's somewhat recession proof, Neave says. "Obviously people get price sensitive during recessions, but most of our clients aren't going to mow their own grass or take care of their yards. The business stays there more or less – it's something people can't cut out completely."

The key to being successful at it is being

able to manage client's expectations. Some might want their grass to look like a golf course, others might care more about their front entrance or clean up, Neave says.

"It's managing client's expectations and managing what they value, not what you value," Neave says. "That is the tough part for most people."

Here Neave gives five tips for entering the property management market and keeping customers happy. – Carolyn LaWell



1

First you need to decide whether property management is going to be an add-on or supplement service and who your clients will be. That will allow you to decide what type of resources you'll need: additional staff, staff training, perhaps new equipment.

2

To be successful, you have to understand the market-place and what to price the service at. Ask: What is the competition doing? What are jobs going for? "Go online and try to find from PLANET or other resources production rates that you can estimate from how long things take. (Then) come up with an estimating system that will help you price things properly," Neave says.

3

Target the customers you hope to go after. Will they be residential, commercial or both? Try to determine what is important to that customer base.

4

Selling property management is like every other service; you need to find out what the potential customer is already doing and go in with the approach that you're able to offer them greater value. That might be selling them on your ability to enhance what they're already doing or finding ways to save them money, Neave says.

5

Continually communicate with your clients. "You really have to spend the time to understand what's important to the client and manage that," Neave says. "No matter if it's residential or commercial, every client has things that are important to them — not you — and they're different from client to client."

Illustration by Vic Kulihin

Proper mowing and irrigation techniques can ensure lawns stay splotch

free. By Carolyn LaWell

loticing brown, circular patches appearing in the grass? Well, it probably is just what it looks like: Brown patch. The fungal disease brown patch causes blighting of the turfgrass foliage. turning lawns from pristine and green to splotchy with shades of brown and tan. To gear up for the onslaught of brown patch, we asked Lane Tredway, an associate professor and extension specialist at North Carolina State University, to breakdown brown patch.

CAUSE AND IDENTIFICATION. Brown patch is common across the country in full-season grasses. And it is especially prone to grow in warm and humid environments and turf, such as fescue, ryegrasses and bentgrasses, Tredway says. "Brown patch becomes much more common and more problematic as you go further south down into the transition zone where the hot and humid conditions persist for longer periods of time."

There are a few conditions that make brown patch ripe for forming. The

fungus usually begins to grow when the nighttime temperatures are around 60 degrees, Tredway says. Also, its primarily active at night when turfgrass leaves tend to be wet from either dew or irrigation water.

"The fungus grows and infects the turfgrass leaves in warm and humid weather and, in doing so, it causes a dieback of the foliage," he says.



The fungal disease causes blighting of the turfgrass foliage and is preventable and treatable.

Brown patch appears in circular patches that are shades of brown and tan. In grass, such as tall fescue, the patches range from 6 inches to several feet in diameter.

PREVENTION AND CONTROL. The key with brown patch is really the ability to manage the wetness and humidity in the turf canopy. So there are multiple steps that can be taken to prevent and control the disease, from proper mowing and irrigation to actually using fungicides.

"First of all, selecting a variety of turf that has been bred for resistance of brown patch is a very effective way to manage it," Tredway says, adding a local extension agent or the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program can help with identifying resistant types in one's area. "In addition, how the turf is mowed, fertilized and irrigated can have

> a tremendous impact on the development of the disease. And so, turf managers can adjust how they manage the turf to reduce their problems with brown patch."

> Tredway says it's important to follow the recommended mowing lengths for each grass species. "If you go above that mowing height, then brown patch becomes much more problematic," he says. "Since the turf canopy

is taller and denser at higher mowing heights, the canopy holds humidity and stays wet for longer periods of time, which encourages the development of the disease."

Irrigation is important for the same reason. Irrigating too frequently allows turfgrass to hold moisture longer and exacerbate brown patch, Tredway says.

Fungicides can be used on both a preventative and curative basis, Tredway says. The most effective products belong to the QoI class of chemistry, he says. Products that contain active ingredients like azoxystrobin and pyraclostrobin.

Other steps to take into consideration in areas where brown patch might grow is the turf planting process itself. The disease is problematic in poorly drained soils and shady areas.

"One thing that is important from a landscape design standpoint is that you're not trying to grow turf in areas that are pocketed or surrounded by trees or other obstructions because those areas tend to stay wet longer," he says. "It creates a much more conducive environment for the development of the disease." L&L

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. She can be reached at clawell@gie.net.

A Spanish version of this article can be found at www.lawnandlandscape.com. search "Spanish version."



Brown patch is more prevalent in warm and humid environments.



To prevent a grub-infested lawn, it's important to know the symptoms and control options.

By Jennifer Lemcke

ne of the most destructible pest problems that arise during spring and fall are grubs.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it is estimated that grubs cause more than \$200 million in damage a year to lawns.

In order to properly treat grub-infested lawns and ensure they stay healthy, it is crucial that you understand how to identify grubs, their lifespan and the symptoms of grub damage, along with the various treatment options that are available.

IDENTIFICATION. Grubs. which are generally found on the East Coast and in the Midwest, are small, plump white larvae that live below the soil surface and chew on the roots of the grass.

They are the larval stage of a group of beetles, including the European chafer, June beetle, Japanese beetle, Asiatic garden beetle and the oriental beetle.

While grubs are typically

cream-colored and have six legs with an amber-colored head, the size of grubs will vary depending on the species and its age.

LIFESPAN. While the typical lifespan of the beetles is about a year, it is not uncommon to come across grubs that have a lifespan of approximately three years.

Grubs are most destructive late summer, but mating between beetles occurs in late June. As the grub larvae sit about 3 inches from the soil surface, they feed off the roots of the grass.

This process will continue into August as they continue to feed off the grass and grow larger. As summer starts to wind down and frost approaches, the grubs will move down into the soil and hibernate in order to make it through the winter season.

DAMAGE. Because grubs chew on the grass roots, the turf will appear brown. Grub damage may be confused

with drought or dead patches of lawn. If the lawn is infested by grubs, you will be able to roll the sod back like a carpet. Additionally, be on the lookout for animals like skunks and raccoons.

If grubs are burrowing themselves underneath the turf, these animals will dig up the lawn in order to feast on them.

It is also important to remember that beetles like to lay their eggs in areas with adequate soil moisture and plenty of sunshine.

CONTROL. The most favorable time of the year to implement grub control treatments is early summer right after the eggs hatch.

The most easily accessible method to controlling grubs is to closely monitor the lawn.

Start observing late summer for off-color spots, especially in areas that have been irrigated. There are curative and preventive products available to help control

grubs. Preventive products should be applied as early as mid-April to the end of May when grub eggs are hatching or are small. The most effective control is products with the active ingredients dithiopyr, prodiamine and pendimethalin.

Curative products should be applied in June or early July when the grubs are active. Effective active ingredients are quinclorac and fenoxaprop-p-ethyl.

If seeking an alternative control, nematodes are multi-celled organism that feed on grubs.

In particular, they are most efficient at eliminating Japanese beetle grubs alone with the European chafer grubs. L&L

The author is chief operating officer at Turf Holdings Inc./Weed Man USA. She can be reached at jlemcke@ giemedia.com.

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Leadership Class of 2007

Interviewed by Carolyn LaWell

Co-owner, CoCal Landscape **Fochtman**



What have you been up to since winning the Leadership Award in 2007?

I have been trying to preserve my wealth and hunkering down and retooling our business to survive this downturn. I say my wealth, I mean the wealth of the company and my own wealth because it's been a very difficult economy. We have restructured our company; literally how we compensate the owners.

What we have done is change our model. CoCal Landscape is strictly a landscape management company. We are not in what is commonly called bid build construction anymore. We still do a lot of installation. We used to do multi-million dollar bids against five contractors. We are out of that business. We are primarily a landscape maintenance, renovation and snow clearing organization.

Read more from Fochtman. including his best advice for motivating employees.



When did you get out of the design/build business?

It took two years. We got out during this downturn. We were working on leaving that end of the business, and when the economy turned and we fully understood how bad it was going to be, we accelerated our departure.

How has the restructuring helped the business?

It took a lot to get out of that business and, as we've done that, we just keep finding maintenance operations, working on the density of our routes, finding ways to be more efficient.

We're doing more training with our people than we have ever done. We're working on our brand, marketing wise, to enhance our ability to attract work, potential jobs. We have our best sales team ever; (we) hired our first sales manager.

We've gotten very lean - we're not staffed the way we use to be in large part because half of our volume we have turned off. And we've just gotten back to people wearing more hats and operating extremely lean.

So the end result is Co-Cal Landscape is in the best shape it's been in probably 10 years, financially and as an organization. We're very excited about 2011.

Do you have advice for others going through a restructuring process or who might be shedding services?

You have to understand where your opportunities are and what your sweet spot is: What's your niche? What do vou do well?

The two owners of Co-Cal, our heritage is in maintenance, and we kind of got lured into construction through some relationships and it's not really us. We're not passionate about it and, quite frankly, we didn't do it particularly well. As we became a big company, it became a big drain on us. So understand what you're good at and don't go off into areas that you might not be good at.

You have to have a culture of efficiency. When the economy was very good, and this is true in many industries, people were making a lot of money and just got a little fat, dumb and happy, you just kind of breed sloppiness.

What is the hardest part about restructuring a company?

The hardest part about all of this is probably the people. Not too long ago, we let

go a nine-year and 11-year employee. Good people. We really looked hard; we just didn't have a spot for them. The one gentleman I helped get a job with a very good company, he was only out of work a month. But it's letting the people go and what that does for the morale of your company. So you have to stay very close to your team and be a cheerleader. When you're going through this, naturally employees are looking over their shoulder a little bit, who is going to be next.

We're half the size we were in 2007, and if we perform, we will make more money in 2011 than we've made in the last four years.

It's a function of returning to what we do well and doing a lot more with less, on the equipment side, the people side, everything - there is no fat in CoCal Landscape. There are no B or C players in our company anymore, only the best people remain. Actually, people are pretty excited and anxious for the coming season because they know we are positioned properly.

It's quite exciting really. After a couple of painful years, 2011 is like our coming out party. L&L



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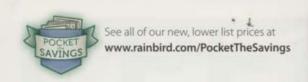
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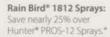
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