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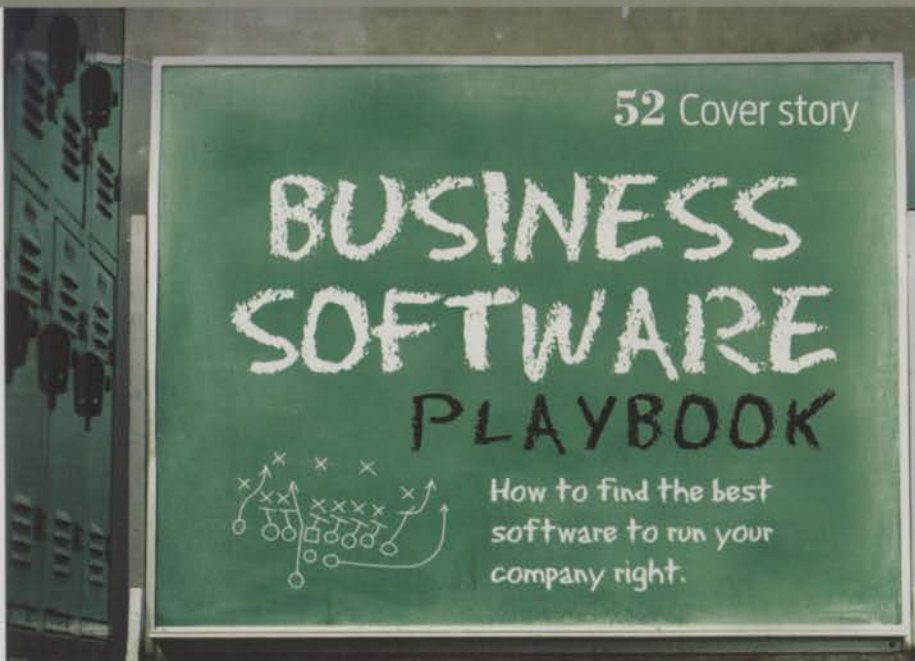


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ONLINE Contents

Check out what's now online from *Lawn & Landscape*.

Gaining MOWmentum

The Grasshopper Co., with the help of *Lawn & Landscape*, has released the first mobile app for tablet technology specifically for landscape maintenance contractors. It's called MOWmentum and it provides grounds maintenance professionals valuable information to improve their businesses. New issues, available for free download in Apple and Android app stores, will be released quarterly, with relevant content for the respective season.

The premiere issue includes a checklist for morning rollout, fleet maintenance guide, mower and crew safety tips, alternative fuel-saving comparisons, insights on mulching and dethatching services and best practices demonstrated by the issue's featured contractor. The goal of the app, through stories, videos and photo galleries, aims to provide industry benchmarks and resources to assist contractors in their operations. Download the app for iPad: bit.ly/mowmentum or Android: bit.ly/mowmentumdroid.



POPULAR POSTS

facebook

LinkedIn

twitter

Here are some links our followers and friends found the most intriguing across our social media platforms.

LATEST SINGLES SCENE

Weed dating was a hit for singles in Idaho.

bit.ly/weeddate

WHAT'S TO BLAME?

A Cleveland homeowner blames a fertilizer company for the death of his Koi fish.

bit.ly/koifishkill

SUPPLIER TESTIFIES

The green industry witness described how high fuel prices have affected job creation.

bit.ly/LLtestify

LONG ISLAND LAW

Cut your lawn, or your you-know-what is grass.

bit.ly/cutlawn

THE NEW LAWN

It's shaggy, chic and easy on the mower.

bit.ly/meadlawn

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LAWN CARE
R·A·D·I·O N·E·T·W·O·R·K

The second edition of the Lawn Care Radio Network arrived in inboxes recently. But, in case you missed it, just visit the links provided below to hear the latest podcasts on how to better run your business. You can also download them via iTunes and listen to them while driving around on the job. Visit bit.ly/lawncareradio to hear other podcasts from the network.

Pests and politicians

Agrium Advanced Technologies headed to Washington to speak with legislators about the chemical industry. bit.ly/pestLL

Turf challenges

Todd Mayhew of Valent Professional Products talks about what LCOs can do when the weather doesn't go according to plan, and other obstacles facing LCOs this year. bit.ly/lcmturf



Know your conditions

LCOs have to be more aware of pest damage in lawns because of drought and stressed turf. bit.ly/lcmmknow



ALL THE WAY TO OFA

Check out some videos from the OFA Short Course by typing in the bit.ly links below. For all the videos, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "From the Field."

Plant something

Cheryl Goar explains a new marketing initiative geared at motivating people to play in the dirt. bit.ly/growsomething

One voice, one industry

OFA's Michael Geary comments on the plan to form a new green association with ANLA. bit.ly/anlaofa

Disease control

Steven Larson from BASF discusses the Orvego fungicide, a new product that controls downy mildew and Phytophthora. bit.ly/diseasecontrol

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Long-suffering Lynne

When I installed irrigation systems, we would keep track of everything by hand. The passenger seat, wheel wells and glove box of every repair van were littered with crumpled and torn job sheets of chicken scratch.

And every week Lynne, our long-suffering office manager, would harangue us about our poor penmanship and inability to keep anything clean.



At any successful landscape company, the books, trucks, supplies and people are tracked and allocated by computer, little invisible ones and zeros keeping tabs on everything from spray rigs to lunch breaks.

But when it comes to choosing a program, many landscapers are stuck. It's one of the questions I get from readers most often. "What should I use? What works best?"

Unfortunately, there's no good answer. It all depends on your management style, company size and how you organize things.

But whatever type or brand of software an owner chooses, the end result is the same. If you can't keep tabs on how many hours your crews work, or where they drive once they leave the yard, or who has paid their bills this month, how can you ever hope to get out from under it all to plan for higher-level projects or markets?

Having tools in place to track – and then manage – the key parts of your business is one of the most basic ways to grow. This strategy of the small stuff – what Seth Godin calls "the thankless

work of lower-leverage detail" – is so important for small companies, but it's something the big guys have to do, too.

On page 50, in an exclusive interview with L&L, the new CEO of TruGreen LandCare, explained a similar focus for his firm for this year. "Our 2012 focus is resetting the foundation, getting back to the basics, making sure we do them right every day," says Vidu Kulkarni. "Ours is a relatively straightforward business. We're not building rocketships. Longer term, our focus is on profitable growth, not being the biggest dog on the block. I want to be the best dog on the block."

When it comes to those small things, Godin writes: "An organization with feet on the street and alert and regular attention to detail can build more trust and develop better relationships than one that hits and runs."

So this month, sit down and take a look at how you and your team handle the small things in your day-to-day work – everything from your time sheets to your job tickets to your order forms. Every company has a Lynne, and she has a point. – Chuck Bowen

Lawn & Landscape

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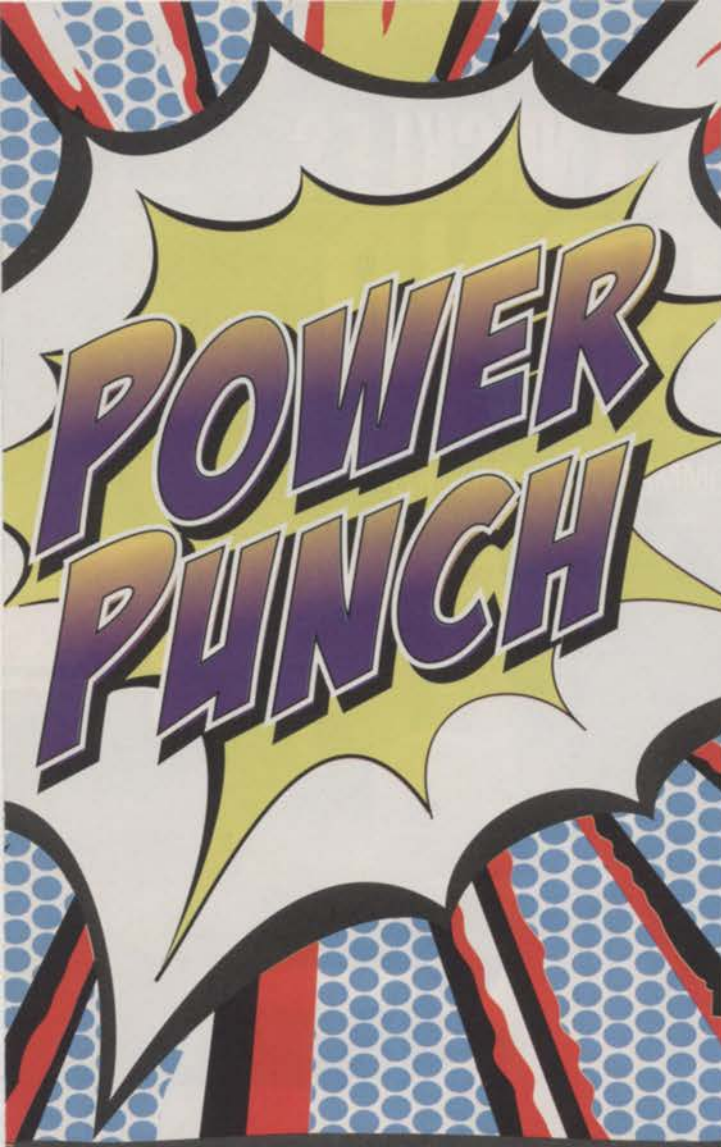
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LETTERS

Teach your children well

Colin Vincent, branch manager at Southern Spray Lawn Care in Nashville, shares this photo of our youngest reader to date – his son, Ethan, enthralled with our March issue.



Ethan Vincent

Colin explains: "He can't go to school in the morning without a copy of *Lawn & Landscape*. Ethan is 2 and a half and absolutely loves lawn equipment. Southern Spray concentrates on turf and ornamental applications, so he knows a spray truck when he sees one, but he prefers big zero-turn mowers. He also can spot a "weedeat-eater" and even an aerator in the ads. He spends his morning ride to preschool with *Lawn & Landscape*. No DVD player in this truck!

Bigger isn't always better

In your June 2012 issue, I read the letter to the editor "On staying small and local," and I would like to say how much I appreciate you recognizing these companies. Many companies choose to maintain this mindset despite their number of cli-

ents or their revenue. Actually, the article and idea of a very small business starting, growing and maintaining the ma and pa shop feel completely mimic my company's story and mission.

After being a full-time mother to my two children and working a few part-time positions at local retailers, I decided I wanted a change. I wanted to start my own business. After baffling countless ideas of what to do, I decided I was going to start a lawn care company by myself. No one would have ever known that this idea of trying to find something to do to pass time and generate a little spending cash would quickly transform into my dream and passion.

My husband knew of a general contractor who had recently moved to a new home and was looking for someone to maintain his lawn. There was my chance and I ran with it.

Starting off with one customer, a self-propelled push mower, a hand-me-down blower, my SUV, a home-made trailer and both of my kids in the back seat, my company was born and I began my first day at my new job. Despite critics and speculation of me, a female, developing a successful business in a predominantly male industry, I have proved quite the contrary.

Through maintaining a focus on relationships, consistency and personalized service with every client, my business has grown year over year since that day in the mid 90s when I started with one customer. Over time, I have transitioned from a

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maintenance only company to offering full landscape services including design and installation, construction of hardscapes and outdoor living spaces, and beginning in 2013 will even launch our new fertilization and lawn treatment segment. In 2011, our revenue exceeded \$350,000 – a first for us.

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the idea of being a small, local business in our daily activities. Keeping the small business feel is our culture and how we will remain as an organization with both our clients and our employees. We continuously look for ways to demonstrate our culture to the community.

Over the past few years, we have had the opportunity

to sponsor sports teams of client's children, charity events and fundraisers held in local neighborhoods and private clubs in which we work - all to continue to build on that small, local business mentality.

Thank you for your contribution and information into our industry and especially recognizing the little guys

(or girls) out there and I look forward to my next issue of *Lawn & Landscape*.

Kimberly Bates
K.G. Bates, Inc.
Stockbridge, Ga.

Doing business the right way

My name is Scott Beauregard and I have been in the landscaping business for over twenty years.

I have always run my business according to state and local laws. I am insured, pay sales tax to the state and make sure any employees working for me are documented and legal to work in the United States. I realize that with the economy the way it is that people are doing whatever it takes to make ends meet.

However, I take offense to people that throw a little trailer on the back of their vehicle load up with equipment and call themselves landscapers. More and more of these companies pop up every day. I work very hard to make a living and do things the right way to keep my business going.

In the past, I would take down license plate numbers or phone numbers off of these companies and turn them into the New Jersey Catch program for businesses that are tax cheats and usually would see some of them gone within a few weeks. However, there seems to be an infestation of companies lately.

I know that it is illegal to operate a commercial business in New Jersey without

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LETTERS

commercial plates and signage on your vehicle, but local law enforcement does nothing about it.

I have contacted Gov. Chris Christie's office in regards to this matter several times but have never received any answers as to why the state does not go after the millions of dollars in lost sales tax revenue.

I have called the senators office and also received no response. Even after reaching out to the media about a local business trying to stay afloat in such tough times with all this illegal competition, but once again no response.

People don't realize that this is a serious industry. Home-owners need to understand that having one of these companies work on their property is an accident waiting to happen.

God forbid someone gets injured on your property and they are uninsured, then they can sue you as the home owner. Even worse if one of the employees gets hurt. What if they hurt someone like a neighbor or someone's child.

Every other business that is open has to go through proper procedures in order to open the doors, except our field. If you can offer me any suggestions on how to help clean up this industry please let me know.

I am tired of spending countless hours bidding jobs, then seeing someone else do the work and pocket every penny.

*Scott Beauregard
Owner, Hidden Hills Landscaping
Hazlet, N.J.*

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All about Utah

I enjoyed Jim Huston's article in the May issue of *Lawn & Landscape*. I appreciate the fact that you highlighted the Utah market and a local contractor.

I lived in Utah up until about a year ago and had been there on and off for about 10 years as a BYU student, LCO and part of the green industry workforce.

It's got to be one of the weirdest landscape markets around, but I think you nailed it with your summary of market conditions.

*Austin Gardner
Client Relations Manager
Eastern Land Management
Stamford, Conn.*



Circular file

A quick note to say thanks for your publication, *Lawn &*

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FREIGHTLINER

Grass, gas and ... WATER

At the annual OPEI meeting, manufacturers outline plans to fight regulations on fuel, water and the managed landscape. By Chuck Bowen



From left, Mike Hoffman, chairman and CEO, the Toro Company; Mike Ariens, chairman, Ariens Company; Dan Ariens, president and CEO, Ariens Company and chairman of the OPEI board; Tom Skove, assistant general counsel of environmental and regulatory compliance, MTD Products; and Kris Kiser, president and CEO, OPEI

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – Green industry equipment suppliers continue to promote turf in schools and the halls of Congress, not just on issues of emissions and fuel, but also water and the benefits of landscapes.

Executives from major equipment manufacturers gathered at the annual meeting of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute in late June to discuss the association's growing Turf Mutt program, its lobbying efforts against E15 fuel and its work to develop standards for water use.

WATERWORK. Mark Schmidt, chief scientist at John Deere, is leading work to develop an ANSI standard for



Schmidt

water use in managed landscapes. As the green industry continues to face pressure from regulatory agencies and the public about water use of green spaces, a science-based standard can help better define a "sustainable" environment, he says.

Among other things, the document the committee is developing with the Association of Agricultural and Biological Engineers standardizes the process for calculating water budgets and the water requirements of landscape plants.

"When people say landscapes need to change, I would suggest they need to evolve," Schmidt says. "It's not plants that waste water, it's people. ... If we can

prove the value of the landscape, and that's something we can achieve, we can justify the value of those inputs."

TURFMUTT. OPEI has expanded its canine-based educational program that promotes the value of green spaces. Turf Mutt, developed with Discovery Education, has expanded to include curriculum for kindergarteners through second graders, as well as third through fifth graders.

The program's recent Spruce Up Your School sweepstakes, which encouraged students to increase greenspace around their schools, received more than 16,000 entries. The winning school received \$5,000 from OPEI to plant shade trees and install benches.

ETHANOL. The fight continues against EPA's partial waiver for E15 fuels. The fuel, with a higher level of ethanol, has been approved by the government for on-road vehicles built before 2001, but not power equipment, and has been shown to cause failure in small engines. OPEI president and CEO Kris Kiser said he expected a decision soon on a lawsuit that would prevent sale of the fuel at all. As of press time, no final decision had been made.

2012 ELECTION. Howard Fineman, editorial director for

the Huffington Post, spoke to attendees about the current state of politics in America, and gave his predictions for the upcoming presidential election.

Fineman said Florida, Ohio and Colorado are the most important states in November, then Iowa, North Carolina and Nevada. The Hispanic populations in those states, as well as unions, will play crucial roles, he says.

An after many years spent reporting on Washington for Newsweek, NBC and HuffPo,



2012 marks Kris Kiser's first year at the helm of OPEI.

Fineman called American politics a "WWF sort of exercise, and that's sad." And regardless of political affiliation, the most pressing issues facing the country are how the nation will deal with taxes, social programs and a growing culture of fear.

"We're going to have to simplify the tax code so it does the best it can to help and not hinder the economy," Fineman says. We're going to have to have a grown-up discussion about what social welfare costs we can afford as a society." L&L

Talking points

Contractors had a chance to give John Deere their input on a variety of issues. By Brian Horn

RALEIGH N.C. – Business is steady, delegating is a difficult process and alternative fuels aren't catching on according to contractors who attended a John Deere customer fly-in held at the company's Turf Care factory near Raleigh, N.C.

The topics came up during roundtable discussions as part of the two-day event that helps the company understand current and potential customers. Contractors also got a tour of the factory and a chance to ride some of the

company's mowers, skid-steers and ATVs. The overall feeling from contractors was that, while business is steady, it's been a struggle the past couple of years for some to stay ahead of the game.

Stephen McFarland, president of Grounds Management in Maryland Heights, Mo., said when cash flow catches up, he'll put some of that into savings, but it's hard to build up reserves. "Our cash flow," he said "has been an issue for the first time in a long time." Other



Contractors learned about Deere equipment during the fly-in.

topics contractors touched upon included:

STEPPING AWAY. Dave and Jeff Sajovie, owners of Sajovie Brothers in Northeast Ohio, have gone through a ten-year battle trying to step out of the field and concentrate more on the

business and office work. Their thought is that they would rather pay someone to do work in the field where they can make money, rather than hire office help. But the key to being able to step away is to develop foremen so you can feel comfortable being away from job sites.



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ALTERNATIVE FUELS. None of the contractors were hearing from too many customers asking for alternative fuels like propane or ethanol. But, some were seeing it from dealers. "It's not a hard push, but it's a push," McFarland said.

LESS CLEANUP. Saving time is always something contractors value, which is why many there were impressed with Deere's riding mower mulch-on-demand option – an option they'd like to see on 60-inch decks and walk-behind mowers. While mulching kits are an option, they don't do the job as well because operators have to slow the mower down to

make sure it mulches correctly. Even then, in high, wet grass, it still leaves clumps.

"You have to find ways to save that extra step," Duncan said.

COMFORT VERSUS CUT. When it came to spending money on a comfortable ride versus one that gives a better cut, contractors had mixed opinions. The pro-comfort side said that they think their crews will mow more and work harder if they are able to enjoy a smoother ride.

The Sajovics raved about stand-on mowers saying there wasn't much difference in quality, adding their operators had an easier time

getting off and on them to pick up debris. "They hate them the first two days, and then they don't want to sit down," David said.

BUY OR LEASE. James Duncan, owner of Outdoor Precision in Foristell, Mo., said he prefers to lease equipment that will be driven by a number of different employees, like his skid-steer. "When you have multiple guys using it, it just gets torn down," he said.

STOCKING PARTS. Contractors said they had issues with buying extra parts, putting them on a shelf and either losing them or forgetting they had them. Then,

after realizing they have too many of one part, they have to waste time taking the part back to the store or the dealer.

Setting a minimum number of parts in stock left on a shelf is an effective way to remind workers when they need to place an order.

EASY MONEY. A couple contractors pushed low voltage lighting as an easy way to improve your profitability. "We pushed it as a safety issue," said Zac Terrill, owner of Terrill Landscaping in St. Louis.

Terrill said he does free demos for customers as a way of enticing them to buy the service. **L&L**



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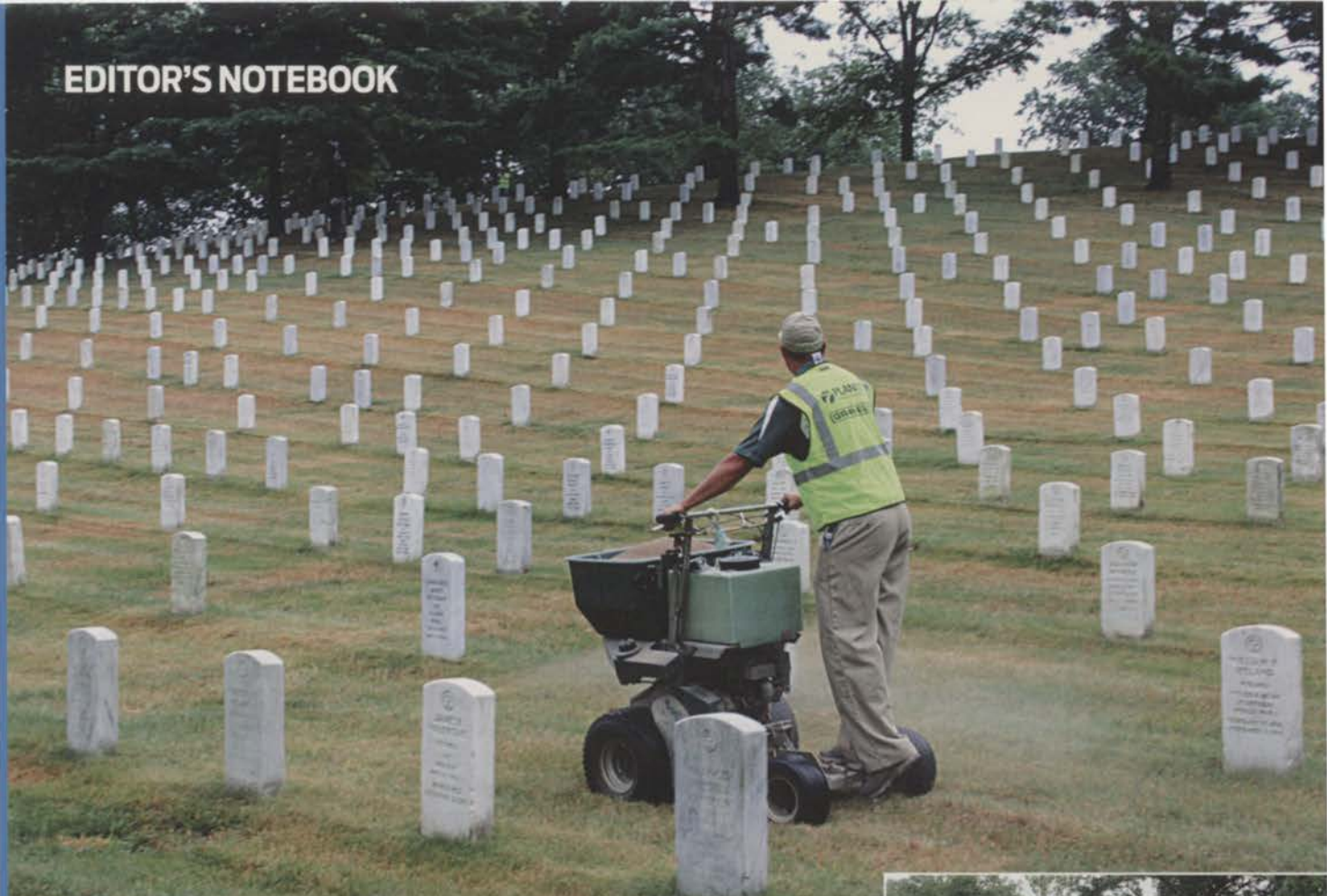


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Leaving their mark

Green industry professionals use their talents to honor fallen soldiers, and make their presence felt on Capitol Hill.

By Brian Horn

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Roger Phelps choked up while addressing the crowd on the morning of July 8 at PLANET's Renewal & Remembrance at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va. But while talking about his friends and classmates who were buried at the cemetery, the Navy veteran had a positive message for the 400 volunteers and 100 companies standing at the ready to help maintain the turf and trees that surround the rows of white tombstones.

"The stones here are speaking to us," said Phelps, promotional communications manager of STIHL. "They are telling us to live." With that message, the volunteers began their work on the cemetery grounds. Whether they were trimming a tree, working on an irrigation project, applying lime or aerating half of the 400-acre cemetery, the volunteers all expressed gratitude at the opportunity to take part in the event.





Renewal and Remembrance is the largest event PLANET participates in, and represents \$250,000 of services and goods a year donated to the cemetery. In the past 16 years, more than \$2 million in goods and services has been donated.

Michael Kravitsky, co-owner of Grasshopper Lawns, has participated in R&R all 16 years, and makes a family trip out of the event, travelling four hours from northeastern Pennsylvania. He said a few things have changed since the beginning, including the increasing popularity of the event and the equipment used to maintain the grounds.

"Sixteen years ago, it was in February and we all used push spreaders," he said. "I don't know if any people remember push spreaders because of all the equipment and the iron that's running around her now. So that's been a huge difference, but it's just been fantastic."

Norman Goldenberg, PLANET president, said the event is so popular now that the association had to turn away volunteers.

"We have more trouble keeping the volunteers away than getting them to come here because we are limited to the number of people that can actually come here and perform this work," he said.

Michael Sisti, owner of Weed Man in Montgomery County Pennsylvania, said the event also gives green industry professionals a chance to show unity as an industry.

"It's coming together as an industry and showing our strength as an industry and giving back to those who gave to us," he said. "Until you've experienced it and you go through those gates, and you step on these grounds, there's no other way to explain it."

Also as part of the trip to D.C., contractors meet with their elected representatives during Legislative Day on the Hill.

A few issues PLANET and its member have in focus include:

H-2B VISA PROGRAM: PLANET members want Congress to pass legislation prohibiting the Department of Labor from implementing the final H-2B methodology and program rules. Many contractors depend on this program to staff their business because they say American workers don't apply for available green industry jobs. The labor department wants to raise the amount H-2B workers are paid

The morning of July 9, more than 400 volunteers and 100 companies tended to the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., as part of PLANET's Renewal & Remembrance.



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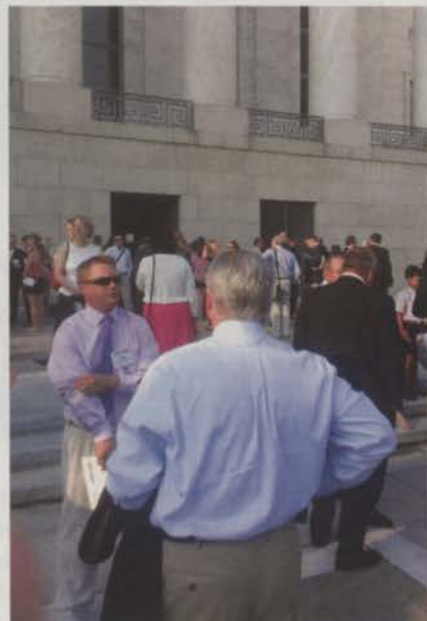
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EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



On July 10, PLANET members were able to meet with politicians on Capitol Hill.

hourly by more than \$3. A rule change would also allow any American to apply for a job up to 21 days before the H-2B worker is scheduled to start work even though the company may almost be finished with all the costs and paperwork needed for the H-2B worker to start. If the DOL's rule changes go through, it would also affect companies that don't use H-2B by increasing competition for American workers.

NPDES PERMITS: Increasing the amount of permits to apply pesticides may overburden LCOs with paperwork. PLANET's position is that the Senate should pass the Reducing Regulatory Burdens Act of 2011 to alleviate the amount of paperwork required to allow for pesticide applications.

LYME DISEASE: PLANET wants a bill passed that would establish an advisory committee that would educate the public on tick-borne diseases, such as Lyme disease. Lyme disease can be deadly, and more education on the subject could result in faster and better treatment. L&L

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

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James Ingram named president of Bartlett Tree Experts

STAMFORD, Conn. – Bartlett Tree Experts has named James Ingram president.

Ingram, currently vice president and division manager of the company's field operations in New England and eastern Canada, will take the helm of the company officially Jan. 1, 2013. Bartlett's former president, Greg Daniels, announced his retirement in May.

"Based on my personal experiences working with Jim and the success he's had as a leader in our company, I can confidently say I feel great about this decision.

"He has strong ideas for the continued growth of the company that fit with my vision of where we are now and where we're headed," said Robert Bartlett Jr., chairman and CEO of Bartlett Tree Experts.

Ingram joined Bartlett Tree Experts as an arborist representative in 1983 and was promoted to local manager in 1984. Ingram has held his current role since 1993.

In that time, he established the New England territory as the company's largest sales region. He is responsible for financial oversight of 17 Bartlett locations and has been actively involved in recruiting, managing and training a staff of more than 40 arborists.

Bartlett Tree Experts ranked No. 8 on the 2012 *Lawn & Landscape* Top 100 List with revenue of \$167 million. The Connecticut-based company has offices in 26 states, Canada, Great Britain and Ireland.



Ingram

IA show registration now open

FALLS CHURCH, Va. – Attendee registration is now open for the Irrigation Association's 2012 Irrigation Show, Nov. 4-5, and education conference, Nov. 2-6, at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla.

Attendees who register by Oct. 5 will receive discounted rates. New offerings in 2012 include:

- Charlie Hall, professor of horticulture and Ellison Chair in International Floriculture at Texas A&M University will provide a macro perspective to economics in the industry.

- The Florida Irrigation Society and Workforce Florida are holding a job and career fair open to all people

- A new product contest will offer attendees the opportunity to vote on their favorite products. Visit www.irrigationshow.org to register.

Two top students selected for major GIE Media scholarships

CLEVELAND – GIE Media, the nation's leading publisher of horticulture and green industry trade magazines, has named the winners of its annual Young Leaders Scholarship.

Robin Cannon, a junior at Kent State University-Salem, and Judson LeCompte (pictured), a graduate student at Auburn University, will both receive \$5,000 to continue their education this fall.

Cannon, who currently works as a horticulture intern at the Shaker Heights, Ohio, Country Club, has spent several years pursuing her degree and working to support her family. She was the horticulturist for three years at the Boulder Creek Golf Course in Streetsboro, Ohio, which is ranked one of the best public courses in Ohio. She established and ran the greenhouses on site there, and currently manages a crew at Wheeler Landscaping.

"Many people have said to me over the course of the past two years that I should be content with the job that I have, and that I should quit school," she wrote in her application essay. "I strongly disagree. I believe that you can never stop learning, and that there is always someone that can teach you something that you didn't already know."

LeCompte, a first year graduate student at Auburn University, brings a wide range of experience in the green industry to his work. He worked as the manager of a garden center, where he was responsible for 15 employees and \$12 million a year in sales, and led several student groups as an undergraduate. His research has focused on the use of gray water and salt water in irrigation, sustainable landscape practices and the development of green roofs.

"Students in the green industry truly are the next generation of the industry," said Chris Foster, president and CEO of GIE Media. "We view this award as just one way we can support the incoming class of entrepreneurs, stand-out professionals and researchers in all the industries we serve."



Robin Cannon, right, was one of two winners of the GIE Media Young Leaders Scholarship.



LeCompte

ANLA, OFA to form new trade association

COLUMBUS – The Board of Directors of OFA – The Association of Horticulture Professionals voted to begin the process of organizing a new association with the American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA).

After months of discussion, the working group comprised of leaders from both organizations determined it was time to formally explore creating a new trade association.

OFA and ANLA announced

in January 2012 the formation of a joint venture to support business education and government relations activities. The vision statement adopted by OFA's

board of directors expressed the desire to form a new organization if it brings more value to our members and the industry. Since June 2011, OFA's executive committee has been meeting with ANLA's leaders about the opportunity for and viability of a



formal relationship between the two organizations. As early as the first meeting, the idea of forming a new organization has been discussed by the joint venture working group.

"We are listening to our members. Results of a membership and organizational study performed at the end of last year indicated that members of both associations want the organizations to work closer to unify the industry," said OFA President Mike McCabe, owner of McCabe's Greenhouse & Floral in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. "They want their industry association to be all encompassing – one that touches and links all pieces of the horticulture industry, which can be offered by a new organization."

The timeline is to have a new organization established no sooner than July of 2013 and no later than January 2014. "This is not a merger. This is taking the best of what both associations do to create a new organization that will advance the industry and better serve our members," said Michael V. Geary, OFA's chief executive officer.

In further developments of the joint venture, following ANLA Executive Vice President Bob Dolibois' scheduled retirement at the end of the year, Geary will become the chief staff executive of both ANLA and OFA beginning on January 1, 2013. The organizations will continue to be governed separately, but Geary will lead the day-to-day operations of both groups.

New England Grows announces 2013 programs

BOSTON – New England Grows theme for 2013 is Frontline thinking. Intelligent solutions.

The event is scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 6 to Friday, Feb. 8 at the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center.

More than 30 educational seminars are planned. The speaker lineup includes well-known experts and other trendsetting presenters including Bruce Allison, Kirk Armstrong, Kip Creel, Richard Hawke, Dan Heims, Michael Raupp, and Cass Turnbull.

They will address a variety of timely commercial horticultural topics like permaculture, the impact of global climate change on plants and pests, water management and mature tree care, as well as business-growth ideas

"New England Grows is produced by the industry, for the industry," said New England Grows' president Mary Hallene of Sylvan Nursery in Westport, Mass.

At New England Grows, green industry professionals can obtain most of their professional Continuing Education (CEU) credits with recertification opportunities for pesticide licenses, NOFA, APLD, LA CES, ISA, CTSP, and most state association credentials.

Early registration goes through Jan. 15 and costs \$49 for all three days. The early registration price drops to \$45 per person when four or more people from the same company register together.

Pat Jones and Jim Gilbride to lead GIE Media's Horticulture Group

CLEVELAND – Pat Jones and Jim Gilbride have been promoted to new positions within GIE Media, the leading business media company in the green industry.

Jones becomes business manager and publisher for GIE's turf publications, including *Lawn & Landscape* and *Golf Course Industry*, and Gilbride is now business manager and publisher for the company's ornamental publications, including *Greenhouse Management*, *Nursery Management* and *Garden Center*.

Jones has led *Golf Course Industry* as publisher and editorial director for the past three years and recently launched both *GCI International* and GIE's new *Green Industry Supply Chain Management*. He is a veteran golf/turf communications professional and award-winning editor with more than 25 years of market experience in the green industry. In his new position, he will have overall management responsibility for L&L, GCI, GISCM and related digital products and custom media programs.

Gilbride, who has been with GIE since 2004, has been a key factor in the success and rapid growth of the ornamental market publications GIE acquired three years ago. He previously was Associate Publisher and Sales Manager for *Greenhouse Management*. He will now oversee all aspects of GIE's ornamental market publications and operations including GM, NM, Garden Center and related products.

"Pat and Jim have both shown they are amazingly passionate about their markets and that they're incredibly skilled publishing and media pros," said Chris Foster, GIE CEO. "They are absolutely the right people to lead our Horticulture Group to new levels."

In a related move, Dave Szy has been promoted to the position of associate publisher for *Lawn & Landscape*. Szy, a 10-year veteran of GIE's sales team, was most recently national sales manager for L&L and GIE's *Snow* magazine. He will work closely with Jones to manage L&L's sales and industry relationships.



Jones



Gilbride



Szy



CLIMBING THE LADDER:

Hires, promotions and career advancements

LAYTONSVILLE, Md. - Ruppert Landscape has promoted **Fred Key** to the role of region manager, where he will oversee branches in Raleigh, N.C., Richmond, Va., Lorton, Va. and Gainesville, Va.

In this role, Key will be a resource for each of the branch managers and will help maximize the division's capabilities in people development, training, customer service, business development and profitability.

Key, a resident of Haymarket, Va., has more than 20 years of industry experience and has been with Ruppert for 10 years serving in a variety of positions including crewman, foreman, area manager, controller, landscape construction production manager, division administrator,

landscape management branch manager and region manager. According to Phil Key, vice president and director of the landscape management division, Key's background with holding so many different positions, in both divisions and in different markets has given him a strong foundation for the position of region manager.

"His knowledge of processes, procedures and systems that he's garnered in those positions and his willingness to offer his opinion, whether it's a popular opinion or unpopular opinion, has really helped to increase his value in the organization," said Phil Key.

(Fred) Key holds a bachelor's degree in business from Salisbury State University where he majored in accounting. He is



Key



Todd



Fasano

a Certified Landscape Professional and in 2009, he received one of the company's top honors, the Clyde Vadner Merit Award, which is presented to the individual who has demonstrated consistent hard work and dedication leading to exceptional contributions to the organization.

FMC Corp. appointed **Bethwyn Todd** as director and **Steve Fasano** as strategic marketing and business development manager of FMC Professional Solutions, which serves the professional pest control, lawn, nursery, ornamental and related industries.

"Bethwyn Todd brings significant experience and broad perspectives to her new position," said Milton Steele, president, FMC Agricultural Products. "For the past two years, she played a key role within the FMC Agricultural Products Group as the Asia-Pacific Development and Regulatory manager, leading this region's innovation programs and regulatory affairs."

Todd will continue to lead and drive the growth initiatives started under previous FMC Professional Solutions director, Amy O'Shea, who recently became division manager of FMC Environmental Solutions, a new division within FMC Corporation.

As marketing manager for FMC Professional Solutions, Fasano is responsible for strategic planning and leadership of the marketing team. In his new role, he will also provide leadership on business development and product management, fostering customer-driven innovation.

Previously, Fasano was head of marketing for Bayer Advanced Consumer Lawn & Garden, and brand manager for Bayer Advanced, where he launched a line of alternative solutions for pest, weed and disease management.

Richard Kelly has joined Norse Building Products (Allenton, Wis.), manufacturer of the Rockstep and Pro Line Stone Veneer and will serve as their national sales and marketing manager. Kelly most recently was national sales manager for Bodyguard Wood Product & Spiderlath.

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Erik Lowes
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A call to *recycle*

Instead of just pitching his excess phone books, this Maryland landscaper designed a contest to help the environment and inform kids about being green.

In this digital age, there are some kids who have never looked in a phone book, and a few who don't even know such a thing exists. But, thanks to Tom Grosh, students of the Washington County School System in Maryland now not only know what a phone book looks like, but also learned a valuable lesson about recycling.

Grosh, who owns Grosh's Lawn Service in Clear Spring, Md., along with the help of now retired recycling coordinator Harvey Hoch, decided to start The Washington County Phone Book Recycling Contest.

For three years, the students in the Washington County School systems have collected and recycled used phone books so they can be kept out of the waste stream. This contest also raises awareness about the importance of recycling in the area. In 2011, more than 9,700 phone books were collected by 13 participating Washington County Public Schools. This year, the group collected more than 10,000 phone books, which is the first time that number has been eclipsed.

"I knew that if we could get the kids interested in this during the week of Earth Day – there would be other projects going on that week – we would allow them to see that they made a difference from the stacks of phone books," he says. "As they say 'A picture is worth a thousand words' but in this case they could see just how much space these phone books will use up in our landfill."

Grosh said every family has phone books, so it was easy to drum up interest in the project because every child could participate by donating.

"This project is growing each year and kids are finding ways to find more books," he says. "Some schools kept graphs to show the progress each day of how many books were collected and some schools set a collection table with student-made posters." L&L

The idea for The Washington County Phone Book Recycling Contest was born when Tom Grosh, owner of Grosh's Lawn Service in Maryland, thought about the excess phone books he accumulated in one year. With some help, he decided to get students involved to teach them the benefits of recycling.



Bottom: Tom Grosh, left, was given the Certificate of Merit Award from the Washington County Commissioner for his role in the phone book collection.



Good Works is an occasional feature that highlights charitable projects our readers are working on. If you'd like to see your company's recent good work profiled, send an email to Associate Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.



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etc. Everything is integrated, so you do not need to enter data more than once. Include is very involved in PLANET and knows our industry very well.

Cons - This is not an inexpensive product and it requires some dedicated staff time to learn and run it properly.

Kurt Kluznik, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, President, Yardmaster

We use Include Software.

Pros - It's an all-inclusive software and has production and payroll tied together. You can use handheld devices to track the crews in real time, eliminating the use of paper entry.

Cons - It's very detailed, and the learning curve will take some time (they are currently trying to simplify the system).

Miles Kuperus Jr., Landscape Industry Certified Manager, President, Farmside Landscape & Design

We discussed using Outlook for her operation because of the size of her company. We use a variety of tools, including Google Calendar, Dynascope and Clip. Unfortunately, we have not found one tool that will do everything we want it to do.

Bruce Allentuck, President, Allentuck Landscaping Co.

We work with Clip and now Q Clip. I don't know of any one software program that can meet all the needs of any one company no matter the cost.

Chris James, president, Chris James Landscaping L&L

SOFTWARE PROGRAMS

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.

Q. We are no longer using a subcontractor for our lawn treatments but instead doing it in-house. I am looking for a custom lawn care report sheet that my lawn tech can leave behind with our clients. It should have the basic info: our logo, client name, address, account number, date, what chemicals were put down (weed control, grub control, broadleaf weed control) with check boxes, and even wind speed and direction. I've seen these used by companies like Scotts LawnService and TruGreen, and one copy goes back to the office, and the carbon copy stays with the client.

A. You submitted a question about ideas for a lawn care applica-

tion sheet that can be left with a client when you make an application to the lawn. What I think you are looking for is an invoice. Creating this can be time consuming and can be expensive if you have it printed locally. There are numerous service company software programs that can help with this part of running your business.

If you are using one of the current lawn care software programs, such as Real Green Systems Service Assistant, these types of forms come with the software package and through their printing division. You can contact them through PLANET or call (800) 422-7478.

You may also want to call Focal Point Communications. They have a website, growpro.com that may be helpful for you.

Have a question for the experts? Send it to lexperts@gle.net



Harold Enger, Landscape Industry Certified Manager & Technician, Spring-Green

Q. We are a full-service landscape company. I run the landscape maintenance division and I am curious about scheduling/billing programs used by other maintenance contractors. We currently are using QXpress combined with Qbooks and are not completely satisfied.

A. We use Asset by Include Software and have used it for more than 10 years.

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The drought across the country has reached record proportions.

In its monthly drought report, the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., announced that 55% of the country was in a moderate to extreme drought at the end of June.

The percentage of affected land is the largest since the 1950s. In December of 1956, 58% of the country was covered by drought. The conditions expanded last month in the West, the Great Plains and the Midwest, driven by the 14th warmest and 10th driest June on record, the report said.

HOT LENDING

With summer's arrival, banks have jumped head-first back in the small business lending. The Biz2Credit Small Business Lending Index, a monthly analysis of 1,000 loan applications on Biz2credit.com, found that approvals in June by big banks (\$10 billion in assets) jumped a half percentage point to 11.1% from 10.6% in May 2012. The figure was well above the paltry 8.9% approval rate a year ago in June 2011.

Additionally, small bank lending jumped to 47.5% in June 2012, up two percentage points from 45.5% in May 2012 and up a full five percentage points higher than the 42.5% approval rate in May 2011.

APPROVED

Social confidence

More businesses feel confident about how to use social media to support business goals and create brand identity, according to the 2012 FedEx/Ketchum Social Media Benchmarking Study. The research shows that, through social media, these companies believe they are particularly effective at strengthening relationships among customers (51%), the general public (52%) and partners and suppliers (40%). In addition, 85% of the companies who use social media to engage employees reported that employee participation in their organization's social business efforts increased over the past 12 months. These companies believe they are effectively using these strategies with employees in the social space to:

Strengthen relationships.....	46%	Foster collaboration, dialogue and discussion	44%
Share and tap into expertise.....	44%	Increase participation in a program or an initiative.....	38%



To learn more about social media and how green industry pros are using it, read our June cover package at bit.ly/LLsocial.



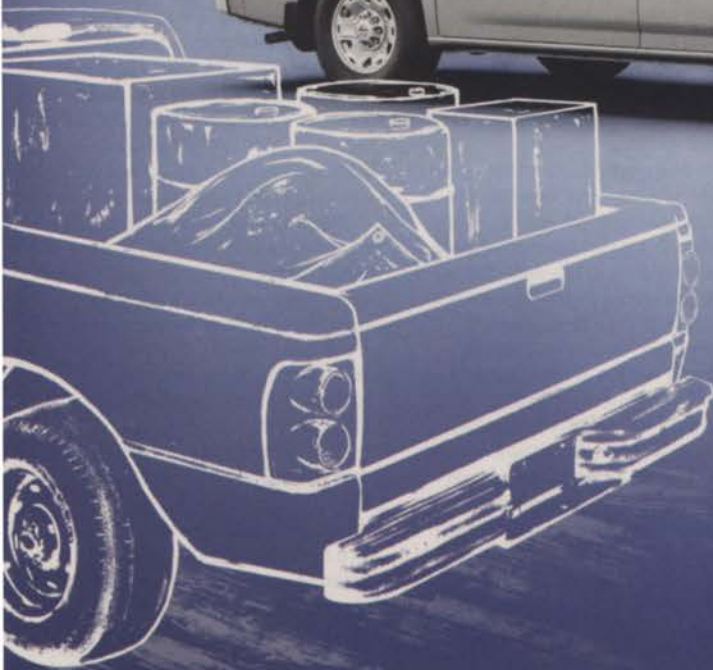
\$3.62

Consumers got relief at the pump in June, but not in many other places.

According to CNN, The Consumer Price Index, the key measure of retail prices, was up 1.7% compared to a year earlier, even though gasoline prices fell 4.3% over the same period.

Food prices rose 2.7% over the course of the last 12 months, with a one-month jump of 0.2% in June. The average price of a gallon of regular gas was \$3.33 at the end of June, according to AAA, down from \$3.62 at the end of May. The CPI report showed a 2% drop in gas prices in June alone.

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MARTY!

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

What we think we know



Lisa, Emily and Marty Grunder at Emily's high school graduation.

My oldest daughter Emily just graduated from high school. For those of you who have had your first graduate from high school, you will relate to what I'm about to say. It's an emotional experience. As I sat watching Emily in her cap and gown walking down the aisle to receive her diploma, I could not help but think back to when I was 18 years old as well as where Emily is now as an 18-year-old young woman.

When I was in high school, I started Grunder Lawn Service, which today is known as Grunder Landscaping Co. I gave up a lot to have that company. I quit playing baseball, I missed some fun things and I gave up the couch to get up and do something. For

graduation, there was no big party. My dad didn't consider graduating from high school a significant accomplishment, so you just didn't celebrate it too much. My lovely mother made sure we had a small party.

I enrolled in the University of Dayton because, quite frankly, they let me in and it was close to home, which allowed me to continue to run my landscaping company and make money to pay for college. My parents were both college graduates and in our family you went to college. But even though they were college graduates, we didn't have a whole lot of money.

My dad was a civil engineer and my mom a teacher. They both came from very humble

beginnings and worked hard. But neither "made it big" as there wasn't much money to be made as an engineer working for the state of Ohio or as a teacher in the same state. I wanted to pay for college myself and keep that burden from my folks, so it was off to work I went.

Emily's trail is a bit different. Emily is what I call a professional student. She loves school and her high school teachers, some of whom I had, often asked her, "Are you sure you're Marty Grunder's daughter?" We may both have red hair, but she's a great student and I was not.

I wanted to work to make money. There were a lot of things I wanted – material things. Emily, not so much.

She works at our office some in the summer and babysits, but at this point is motivated to do the right thing, but not motivated to earn money to buy new clothes or a new car or anything of the sort.

Emily will attend Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. But, that's not the school I wanted her to attend. I wanted her to attend my alma mater and her mom's alma mater, the University of Dayton. After all, it's a great school, it's close to home, she was offered an academic scholarship and they have an excellent business school. As a member of the board of the school of business there, I know

someone that wasn't a fit and no matter how hard I tried, it wasn't what she wanted.

At the end of our last visit to Miami, Emily and I walked to the car. She was quiet and I said, "Emily, Miami is the best choice for you, sweetheart. I can see it, plain as day." She said, "I know, Dad." The rest, as they say, is history. Emily will attend the school that declined me admission in 1986 and told me I was not a good enough student to attend there. Emily is way wiser than I will ever be.

In our lives, we entrepreneurs often wonder why others can't just be like us. Why can't our prospects see what we see in our offerings? Why can't our teams do what we would do? Why wouldn't that applicant want to work at our company? I could go on and on.

This recent experience with Emily has taught me a lot. At a certain point, you need to just understand people are different and there's a place for everyone in our great country. The paths we take, if rooted in honesty, passion and excellence, will make us successful in all that we do. It's not the path that matters as much as the place we end up in life.

I'm in a great place and I'm sure Emily will be, too. She's way ahead of where I was in terms of her perspective on life and that, my friends, you can chalk up to

“You need to just understand people are different and there's a place for everyone in our great country.”

what I'm talking about! I pulled out all the stops. I got a VIP tour; I had all kinds of folks come see her while we were on the tour, including the president of the university. I'm in sales, folks. I know how to sell a good product. But Emily was not that impressed. She liked U.D., but when we went to Miami, because it was obvious I was trying to sell something to

her mom. And, so we end on a high note here, the best selling job I have ever done, and will ever do, is the one I did on Lisa Lynn Lehman at the Reds game on June 24, 1993, when I asked her to marry me and she said yes.

Congratulations and good luck to all the graduates. May whatever path you take lead you to happiness! **L&L**



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Don't be a cowboy

Ten years ago, a partner from a large irrigation company in New England approached me during a break at an irrigation seminar that I was conducting. I was emphasizing the need for irrigation companies to build their service division. The partner mentioned that their CPA had them almost convinced to get rid of their service work and focus on installation jobs. My counsel was to get rid of the CPA. Today this company has service revenue exceeding \$5 million annually.

John Newlin, president of Quality Sprinkling Systems near Cleveland has reaped the benefits of building a company focused on repetitive revenue streams. His irrigation service, lawn care and invisible dog fencing divisions have paid big dividends during the current economic slump.

He's actually gained market share in these areas as other companies have gone out of business. They've maximized repetitive revenue streams while reducing costs at Quality Sprinkling Systems, Inc.

The lesson for irrigation companies: Don't be a one trick pony, and here's how to avoid being one.

BUILDING IT RIGHT. Two psychological issues face the irrigation entrepreneur who wants to grow his company. First, it is a mature contractor who realizes the importance of building a service division. Most young irrigation contractors start their company installing residential systems. They sell and install the system in just one to two days. They get their money and it's on to the next job. It's a big



adrenaline rush combined with big bucks (\$3,000 to \$5,000 for the average residential install system) and no long-term commitment. These guys just don't see the value of slow-paced, low-dollar and long-term commitment service work. I call them "cowboys." They get the money and run to the next job.

Second, approximately 75 percent of all landscape and irrigation contractors will never realize sales more than \$500,000 per year. Psychologically, they're stuck in the mindset of that of a technician. They need to learn to think like an entrepreneur - think outside of their self-imposed box. A person can only supervise three to four people in a business setting.

If you are supervising three to four laborers, each generating roughly \$100,000 of work revenue per year, your sales

will be in the \$350,000 to \$450,000 range. If you are supervising three to four foremen, each supervising three to four laborers, your sales will quadruple and be in the range of \$900,000 to \$1,600,000. But you manage laborers, foremen and managers differently. It is a learned skill set. Most contractors never learn to think beyond supervising laborers. That's why they get stuck below \$500,000 in annual sales.

WEATHERING THE STORM.

So, you realize that if you do not build your irrigation service base to supplement your installation work, your company is at risk in an economic downturn. What do you do?

First, I'd recommend that you see your business as a means to grow your service division. If you are installing one hundred systems per year, you should be adding one hundred service customers to your service base each year. Strive to have your service revenue eventually equal your install revenue.

Second, benchmark and set goals for your service technicians. Here are some benchmarks to consider. It takes approximately 350 residential customers to generate enough work to keep a service technician busy all season. A full-time service technician should generate at least \$100,000 of revenue (including parts) per year.

In 90 percent of the locations in the U.S., a service technician will bill out at \$60 per man-hour. If a service technician works an eight hour day, he/she should

generate \$480 per day (not including parts). If you're charging less than \$60 per man-hour, you're probably too cheap. Many companies are charging \$75, \$85 or even \$95 per man-hour.

Mark up your parts to a *minimum* of list price. Working an eight month season, eight hours per day at \$60 per man-hour, a service technician should generate \$84,480 per year (8 hours per day x \$60 per man-hour x 8 months x 22 days per month) = \$84,480. Add parts revenue to this and you have more than \$100,000 per year, per technician.

THE GOOD STUFF. There are four primary benefits for an irrigation company to expand and grow its service division. First are the excellent margins normally enjoyed by service work.

The benchmark for service work gross profit margins ranges from 45-55 percent. Second is the repetitive streams of cash flow from year to year. Third is the influx of revenue from seasonal service contracts in either late fall or winter when additional funds are always appreciated. And finally is the contribution to an owner's exit strategy made by service work upon the sale of the company.

The "blue-sky" or "good will" benchmark value of a service division (apart from any assets such as equipment, inventory or real estate) is 50 percent of one year of annual revenue - \$0.50 on the sales dollar. Compare this to the benchmark for installation work, which is almost zero, and you see why service work revenue is so critical to building a viable exit strategy. **L&L**

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The ABCs of landscape safety programs

While landscapers acknowledge the importance of safety to their business operations, they seldom know the full extent to which a safety program is defined. In fact, it is not uncommon for landscapers to believe they are legally compliant if their safety program consists of: having new employees watch safety videotapes on their first day of work, conducting weekly tailgate sessions and distributing PPE to employees. There is much more to it than that.

This article summarizes many safety concepts required by federal/state law into three categories – administrative, behaviors, consequences – to help landscapers understand the entire scope of a safety program. This simplified ABC model allows landscapers to systematically audit their existing safety programs, develop appropriate action plans and track improvement.

ADMINISTRATIVE. Though often viewed as bureaucratic, the components listed below assist in defining the company's safety culture, which underscores the company's intent to improve employee safety and withstand an OSHA audit.

To be clear, the documents listed below must not be developed and then stored in

an office file cabinet never to see the light of day. Rather, each component must be shared with all employees in a manner clarifying its respective role in improving employee safety, procedural efficiency, and organizational success.

- State/Federal OSHA Compliance
- OSHA Audit Response Procedures
- Record Keeping of Safety Documents
- Legal Postings
- Company Safety Goals
- Company Safety Policy
- Code of Safe Practices
- Employee Handbook
- Mission Statement & Core Values
- Job Descriptions
- Injury and Illness Prevention Program
- Hazard Communication Program
- Lockout/Tagout Program
- Employer Pull Notification Program

BEHAVIORS. This section presents the behaviors that bring the company's safety program to life.

Behaviors like safety meetings, training sessions and audit procedures emphasize the salient role of safety as part of the company's culture, each employee's standard work routine, and procedural expectations. Depending upon its specific contribution to

the safety program, a behavior may be demonstrated daily (e.g., vehicle audit), weekly (e.g., tailgate session), monthly (e.g., safety committee meeting), annually (e.g., OSHA safety audit), or on an "as-needed" basis (e.g., New Employee Orientation).

- Drug Testing Program
- Return to Work Program
- Training: Safety Videotapes
- Training: Tailgate Sessions
- Training: Field Positions (e.g., Laborer, Leadman, Foreman)
- Training: First Aid/CPR
- Training: Pesticides
- Training: Injury and Illness Prevention
- Training: Hazard Communication
- Training: Fire Extinguisher
- Training: Emergency Action Plan

CONSEQUENCES. Whether it is through rewards and recognition, disciplinary procedures, or industry-wide comparison (e.g., Experience Modification Rate), a company's safety program must be routinely evaluated just like other key performance metrics (e.g., sales, profit, gross margin).

Based upon these measurements, suitable changes must be made at the employee, procedural or organizational level to continuously improve safety results.

- Performance Appraisals
- Rewards and Recognition
- Disciplinary Procedures
- Safety Hearings
- Safety Raffles
- Documentation in Personnel File
- Tracking: OSHA 300 Series Forms
- Tracking: Year-to-year Experience Modification Rate
- Tracking: Year-to-year Injury Rates by month
- Tracking: Year-to-year Expenses by month
- Tracking: Year-to-year Reserves by month

SUMMARY. The ABC model is intended to organize the diverse components of a safety program into a useful checklist format allowing landscapers to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Naturally, the lists provided above must be tailored based on the relevant state laws applicable to a particular landscape company.

It is important that landscapers realize the full extent of a safety program; thereby generating initiative to devote resources to ensure their safety culture achieves desired results. **L&L**

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{ By Kristen Hampshire }

A sustainable difference

An alternative to landscape maintenance can confuse customers. So it's up to you to educate them.



This picture might scare off a client without an explanation of the installation's benefits.

Balls and cones and spirals and boxes. That's what many shrubs in greater Phoenix looked like before sustainability advocates Asset Landscaping introduced more natural techniques. Back in the day, irrigation systems ran without restriction, too. That has changed, big time.

"Water conservation has come to light in the past five years," says Matthew Johnson, co-owner and vice president of Asset Landscaping, which has a staff of 60 and primarily manages homeowners' associations and commercial accounts like the stadium where the Arizona Cardinals play.

Doing the right thing for the environment is a part of Asset Landscaping's mission. And the right thing can look a little funny at first to property owners who are used to having their shrubs sculpted into perfect shapes.

Read more about Johnson and his commission culture and sign up for the A Cut Above newsletter at www.lawnandlandscape.com/newsletters



"Some clients had no reaction – some kind of freaked out," Johnson says of the way residents responded to renovation methods that involve letting a shrub mature and grow freely much of the year, then trimming over-achieving branches. Serious renovation can leave a shrub naked, but only for a short time. It's healthier to prune less often, Johnson explains to clients. "Every time you cut and shape plants, they have to regenerate and that uses more water," he says.

Client education is a key component of Asset Landscaping's outreach efforts. The company distributes e-newsletters, holds lunch-and-learns for HOA property managers and posts signs explaining sustainable techniques in the communities it serves. Now, people are really starting to pay attention to these sustainable ideas, and awareness has resulted in a boon in business for Asset. "With water conservation being the right thing to do and more cities generating revenues from water bills, that has everyone's attention," Johnson says. "They realize they need to cut back on water and that savings can go directly back to the bottom line."

That's where Asset Landscaping steps in.

THE CARDINAL RULES. The Arizona Cardinals stadium in Glendale looks different than many professional sports environments. The trees grow lush canopies and shrubs branch out and bare their natural colors.

Decomposed granite groundcover is foot-traffic friendly and has a low carbon footprint (it travels only as far as nearby mountains where it is harvested). "Ultimately, a successful partnership toward sustainability relies on the customer's openness to a discussion toward sustainability," Johnson says.

KNOWING BOTH SIDES

Matthew Johnson knows how HOAs work.

It takes one to know one.

Matthew Johnson understands the inner workings of homeowners association (HOA) because he once served as a vice president on an HOA board in Scottsdale, Ariz. And, he previously worked for a community association management firm, helping to manage planned condominium communities.

Johnson was a property manager when Asset Landscaping's co-owner and president Kevin Robinson was running the maintenance firm. "I became friends with Kevin, and when he eventually asked me if I wanted to invest and buy out (the partners of the company), I said yes," Johnson says of how they came together.

Landscape maintenance was a learning process for Johnson. But he brought the HOA knowledge to the table. Plus, he had been intimately involved with communities' complex irrigation projects.

Today, the bulk of Asset Landscaping's work is in the planned community arena.

Before Johnson came on board, the company focused on apartment complex maintenance. Transitioning to community-based projects required some infrastructural changes, Johnson says.

"We definitely increased our customer service capabilities," he says. This was important because of the many stakeholders involved in HOA work. There is the property manager (or several), HOA board members and residents.

"You need to communicate on many fronts," he says, adding that it's important to have the resources to handle call volume. "You need to spend time on the phone speaking to clients, explaining things or getting back to them with their requests."

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{ By Lindsey Getz }

Full coverage

Mike Merlesena offers installers insight after years of working on the supply side.

After having worked on the manufacturing side for five years, Mike Merlesena, owner of Environmental Enhancements Irrigation in Missoula, Mont., says it has given him a bit of an advantage as a contractor to have seen the industry from another angle. He offers some of his best tips for irrigation contractors.

KNOW THE PRODUCTS. "I think that it gives you a tremendous advantage as a contractor to really know what types of products are out there," Merlesena says. "I believe that most contractors probably don't pay as close attention

to this as they should though. They keep going to the same products they've always used. But it would benefit you to try and keep up with what's new. Customers appreciate that and it makes you more knowledgeable."

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS. Merlesena says that better familiarity with products will give you an opportunity to come up with solutions that other contractors may not have thought about. "You should think of every job as a clean slate – different from the last job," he says.

"On each job you have to consider what product might work best and having familiarity with a lot of product will help you. In the 10 jobs I did in my first year, there were applications I needed that were out of the norm, so I have to imagine that most contractors are being faced with situations where

they have to be able to think outside the box a little bit. The idea is to come up with a solution that nobody else is going to think of. That's what will set you apart."

GO TO THE SHOWS. The best way to know what products are out there? Go to the shows, Merlesena says. "I go to the IA show every year," he says. "It gives me a chance to see what products are available. I understand it's an expense, but it's one that I believe is well worth it. And if you can't afford to go to the bigger shows, there are always smaller regional ones. Look for shows that are available at a state-wide level. Most manufacturers will also go to those. You just have to make yourself do it because

it's really important to be out there and staying on top of the latest technology."

TALK TO DISTRIBUTORS. Besides the industry shows Merlesena says to pay attention to the fact that manufacturers are always going to "distributor days" and hosting other similar events.

"Manufacturers often host regional trainings all over the country," he says. "It seems like they try to keep it off season when contractors have the time available. While those are not cheap things to attend, I really believe the more ahead of the curve you stay, the better off you'll be."



Mike Merlesena receives his first \$1 of profit as owner of Environmental Enhancements Irrigation.

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Read about Merlesena's journey from the supply side to the contracting side and sign up for the Water Works e-newsletter at www.lawnandlandscape.com/newsletters.



GREEN SOLUTIONS

Where applicable, Merlesena says he's trying to put in as much low-volume drip as possible. "I'm always looking to keep running times down," he says. "But of course you need to take into account the whole yard including considerations like sun, shade and adjusting run times accordingly."

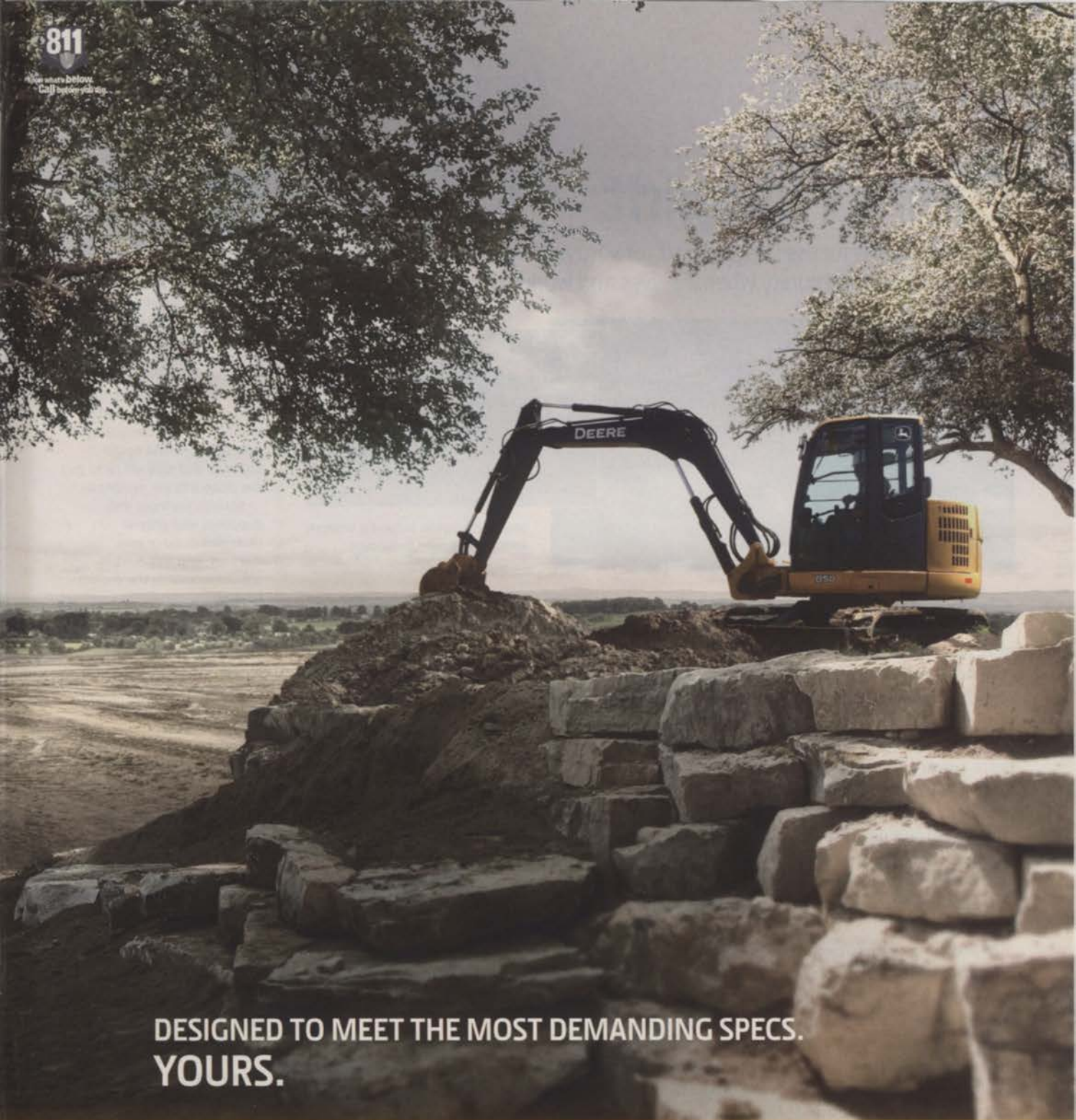
Having worked for a manufacturer that pushed solar powered irrigation controllers and smart controllers that self adjust, Merlesena says he is taking that knowledge to the customer. Even though the technology costs more, he says that customers are "getting it." "People do understand that you have to invest more to save more," he says. "These controllers will pay for themselves eventually, but I want to have

hard data to show that. One of my plans is to start keeping track of customers' data so I can reference it when talking to new clients – to be able to let them know just how much they can save."

As the market becomes more saturated, Merlesena says it's also important to find ways to stand out from the crowd. Knowing a lot about products and staying on top of the trends is how Merlesena says he plans to stand out. "It's all about setting yourself apart from the competition by pushing technology and knowing enough about the products out there that you're able to offer different applications and get creative. I want to be able to show my customers things they haven't seen before."

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Community spirit

Stephen Mazelis focuses on paying it forward and has made an impact on the community where he lives and works.



Stephen Mazelis helped a veteran with a landscape makeover.

Stephen Mazelis has a go-give initiative at his business, and his commitment to community service strengthens with every year, and with every completed project. The feel-good payment he gets is more rewarding than cold, hard cash. Plus, Mazelis, president of Mazelis Landscape Contracting Corp. in Nesconset, N.Y., is setting an example for employees, residents, area businesses and his young son.

Mazelis' pay-it-forward mission began a few years ago when he was watching the news on Veteran's Day. Mazelis, proud son of a retired New York fireman and a volunteer fireman himself, learned about a wounded soldier who was returning home to Holbrook, N.Y. Mazelis contacted the family of Army Corporal Chris Levi – a double amputee – and offered to give the family's home a landscape makeover.

"Seven other companies said they were going to do

something," says Mazelis. "I said, 'I'll be back in a few days to get started,' and couple days later I showed up with a crew and we were there for several months re-landscaping the entire house to get it ready before the soldier came home from Walter Reid Hospital, where he was in (physical) rehab."

Mazelis felt a duty to help the Levi family. And, after the experience, the gung-ho entrepreneur made a decision. "I said, 'I'm going to do something every year as long as I can afford it,'" he says.

Three years, and three major projects later, Mazelis is running a profitable business that has earned a reputation in the community as the firm that cares.

A GO-GIVE ATTITUDE. The newspaper articles and rec-

To continue reading how Mazelis has grown his client base by doing good deeds and sign up for the Business Builder e-newsletter, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/newsletters.

ognition for Mazelis' volunteer landscape work are a warm fuzzy reminder for Mazelis, but that's nothing compared to the satisfaction of completing a project that will change the quality of life for others. So when Mazelis sees an opportunity to help in ways big or small, he pitches in without hesitation.

A local charity needs table arrangements for a gala: Mazelis says, "No problem."

The local hospital wants to create a garden where cancer patients and families can reflect: Mazelis says, "When do I start?"

The city needs a horticulturist to supervise a land improvement project. Mazelis' response: "I can do you one better."



THE SUPPORTING CAST

Because of the support of generous vendors, Mazelis can take on significant charity landscape projects.

"Good people attract good people," he says, quoting the executive director of the chamber of commerce, who said this to Mazelis when he told her, "I can't comprehend how everyone has come together and was willing to give me discounts (on materials)."

Mazelis partners with suppliers who provide him materials at no or very low cost, and this is what ultimately makes the project happen.

Without these gifts, Mazelis would be taking on a much more significant financial burden in a tough economy.

The key is to develop lasting, personal relationships with suppliers.

And, it's important to align with suppliers that share your vision. Finally, focus on building a friendship – that's ultimately what will preserve a long-term vendor relationship, Mazelis says.

Buy local. Mazelis looks close to home and develops partnerships with independent businesses whose owners are hands-on and customer-focused. "I try to use smaller, more local nurseries as opposed to bigger operations because then you are really dealing with the owner, who is on site on a daily basis," Mazelis says.

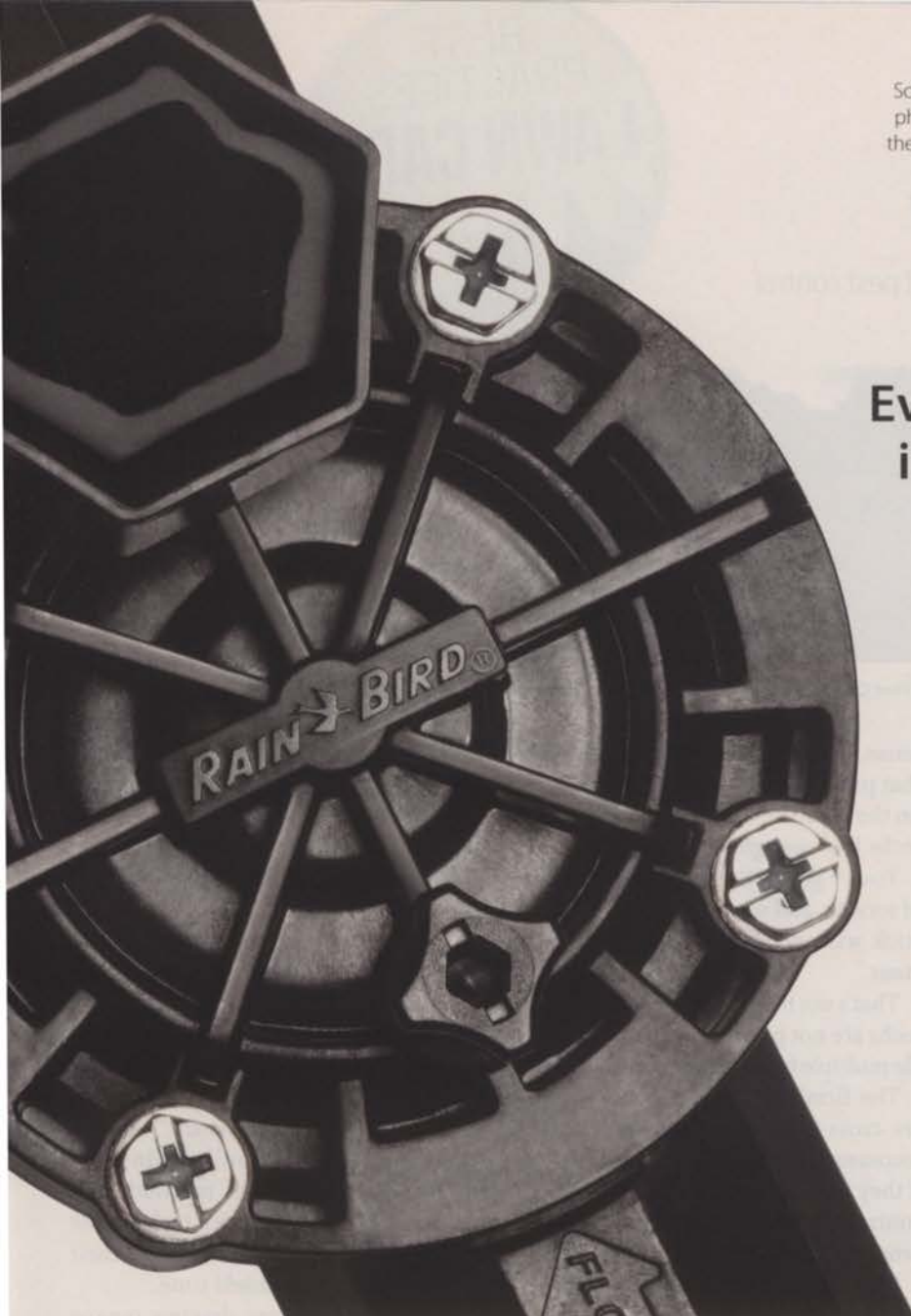
Get personal. Meet up at the golf course. Go out to dinner. Ask about the family. Do more than business. "Over time, we get to know our suppliers better this way," Mazelis says.

Give credit. Go ahead and drop names. Mazelis is sure to mention suppliers that have stuck with his business throughout the years and support his charity efforts.

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Tech Savvy

Use separate lawn care and structural pest control technicians to save time and money.



Lawn technicians only work outside at Brock Lawn and Pest Control, and don't deal with indoor pests.

As many as four dozen types of weeds invade the lawns of the Florida Panhandle each year, and the lawn care techs at Brock Lawn and Pest Control know them all.

The front line staff of this 35-year-old, family-owned company comes well-equipped to stop interlopers like broad-leaf and grassy weeds right in their tracks.

That's why, despite all the chatter in the lawn care industry about universal techs helping to boost efficiency, Brock Lawn and Pest Control owner Tim Brock has retained separate techs for lawn care and structural pest control.

To him, it just makes sense from a quality standpoint because of the level of specialization that is required.

"From a strictly financial standpoint, the universal method makes a lot of

sense," Brock says. "But especially given that product selection is so much larger on the lawn care side, we just felt those techs had enough to think about.

You've got to think about the quality of service, and so we made a decision to stick with dedicated technicians."

That's not to say that Brock's techs are not prepared to handle multiple types of problems.

The firm's lawn care techs are cross-trained so they can recommend the right services if they identify structural pest control issues at a customer's property, and vice versa.

Brock's salespeople are also well-versed in selling multiple services.

What it does mean is that

the \$3 million company is able to offer its clients both kinds of treatments while also retaining the high-quality service it's become known for.

"For the majority of our customers that have multiple services, they're using us for both services," says Brock, whose company's geographic territory includes the entire Panhandle, with three offices in Panama City, Marianna and Santa Rosa/Destin.

Deciding to stick with specialized technicians was not easy and required some thoughtful retooling, says Brock, who grew up immersed in the family business and never seriously considered doing anything else after he graduated from college.

Continue reading about how Brock educates customers and trains employees and sign up for the Growing Green e-newsletter at www.lawnandlandscape.com/newsletters.



"During a typical service period, I'm often sending two techs out to a customer's house, one to do pest control and termite service and one to do lawn care," he says.

"If you're using the universal method, you can reduce a tech's route size, which reduces their windshield time.

"Less driving means they're able to service more customers." L&L

MARKETING MIX

Marketing isn't exactly a science, but Tim Brock has been known to treat it like one. The successful business owner, who has three offices in the Florida Panhandle, mixes and matches marketing venues each year like a mad scientist who is brewing a powerful cocktail.

"I try to spread my advertising dollars over several different mediums," says Brock, who invests about 7-8 percent of his annual revenues in marketing and advertising.

My philosophy is that we need to be in a lot of different places, but not spread too thin. Wherever we do advertise we try to be a strong presence; if we can't, we pass."

For Brock, it all starts with the Yellow Pages. Even though he's cut back in recent years, he still finds the book useful, even in the age

of Google and search engine optimization. "The phone book doesn't necessarily bring the lead in, but we often find that's how they got our number," he says.

"Oftentimes they saw one of our TV ads, heard us on the radio or saw a billboard, then went to the phone book to call us."

Beyond the phone book, Brock also invests in TV and radio. When selecting radio or TV stations to put his money into, he carefully studies their demographics and reach.

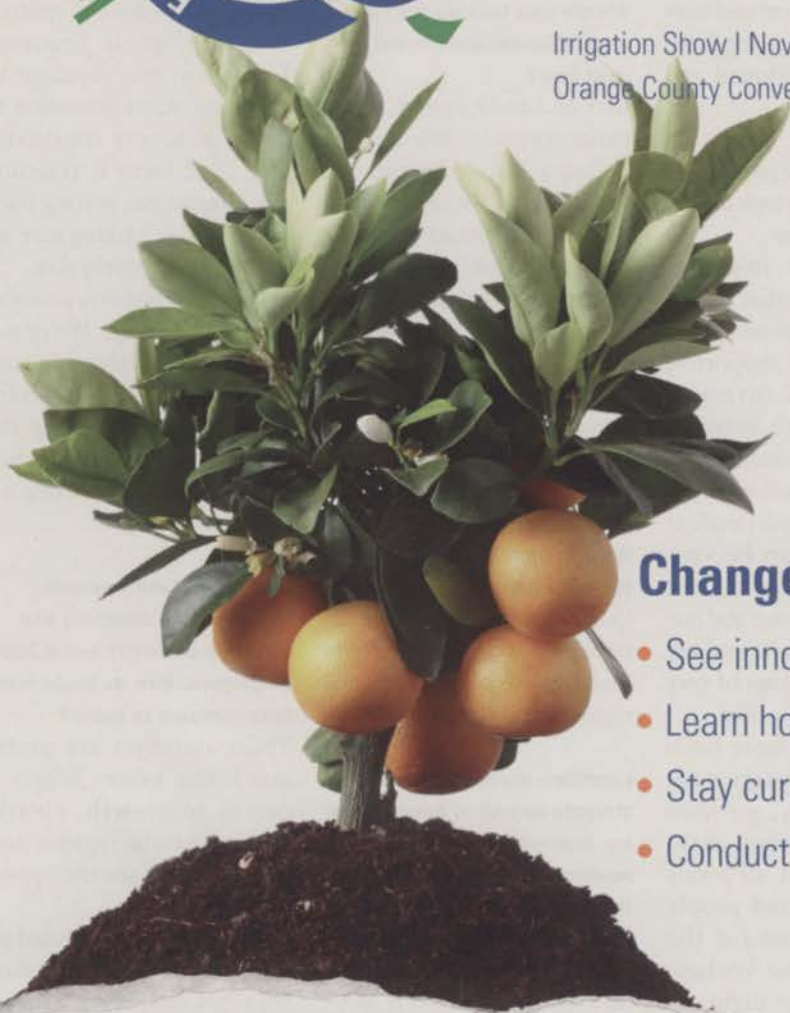
When it comes to outdoor advertising, Brock's experience has shown him that so-called "junior boards," which are found on less-traveled roads, offer something of a bargain. Such low-priced billboards are often found on roads traveled primarily by locals.

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LandCare acquisition: *one year later*

In an exclusive interview, the CEO of the new TruGreen LandCare sheds some light on the company's plans.

By Chuck Bowen



Vidu Kulkarni

A year after its sale, TruGreen LandCare has a new CEO and a new focus.

Vidu Kulkarni came to LandCare from UTC Fire & Security, a global product & facilities services firm that in 2011 posted more than \$6 billion in revenue. He was most recently president of the Americas for the company.

Kulkarni was appointed president of TruGreen LandCare in December of 2011 by Los Angeles-based Aurora Capital Group, the private equity firm company that LandCare acquired from ServiceMaster last summer.

LandCare, one of the green industry's first national landscape firms, was created 12 years ago in an unprecedented and high-value merger. Aurora bought ServiceMaster's landscape division for \$38 million – a fraction of the \$250 million ServiceMaster paid for it in 1999.

According to the 2012 *Lawn & Landscape* Top 100 list, LandCare ranked 7th in the nation with revenue of \$248 million.

In an exclusive interview with *Lawn & Landscape*, Kulkarni explains what's new with the company, emerging

as a standalone firm and how he sees his team going head to head with Brickman and ValleyCrest.

Tell me about what you've changed since you took over TruGreen LandCare.

Part of my reason for joining the company was that I saw a compelling opportunity here. I saw in Aurora a supportive and committed investor. There's a great fit between the business here and some of the things I've worked on in the past. As an independent company, we can be very focused on what we do best and our customer set and our people. That has allowed me to do quickly set a set of very clear, focused priorities.

Secondly, we have been building the management team out. Today, we have an extremely strong management team at all levels – industry vets and people who have worked for the company in the past. We have a flat structure – eight regional managers who report to me – and have “delayed” the company. It allows us to be extremely responsive internally and externally. It allows for very clear communications

What's your take on the commercial landscape market right now?

Just as landscape maintenance is a multi-billion dollar business, it's also extremely fragmented. There are macroeconomic issues in terms of people holding back on spending, and the way it manifests itself is not people cutting back, but it creates margin pressure and pricing pressure that is exacerbated by irrational pricing behavior by a number of companies.

What are you doing to avoid the pricing pressure?

Our focus is on what we do best. What we focus on is making sure we do the basics right each and every day.

LandCare always seemed to struggle as part of ServiceMaster. How will you improve the business?

Being independent is great for us. What we need to achieve short term – if you talk to pretty much any

one down to branch managers and people in TruGreen LandCare, the message in terms of what we need to focus on is very consistent. Our 2012 focus is resetting the foundation, getting back to the basics, making sure we do them right every day.

Ours is a relatively straightforward business. We're not building rocketships. Longer term, our focus is on profitable growth, not being the biggest dog on the block. I want to be the best dog on the block.

When LandCare was sold to Aurora, the company had about 60 branches and 4,200 employees. How do those numbers compare to today?

Those numbers are pretty much the same. When it comes to growth, clearly within certain regions and cities ... I can see the opportunities to grow.

Right now we're focused on the organic growth of existing branches and longer term we will consider inorganic opportunities as well – beyond that, I don't want to speculate at this point in time.

On the web:

To read more about Kulkarni's appointment last year, and the sale of LandCare, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search “landcare.”



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



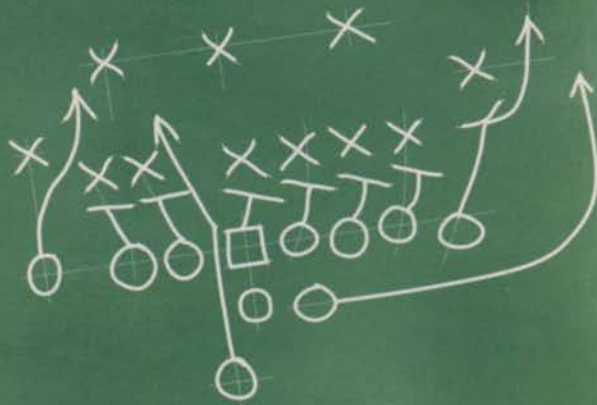
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BUSINESS SOFTWARE PLAYBOOK



How to find the best software to run your company right. *By Lindsey Getz*

Quit throwing away precious man hours by getting bogged down in the details of running a business. Use our business software playbook to discover the tools that will save you time and grow your bottom line.

In a perfect world, you'd be able to delve into every aspect of your business, and still have a grasp at the 30,000-foot level. But, you've got a full

schedule – lawns to mow, weeds to treat, customers to serve. So, we've gathered the intel on the latest from the business software world. Whether it's improving communication with crewmembers via a better job site map, or having more efficient routes during a day, take a few minutes (well, maybe a little bit more) and read on to find out which product best suits your company's needs.



Visual communication

Job site maps are helping simplify projects and boost efficiency.

Today's landscape contractors are getting very creative with job site maps. To help the foreman and crew leaders better communicate with crews on the front lines, some companies are diagramming everything from where to mow, trim, and prune to where to park and what equipment to use. Job site maps provide great visual communication and can even eliminate language barriers, making crews more efficient on the job.

The ability to easily produce a job site map has certainly made them increasingly popular. "Job site maps are being used more readily now that the tool has become

read English, he finds that everyone prefers a visual – whether their first language is English or not. “A lot of times they may even ignore the wording as they just prefer the visual,” says Gonzalez. “So we may do some color coordination on the map or find other ways to denote something important.”

ELIMINATING THE GUESSWORK. For Jarrett Qualls, owner of TurfBusters in Murfreesboro, Tenn., site maps help the company create daily schedules of where the production of our employees need to be for each day.

“Our large school campus that we maintain has events and parties all of the time,” says Qualls. “With the events being on different areas of the campus, with site maps we are able to focus on the landscape beds and turf that need our immediate attention.”

Chris Lee, president of Texas-based EarthWorks, says that they actually encourage clients to fax in requests on job site maps whether it is something irrigation or lawn care maintenance related. He says that some may see this as a burden on the client but he says it is actually doing them a favor. “If we send our crew out to a big apartment complex, we’re on the clock from the minute we arrive and that client is getting billed even if it takes us 30 minutes just to find the issue that needed to be taken care of,” says Lee. “With a job site map we know right where we’re go-

ing which can actually save the client money.”

Lee also says that job site maps can do a great job of helping clarify any confusion when it comes to large apartment complexes or other commercial properties. “We may get a call that there’s a broken head at building three,” Lee says.

“We’ll send the crew out to building three and they’ll fix it and move on. So we’re confused when we get a call saying that the work order wasn’t fulfilled. That’s when we find out it was supposed to be on the backside of building three when we saw and fixed a broken head at the front of building three. The point is that a job site map would have clarified this confusion.”

The same thing goes for any lawn care maintenance requests. Lee says that when they get a very specific request on a large property it can be confusing for crews. “If we get a call for one little limb that’s brushing up against a window we may be able to get the crew to the right place but it might not be obvious what limb the client is talking about,” says Lee.

“With a job site map we can eliminate that confusion. We see exactly what limb they want trimmed.”

WALKING A FINE LINE. Key says that Ruppert Landscape uses job site maps most consistently for snow removal



“Site maps are great and we would be lost without them on a larger property with numerous employees.” – Jarrett Qualls

planning. “The first thing we do is outline priority areas – what’s the highest priority to the customer on that site,” he says. “Then we get into details such as what product is to be used in what areas. We’ll also mark no-plow areas that the customer has indicated they don’t want plowed perhaps because it’s a vacant building. And we’ll specifically lay out where to dump snow, which is one of the most critical things.”

Snow will take time to melt so we need to know the best area where we can pile it up. Where the drainage is on the site comes into play because we need to know where the run-off water will go as the snow melts.”

While Ruppert Landscape likes to make use of maps to simplify jobs and improve efficiency, Key adds that it’s important they don’t detract from crew members’ abil-

ity to make important last minute decisions or flow with changes. “In large jobs we want to designate where crews will be and what type of equipment we are using in each area,” says Key. “But it’s a fine line because we also want to empower and teach our people to handle their own job sites instead of micromanaging too much of the detail.”

Overall job site maps makes owners’ lives easier. “Site maps are great and we would be lost without them on a larger property with numerous employees,” Qualls says.

“It sets everything in motion for the crew. From the second they arrive to the second they start the mower and even when they leave – everything is built into the map for them. **L&L**

The author is a frequent contributor to *Lawn & Landscape*.

West Coast tech

A California tree company takes 600 employees to the cloud.

By Lindsey Getz

West Coast Arborists, (WCA), headquartered in Anaheim, Calif., has found a way to vastly improve its efficiencies. With the implementation of some new technology, company vice president Christopher Crippen says he's seen some "tremendous changes."

With 600 field employees, Crippen says in the past it was easy to get bogged down by paperwork. Crews would turn in paperwork on a daily and weekly basis and it then needed to be keyed into the systems by the company's data entry department. "Sometimes it would take over a week before we could identify errors and anomalies," he says.

But since implementing Xora to automate administrative reporting, Crippen says it's made a big impact on day-to-day operations. "Changes are now instant and accurate as opposed to the latency of creating new paperwork and submitting it to data entry, which results in more documents being pushed right back into the field," he says. "Our ultimate goal is to become completely paperless. On a day-to-day basis we can track if we have a crew who is driving too far to dump a load of green waste or if a crew is driving too far to a particular job site. We can re-route crews when a customer calls with an emergency to get the crew closest to the problem there as quick as possible. We now have the ability to see everything 'live' in the field as it's happening whereas before we would have to make several calls just to determine the status of nearby crews."



The Xora solution includes a mobile app that can be downloaded on to mobile phones or tablets and a secure cloud-based management application that can be accessed by any device with a browser connected to the Internet. WCA has installed the Xora mobile app onto tablets carried by each of the company's 200 group supervisors. "Now that our supervisors and field crew employees have become comfortable with the tablets, they have become a driving force in the direction of our technology roadmap," Crippen says.

But it wasn't always that way. Crippen admits that one of the biggest challenges was getting crews more tech-savvy. "Our biggest hurdle was getting field crews over their fear of technology," he says. "They are most familiar with their tools of the trade and today's mobile technology almost seems supernatural. But it didn't take long for them to realize it's not magic and it's just another tool like their chainsaws and rope."

Crippen says that in six months of using Xora, the company is now beginning to see many of the efficiencies really come to light.

The company's primary goals were

to increase efficiency and accuracy and to find a way to more quickly evaluate what's happening in the field in order to make smarter business decisions and deliver better customer service. Crippen feels that the use of this technology is achieving those goals. While it wasn't a key goal, it's also helping save money. "Saving money by not needing data entry happens to be a nice byproduct of our implementation of Xora," Crippen says. "The responsibilities of our data entry employees have been adjusted to more of an auditor's role than that of someone keying in information."

And because Xora transmits location data from its mobile app in near-real time, Crippen also says that WCA has plans to phase out the use of expensive, fleet-tracking devices currently hardwired into company work vehicles. This will save the company even more money down the road.

"Having embraced technology for so long, it was only a matter of time before we found out how to best put it into use for our supervisors," Crippen says. "I can guarantee you that mobile technology is the future of West Coast Arborists." **L&L**



Finding job sites and billing customers was a lot tougher before business software entered the picture.

By Lindsey Getz

The integration of a software system can have a huge impact on business management. It can be used as a database for billing, marketing, routing and more. While industry vets can still remember the early days without computers, they now say they couldn't live without a software system.

"When I started in 1984, I didn't have a computer and I did everything the old-fashioned way," says Brad Johnson, owner, LawnAmerica in Tulsa, Okla. "But now it's hard to imagine running a business without it. Software has become so ingrained in the way we do things."

Getting technicians to the job has been a vital function

for Matt Jesson, owner/president of Green Pest Solutions in West Chester, Pa. "Real Green has completely nailed this," he says. "With turn-by-turn directions for our route technicians, they're getting to jobs faster. After each job, the information is entered and the system initiates a time stamp. Then when all my route trucks pull into the parking lot, the work automatically syncs into my database. Without having to input all that data, it saves anywhere from five to eight hours a day. That's been a tremendous help."

Johnson says that a huge improvement over the last few years has been in billing and routing. "The ability of

the customer to get online and see their entire account and pay their bill has been huge," he says.

Jesson says that he's about to launch that same function for customers and expects it to save countless hours for the business.

"The functionality of that service is not only valuable for saving office time but will help streamline our customer service," Jesson says. "Today's customers prefer round-the-clock customer service and with this, they can do things like request service, ask questions, and pay bills 24/7."

Having industry-specific software like Real Green Systems has also been quite valuable, Johnson says. "There are

probably some companies out there that are just using a more generic software program and they're probably doing okay with that, but not as well as they might be able to do with a system that is geared toward the industry."

Jesson adds that other companies he's talked to aren't getting the full potential out of their software. "People aren't always willing to put in the time and the money involved in really learning how to use the system so they're not getting everything out of it that they could," he says.

"You hear people say, 'Our software company isn't doing enough for us.' But the truth is that as a business owner you have to be willing to put an allotment of resources – time and money – into training."

Johnson says that there's not a huge learning curve with Real Green but agrees that you have to put the time in. "As long as you're spending time with the system, and keeping up to date, it's relatively easy to use," he says.

Jesson says Real Green has a great support system and has even flown some of his employees to the Real Green headquarters.

"I have a dedicated IT manager who is on the phone with Real Green on a regular basis, making sure that we're utilizing the software as efficiently as possible in the business," he says.

"Sometimes you have to be willing to make that extra effort." **L&L**



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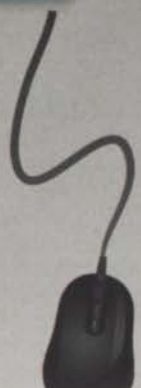
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Paper problems

The right software can save you time, money and valuable office space.

By Natalie Peacock

Michael Pugh realized he had to find a new way to manage his company's paper problem. Fed up with mountains of invoices, bills and work orders spread across multiple offices – not to mention the time his team spent searching for them – he knew he had to do something.

But Pugh, chief technical financial officer at Pugh's Earthworks in Memphis, Tenn., had to shop around before finding the right software for his commercial landscape installation and maintenance firm.

"I spent probably \$50,000 to \$60,000 buying different versions of software. Most of what was on the market was for scheduling," he says. "We're not a route-type sales organization where our guys go to the same spot every day or even every week. Our business is very weather

dependent and we really didn't need the scheduling part of it."

Pugh just wanted a simple way to manage work orders across a large company and multiple offices. But his options were limited to route- or schedule-based software programs.

"Our problem was to get the parts of the software that we wanted, we had to use scheduling software," he says.

In 2010, the need for document management made sense.

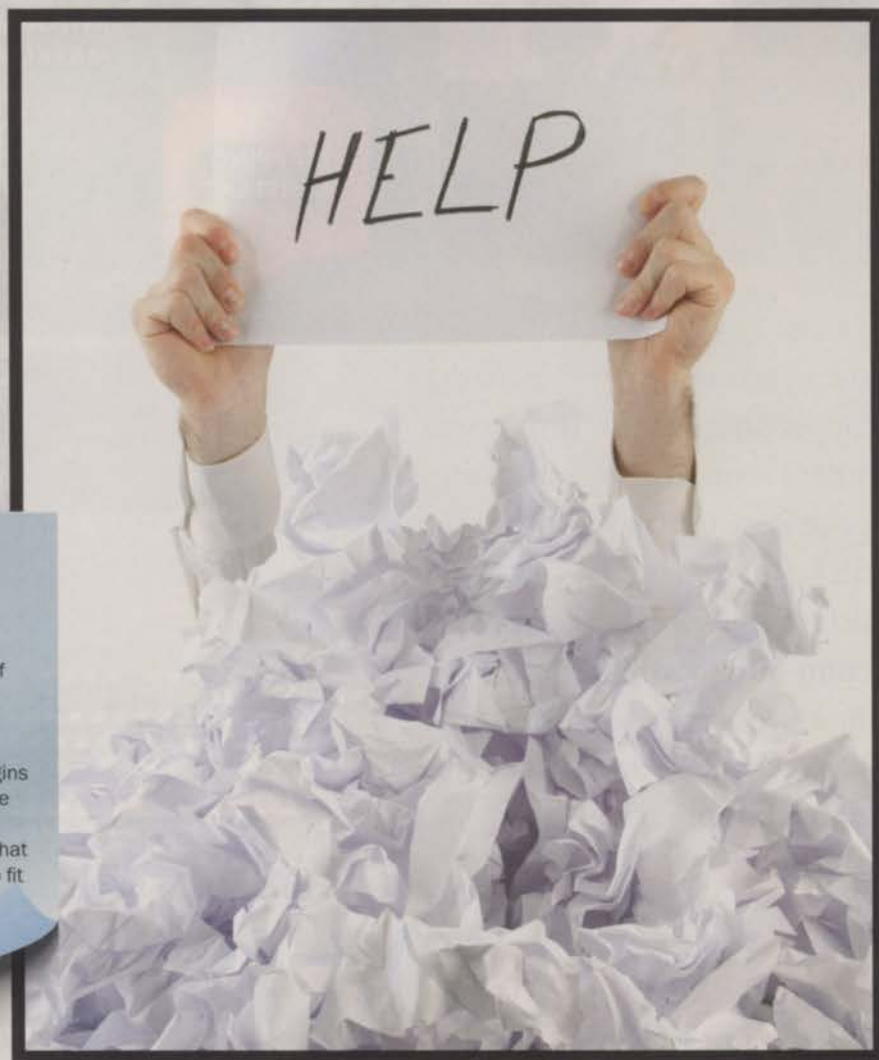
"We thought of all that paper we were generating and it kind of hit home," he

WHERE TO START

Both Freeman and Pugh offer similar advice to companies who are considering this kind of software.

"Plan how you will use CNG within your organization. Take advantage of the training tutorials. You'll be surprised how fast this begins to flow and eventually you will have your entire company using CNG." Freeman said.

Pugh says, "Spend a lot of time deciding what you need the software for. Instead of trying to fit yourself into someone's software, try to find software to fit with what you want and what you are doing."



says. "We had one whole room that used to be an office full of records. I was going to have to rent storage space to put all these boxes full of paper because I had a new employee who needed an office."

The software he chose – Cabinet NG – lets you scan documents and then houses the digital files on third-party servers. It integrates with programs like Outlook to automatically save copies of invoices emailed to customers.

When he looked at the software again it dawned on him how much it could actually do. "It has an Outlook and Quickbooks integration. I've been using Quickbook ever since it came out."

Not to waste a good marketing opportunity, Pugh's Earthworks sent letters to 400 customers announcing that the company had started its green initiative and wanted to start sending invoices through email.

A BLIZZARD OF PAPERWORK. Founded in 1992 in Memphis, Tenn., the company expanded to Jackson and Nashville, as well as Jackson, Miss., and Little Rock, Ark. Being in so many locations only increased the need for a document management communication tool.

"When we opened our Little Rock branch we didn't know how to manage an off-site branch," Pugh says. "CNG basically provides an electronic filing cabinet that anybody in our company can look into."

So a branch manager can look into the software and see any customer's contract with email correspondence between the company and the customer. Before the finding the software, sales produced a blizzard of paperwork.

"Under the old way, our salesman would sell a contract, get a customer signature, come back to the office, make

HOW IT WORKS

Document management software allows you to create electronic versions of your work orders, time sheets and other paperwork. Here's how:

- Scanned versions of your documents are housed on third-party servers.
- The software integrates with Outlook and Quickbooks.
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anywhere between four to six copies of it, and put one on everyone's desk so that each department would be alerted.

If it was made in another branch, he would fax that copy to Memphis and we would make copies for everyone who needed it. If a customer wanted to change something on the contract, we

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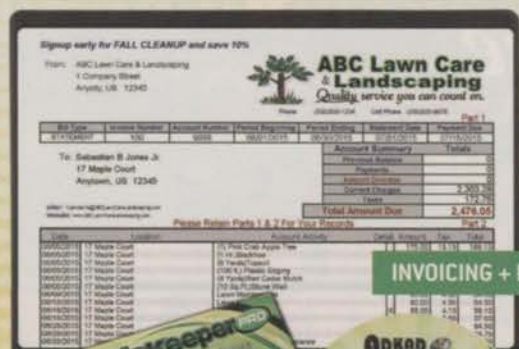
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had to go back through that process.”

Recordkeeping for account payables was equally cumbersome. “The IRS requires you to keep records of your purchases for three to seven years. I’ve got nooks and crannies everywhere filled with bills from vendors. We scan all that now and it integrates with Quickbooks.”

Pugh measures his return on investment in saved office

space, paper and foot traffic. “I’ve got a whole office freed up which is like \$6 a square foot and that’s \$5,000 a year.”

LOW OVERHEAD, HIGH PROFIT.

Like Pugh, Robin Freeman of Freeman Landscape decided to implement document management software to get out from under a mountain of paperwork.

“At first, I kept paper copies of everything because I

didn’t trust the electronic world,” Freeman says. “Now almost everything is a digital document.”

Freeman Landscape has one location in Wilmington, N.C., but services the eastern half of the state. The company, with 50 employees and annual sales of more than \$3 million, installs landscape irrigation, hardscapes, water features and lighting and provides landscape maintenance.

Freeman estimates her software package paid for itself within the first year. “The time that our staff does not spend in looking for documents has been invaluable. Also, finding documents

related to warranty issues, customer communication and billing – all the time that would normally be spent pulling files has basically disappeared.”

Because it made their jobs easier, Freeman’s staff welcomed the new software.

“We’ve lowered our overhead, which in turn has allowed us to be more competitive in the marketplace as well as improve our profitability,” he says.

“We can honestly tell our customers that we’re striving to be a green company both within our organization and in the field.” L&L

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

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- ArborGold Software offers database management designed specifically for tree, lawn and landscape companies to efficiently manage your customers from the initial phone call to proposals, scheduling, invoicing, receiving payments and posting to QuickBooks.
- Features include an appointment scheduler, directions map, and built-in landscape CAD designer.
- Live web access for salespeople and crews.

For more information: www.arboregold.com

Cabinet NG

Cost: Software purchase: \$995-\$1,395 per user (local server); software subscription: \$50 per user per month (hosted server).



Training/support: Online training is included and on site training is available for \$5,000 for two days. Fee includes expenses and travel. Tech support and software maintenance is included with subscription services and the first year of software purchase.

- Multiple workers can simultaneously review job documents and have access to all relevant documentation.
- Contracts, site plans, and other business documents can be reviewed, edited and approved without ever leaving the system.
- Search features include: structural search, keyword and document title search and full text search.

For more information: www.cabinetng.com

CLIP

Cost: The CLIPxe Partner Program is \$499 up front and then \$80 per month. This includes unlimited technical support, all updates and upgrades and 1 license for the CLIP2Go web mobile solution.



Training/support: Training is provided through printed manuals, electronic manuals, training videos, live online classes, live online webinars, live support, optional onsite training and the company's annual conference.

- CLIP contains contact management software with all of your customer's information and history of all services rendered.
- CLIPxe works with QuickBooks, cell phones and web-based technology to keep track of your crews and to update field work for rescheduling, billing and revenue tracking.
- CLIP2Go allows you to take information from CLIPxe and take it out into the field with you.

For more information: www.clip.com

Epicor Eagle

Cost: Not disclosed

Training/support:

Onsite business assessments, web-based, CD and Epicor Eagle Advice Line – specialists focus in one particular area of expertise.

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- Epicor Eagle for lawn and garden management software assists independent lawn and garden businesses in managing their operations through point of sale, inventory management, gift card and loyalty programs, financials, purchasing, payroll and marketing.
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- The basic Eagle system encompasses the company's point of sale and integrated inventory applications.
- Other common startup options include integrated accounting, electronic signature processing, and support for credit/debit cards.

For more information: www.epicor.com

GPS Insight

Cost: Hardware costs about \$375 per vehicle and typical monthly service cost is \$32.95 per vehicle. To rent, the cost is \$39.95 per month per vehicle for both the hardware and service cost combined.



Training/support: GPS Insight offers 24/7 support and free unlimited training for customers.

- Using Garmin integration with the company's GPS Insight software, supervisors are able to promptly dispatch their drivers without any hassle. Through the Garmin technology, managers can send and receive messages via the Garmin itself or through SMS text messaging.
- GPS Insight gives supervisors the capability to track start and stop times of employee shifts for the day, where they are, how many stops they made and how many jobs were completed.
- GPS Insight offers 3-year vehicle history and reporting standard, and allows you to provide your customers with the option to log-in online and locate vehicles.

For more information: www.gpsinsight.com/landscaping

GroundsKeeper Pro

Cost: \$399

Training/support: 30 days of free support with purchase then optional annual Silver support plan that costs \$75.



- GroundsKeeper Pro is specialized business management software for the lawn, landscaping and snow plowing industries.
- Includes billing / invoicing with your own logo, routing, scheduling, estimating, contracts, income & expense reporting, chemical application tracking & reporting and maintaining customer accounts and balances.
- Can apply fuel surcharge fees to customers, apply time and materials fees to customers, run an automated wizard to quickly apply all charges in schedules / routes / estimates to customers, plus charge unique hourly rates for different machinery and services.

For more information: www.adkad.com

HindSite**Cost:** \$495**Training/support:**

HindSite requires a small startup charge to go through a training program where you work with a "Prof," the experts on the software. After this, there is a monthly fee based on the number of crews you will be scheduling - this starts at \$99 per month. This monthly subscription also includes ongoing access to the program, unlimited training and support and all future updates made to the program.

- Focuses on contact management, scheduling and routing technicians, paperless data management and direct integration into your accounting software.
- Billing can be done automatically by date.
- Allows tracking of which customers received what services.

For more information:

www.hindsitesoftware.com

**Include Software**

Cost: The base system for Asset starts at \$5,000 with licensing based on concurrent use, and iCREWtek is priced at \$20 per crew per month.



Training/support: Multiple training and support packages are available directly from Include and industry consultants.

- Eliminates time-consuming spreadsheets, redundant data entry..
- Asset can be combined with iCREWtek, an optional iPhone/iPad touch-based tool that provides real-time job control directly from the field.
- iCREWtek includes features such as a real-time clock in/out, GPS tracking, equipment management, English/Spanish translation and full data recording for insurance and legal documentation.

For more information: www.include.com

Real Green**Cost:** Not disclosed

Training/Support: On-site training, toll-free support line, on-line support, update downloads and much more.

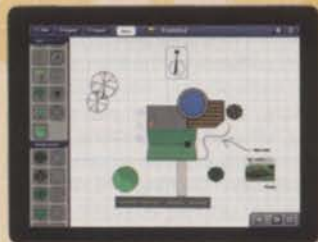
- Service Assistant Software is designed for any service company that needs to track customer accounts, services, billing, scheduling and much more.
- The Customer Assistant is an online application for customers to access information about their services, pay their bills online and respond more efficiently to promotional efforts.
- Measurement Assistant, Real Green's integrated online measuring tool, allows users to instantly print or e-mail proposals with high definition property pictures.
- Route total window allows users to flag what your new stops are, what customers are past due, your "as soon as possible" customers and those who need extra care.

For more information: www.realgreen.com

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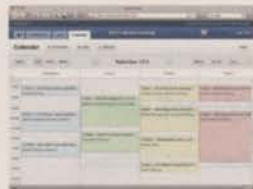


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- Users can set a due date for every note created for a customer and can even choose a time to send an e-mail reminder.
- Quickly schedule jobs by using drag and drop, you can either change the order of jobs for a crew, or move them to another one.

For more information: www.servicetask.com/features

Xora StreetSmart

Cost: Pricing is based on a wireless carrier service model and varies based on carrier and number of users. Average cost is about \$1 per user per day.

Training/Support: For customers who purchase the software for five or more employees the company offers a dedicated training person assigned to your account, a customized training program based on your objectives and individual live training.

- Xora StreetSmart consists of a suite of configurable mobile apps and a web-based management application that work together to help you manage your mobile workforce.
- The apps turn any mobile device into a productivity tool.
- The management application lets managers and office personnel analyze performance.

For more information: www.xora.com



Set the rules

An employee handbook prevents misunderstanding, protects companies from legal implications and gives companies a foundation to build a stronger company culture.

By Kristen Hampshire

A game plan sets the strategy – and without one, players can lose focus and stray from the team. When policies are left up to the interpretation of employees, keeping score is tough because the lack of boundaries can cause internal disputes and a culture clash.

Say a crew member is taking more than his fair share of personal days. He needs this Friday off for a family obligation, last week he was out sick two days, and he's already hinting about a long weekend he wants to take. Without an

employee handbook that directly spells out company attendance and other policies, what grounds does a manager have to enforce the rules?

Besides, there are legal implications if an employer does not provide information on required employment laws – harassment, confidentiality, equal opportunity employment, etc.

An employee handbook protects a company and helps create a structure that allows managers to make effective



decisions. It ensures that employees and management are on the same page.

Lawn & Landscape spoke with three firms who shared the key components of their employee manuals and how these documents serve their organizations.

Getting it on paper

Environmental Enhancements

Fred Peratt, president **LOCATION** Sterling, Va. **ESTABLISHED** 1996 **EMPLOYEES:** 30 employees in peak season **2011 REVENUES** \$2.1 million **CUSTOMERS** maintenance is 95% commercial, 5% residential; design/build is 100% residential **SERVICES** design/build, maintenance, snow removal

Eliminating inconsistency is a complicated task. That's because it means creating tight processes that employees understand – it means training to those processes and measuring the quality of the work performed. To accomplish this, Fred Peratt realized his company needed an employee manual.

"We had what we thought was a training program and a set of procedures, but until you sit down and evaluate that..." says Peratt, president of Environmental Enhancements in Sterling, Va. "We realized we had inconsistencies with each position because we didn't have those job descriptions written down on paper. One guy wanted to do the job this way,

another wanted to do it another way."

Peratt consulted with a business adviser who helped him and managers identify what systems were necessary, and which policies and procedures needed to be put in place. They reviewed other companies' policies from inside and outside of the industry. They borrowed some concepts while creating their own. And they infused the document with the company culture by including mission and vision statements.

But where to start? Setting goals helped Peratt and his team of managers determine a personnel structure that would support future growth and help the business reach its objectives. "We

determined based on our structure and where we wanted to be over the next four years and the revenue we wanted to make, and we coordinated that structure into job descriptions," he says.

Job descriptions were created for every role in the company, and every level within those roles (such as levels 1, 2 and 3 for crew members, etc.). From there, leadership decided what expectations were associated with each position in terms of quality, attendance, safety and overall job performance.

Based on those particulars, a performance evaluation process was established and written into the manual. "We want more of an accountability record with employees on quality ratings on their jobs, safety records, attendance and training required to advance to the next level," Peratt says of some current adjustments he's making to the manual. It's a constant work-in-progress – and the first version took a good year and



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QUICK TIPS

Borrow good ideas. "If you try to reinvent everything you could spend money that you don't need to spend," Peratt says of creating an employee manual. He consulted with business owners through PLANET and his local chamber of commerce to find out how they handled their employee manuals.

Involve your team. Involving a handful of key managers in the process ensures that everyone is on board, even if it takes more time to come to consensus.

Train in steps. Rather than an overwhelming roll-out of the employee manual, introduce the document in parts by focusing in on sections during weekly training sessions. "In our company we do a three-step training process where the trainer shows the trainee, the trainee shows the trainer, and then they discuss what was trained so they can address concerns or correct mistakes," Peratt says.

a half to assemble. That's because Peratt involved leadership including the directors of design, marketing and IPM. Six managers helped create the initial document. "Because key management was involved in the process they knew what was coming, and that was important," he says.

"If you were to just throw a manual at them and say, 'Here is what I developed, now implement it,' that wouldn't have worked. There needs to be buy-in and people who understand the processes because it's difficult to communicate and implement." Also, the manual was translated to Spanish, adding another tedious yet critical process to the project. Peratt rolled out the manual in pieces and managers train their teams on a continuous basis.

"We break it down into little steps like a stairway," he compares. "We work through one module at a time and then move to the next step."

A manual for growth

Stay Green

Jorge Donapetry, director of HR; Stephanie Vasquez, controller
LOCATION San Clarita, Calif. **ESTABLISHED** 1971 **EMPLOYEES** 260
2011 REVENUES \$14 million **CUSTOMERS** 40% commercial, 30% HOA, 30% municipal **SERVICES** landscape maintenance, plant health care, water management, tree care

When Stay Green grew out of its mom-and-pop phase well over a decade ago, the managers of the San Clarita, Calif.-based business recognized that the business needed to start putting policies on paper. "We didn't have anything in place at the time, and we needed something in writing so any question could be answered by a piece of paper – and also to protect the company," says Jorge Donapetry, director of HR at Stay Green.

Setting expectations for employees was the goal, and the result is a company manual that is revised annually so it re-

mains a relevant and effective working document. The initial effort took a few months, and the first edition of Stay Green's employee manual contained all of the basics: federal laws including employee protections, confidentiality and harassment mandates, plus information on company dress code, use of company property, attendance and general conduct.

Over time, the manual has evolved to include a cell phone policy and social media use guidelines that set boundaries for Internet use on the job and define what's appropriate to post about Stay Green off-hours.

Every time the manual is updated, the new pages are distributed to employees along with an acknowledgement form for them to sign – a similar form is the last page of the manual itself. "I think sometimes, you can have a bit of resistance," says Stephanie Vasquez, controller, about rolling out regulations in any form. "People in general are resistant to change. We try to make sure our employees understand why we make changes and it's an ongoing thing."

Work-life balance is an important value at Stay Green, and this is illustrated throughout the manual by the types of employee perks that are outlined. Some positions have an option to work from home. "There are other things that would attract a person to work for us," Vasquez says, adding that a manual can also serve as a recruiting tool.

The handbook also includes a run-down of employee benefits, performance programs and rewards for employees who go above and beyond the job descriptions outlined in those pages. "When you think about an employee handbook you're thinking about laws and procedures – it can be easy to forget about the fun stuff," Vasquez says.

What makes Stay Green's manual so effective is its plain-and-simple language and Spanish translation. "Put the document in simple terms that anyone can read – not in language that an attorney would write," Donapetry says.

Employees understand what they are reading, what Stay Green expects of them and the benefits they will receive by fulfilling the duties outlined in the book. "The more you grow, the more you need that structure because it can be chaotic and it's difficult to provide good service and quality," Vasquez says. "The employee manual is the basis for that."

QUICK TIPS

Speak their language. If Spanish is the first language of your crew members, translate the manual so they can easily read and understand the material. And regardless of whether the content is prepared in English or Spanish, keep it simple, Donapetry says.

Start somewhere. Creating an employee handbook can be an overwhelming process when you think of all the essential components. So if you're starting from scratch, just work on building the framework. "You can always add to it," Vasquez says.

Keep it relevant. Does your manual include a cell phone policy and guidelines for social media use? It should. "As times change, you need to set new boundaries," Vasquez says.

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Setting Expectations

“**M**isunderstanding kills company culture,” says Bill Schnetz, president of Schnetz Landscape in Es-

condido, Calif. And when your company grows to the point where you’re not in constant contact with employees each and every day, an employee manual becomes a critical management tool to ensure that expectations are understood. Because if there isn’t a clear definition

of what is expected, employees can be left scratching their heads every day.

“The real crux of a handbook is building a company culture where the employees feel they are part of something and they don’t feel like they are being undermined by employers who change the game all the time,” Schnetz says. “That upsets employees more than anything.”

With a solid operating/employee handbook in place, owners and managers have a foundation for making decisions that affect performance, quality and standards.

Plus, an employee manual should include the necessary legal components required by the state, Schnetz adds.

“There is information you are required by law to provide to employees,” he says.

“The last thing you need when you are starved for cash flow and looking for work is for an employee to take you to court over some silly thing. An employee manual will help protect your business.”

Schnetz rolled out the first company manual in 2002, and his company relied on employer associations, which provided an infrastructure for the handbook. Green industry associations such as PLANET are also a great resource, he adds.

“Start-up companies, in particular, don’t have the time to invest in building these from scratch, so I recommend buying forms then adjusting them to your needs,” he says, adding that online companies offer this, as do consultants who specialize in HR or creating forms for businesses.

The standard forms were customized and the handbook was revamped again in 2008 with a section on technology and information security.

The core components of Schnetz’s handbook include: policies and procedures, necessary legal components, employment status records and performance evaluations, benefits, holidays and days off, workers compensation, time-keeping and payroll, attendance, employee conduct and discipline, and technology.

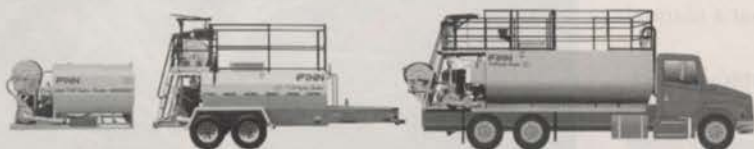
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Schnetz Landscape

Bill Schnetz, president **LOCATION:** Escondido, Calif. **ESTABLISHED:** 1970s
EMPLOYEES: 30 **2011 REVENUES:** \$2.4 million **CUSTOMERS:** 100% residential
SERVICES: landscape design, construction, fine gardening

but shows employees how they can progress and earn more responsibility in the firm if they succeed.

"Ambitious employees are looking for a company that shows them a career path," Schnetz says, adding that the performance evaluation section is particularly important for this.

"They want to see how they are going to be judged and evaluated before they are willing to give you their heart and soul."

Meanwhile, the employee benefit section of the handbook shows that the

company wants to take care of its quality workers.

"We want to make sure they are healthy and we want them to know if something does happen to them, we will take care of them medically," Schnetz says.

As far as setting the game rules, the attendance and disciplinary components allow managers to enforce policies without getting personal. "It's the manual managing them, not us personally managing them," Schnetz says.

"If employee issues come up and you haven't developed a company culture by educating employees on what you expect," he says, "it is difficult to manage your people and the culture of the company starts to disintegrate." **L&L**

The author is a frequent contributor to *Lawn & Landscape*.

QUICK TIPS

Establish the rules. Why create a handbook? Because it sets expectations and gives managers a tool to help them lead crews, and discipline employees when necessary. "The handbook gives you a baseline," Schnetz says. "It creates better understanding between employees and managers."

Get acknowledgement. Immediately following the introductory pages of Schnetz Landscape's handbook is a form that all employees are required to sign. It states that they have read and understand all material in the book.

Let it go. You can't do it all. "There are companies that you can hire to create manuals," Schnetz says. "You can call them into your office and say, 'This is what I need, this is what I can afford, what can we do together?'" Also, you can access sample HR manuals online or through employer organizations. These groups sometimes offer seminars on how to assemble a handbook.

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By Tom Fochtman

This way to the egress

Why you should operate today like you're selling tomorrow.

When I think about someone starting a business, my mind always goes to the exit. Sometimes I have the thought, "They are really going to hit a home run when they sell that business," and other times I think "Who in the heck is going to buy that business?"

I always assume, regardless of what possessed someone to start a business and what the business is, they are going to sell it one day. There is the occasional family businesses

sure how that will occur. And since everybody is so busy working "in" the business and not "on" the business, even if a buyer knocks on their door, the business is usually not in selling shape.

Many years ago Bruce Wilson told a group of us, "You need to be managing and operating your business as if it were ready to be sold tomorrow." That's a totally rational, logical and common sense declaration of how an owner should operate his business.

HOW TO LIVE IN THE FUTURE.

Here is something I'd like you all to consider around this thought of managing your business as if it were being sold tomorrow.

It's remote, but you may

a little bit of due diligence there is a high likelihood that buyer is going to look elsewhere.

Or if they make an offer, it will be significantly less than what you could, and should have received. There is a real benefit to having your business ready to sell tomorrow. If it's truly ready to sell, you are making a lot of money.

You have to be because you will have done all the right things operationally, in your marketing and sales efforts, in your retention of people and clients, etc., that have resulted in you being a best of class operation. If you have that type of company, you should be making a lot of money. And there will be more than one buyer.

do will fall to the bottom line as profit.

- How to become the kind of company buyers want. Today's buyers do not want to buy a distressed or average performer. Generally speaking, they want to cherry pick the best company they can. They are not going to pay you a lot of money and then have to fix your operation.

- How to build your maintenance, service and reoccurring revenue centers. Reoccurring revenue and cash flow is what buyers want. Grow your businesses in that direction.

- How to grow recurring revenue. You can do quite well in both residential and commercial installation, but you will always fall prey to the cycles of our economy. You have to have a solid maintenance operation.

As painful as it may be, focus on maintenance, lawn care and other reoccurring revenue lines and divest yourself of as much installation as possible.

- How to invest in your management team and get the best talent that you can. You have to show a buyer that your company is sustainable without you. They are buying a brand, revenue and talent—focus on your team. L&L

Tom Fochtman is founder of Ceibass Venture Partners, an M&A consulting groups. He can be reached at tjfochtman@giemedia.com

“It's not easy to be a really good operator. It's not easy to be a true best-of-class organization. It takes a lot of effort and hard work. And, quite frankly, most companies in all industries are average.

that is family owned and operated, and becomes multi-generational, but those are quite rare. Most businesses are started and built to be sold, right? You work hard for 20, 30 maybe even 40 years in the business, and hopefully you sell it for a ton of money.

Here's the problem: Very few business owners truly have a solid exit strategy for departing their business. They know they want to sell one day, but are not really

luck out and have a solid buyer approach you to sell. If your business is operating at peak efficiency, you have a solid management team, you own your market or whatever niche you are in, you very well might sell your company for a handsome profit.

But if you are not best of class, your direct labor is a few points high, your maintenance renewal rate is below 85 percent and your management team is average, after

LOOKING AHEAD. Here are the types of things you are going to be reading about in my upcoming contributing articles to *Lawn & Landscape* and in my presentation at PLANET's GIC in Louisville, Ky., in October:

- How to get your companies cleaned up, rid yourself of all the unnecessary "fat" and get lean. This economy has forced everyone to do that already but I bet you can do more. And everything you

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SNOW & ICE *Report*

Big properties, big profits

Snow pros share their secrets for successfully hitting the bullseye with larger accounts.

By Kyle Brown



Summer may be the last time you'd want to start thinking about blizzards, ice storms and salt trucks, but now is the prime time to start locking in your snow removal business for 2013.

More and more often, snow professionals are making their money by going after the big targets, and you don't take down the big targets without a plan. Here's how several snow pros go about it in their section of the market.

TARGET #1 Commercial accounts

Doing the actual plowing isn't what makes going after big accounts difficult, says Jerry Schill, president of Schill Grounds Management in

Sheffield Village, Ohio. "The major secret to that is going to plow is the easy part," says Schill. "It's effectively listening and truly understanding their needs and their expectations that makes the difference."

When his company was trying to break into larger accounts, the team was pushing hard to try to get noticed by property managers, but really saw results once they slowed down and started paying attention to what the clients were saying, he says.

"Initially, we were actively pursuing some of those big accounts through experimentation and trial and error, and we started listening to the client's specific needs and wants," says Schill. "Having the expectations for meeting those needs allowed us to really put together a program to service that property the way it needed to be serviced."



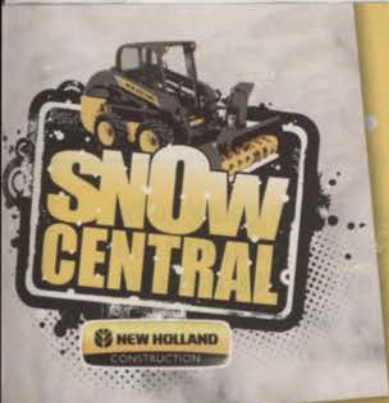
Schill

And once they had shown one or two big names what they could do to reach those needs, others started taking notice. "As we became successful at achieving those needs, we were sought out," he says. "We kind of developed a reputation in Cleveland west as the big commercial specialist."

Communication starts with the pricing and services for commercial contracts, but it doesn't just come in as a flat-rate service statement.

Knowing how to meet a client's needs without unnecessary over-servicing takes creativity and a little bit of education for the client, he says. "Obviously, safety is the single most important thing that has to come into play," he says. "But with technology, with equipment and chemicals, once you outline what they really want, there are options now in how you get there.

"It's about changing their mindset and really trying to get them to understand that some of the upfront initial cost of an application of liquid, for example, will be higher when they compare the price, but you're going to use 30 to 40 percent of the product. Really changing and educating the client is some-



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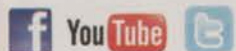
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thing we've been focusing on in the last few years."

But having options doesn't mean giving up profits just to get the client. A large commercial contract is tempting, but take a beating at the bottom line too often and not only will clients start to expect it, they'll be surprised when prices need to go up to sustain business at that level.

"If you haven't figured out how to do the job more effectively at a lower cost to maintain your margins, you've guaranteed a need to cut corners," he says. "Somebody is going to get hurt when you cut corners in a snow and ice situation."

Start out by figuring out a

client's tolerance – not just when they immediately say they want the entire parking lot black, but when they begin comparing the price to the services they can afford.

"Find out what exactly they want to achieve, and then help them to formulate a plan that can get them there with services that pair up with their expectations," Schill says. "It's about coming up with a realistic budget and executing that plan, and keeping an open dialogue throughout that process."

"When you're going to be sending out \$10,000 bills for an event, you have to manage their money like it's your own."



"When you're going to be sending out \$10,000 bills for an event, you have to manage their money like it's your own."

- Jerry Schill

There's lots of explaining of possible changes to services to make the overall price come down without cutting corners: maybe using more efficient deicers or box plows rather than a traditional plow. Other contractors and distributors might have even more ideas to try out.

"You have to be involved with others," Schill says, "whether it's a networking group, locals, manufacturers

or distributors. There's a million different ways you can do things more efficiently. If you're really passionate about your work, you have to take the time to learn those. You have to ask questions. An educated industry is a better industry."

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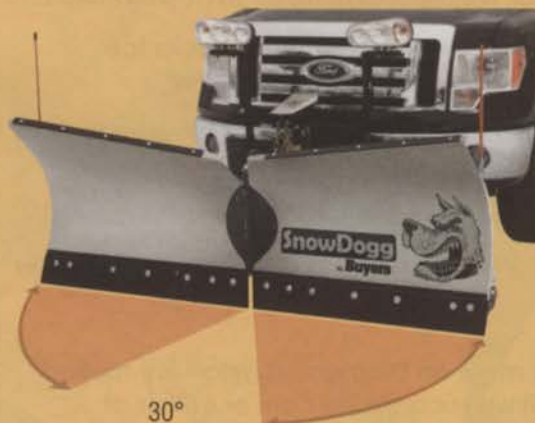
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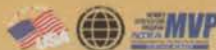
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contract is much easier. "If somebody just says 'I want the snow gone instantly,' the desired outcome at the end of the event is the same, but if I priced for those expectations, they couldn't afford the rent," says Schill.

"If they're saying they want everything melted down, there's a lot of shades of gray in there. You really need to dig into service levels with them."

Once the contract is in place, communication has to continue, though it's best to have a site manager familiar with the account to help the client feel more comfortable with the services being provided. A manager will also

make sure that resources aren't overextended or being used too often during an event, as well as explain the pros and cons of additional requested services to clients on the fly.

"A lot of our bigger sites have multiple managers, maybe someone to manage the sidewalks, someone to manage the equipment," says Schill. "It's really holding these guys' hands and helping them understand so they're not panicking during an event. We've found with that not only are people more happy or safe, we're not having as much trouble after."

Once that open dialogue is established and a fitting

program is in place, the only thing left is for snow to fall.

"It's not the delivery of the snowplowing, it's the delivery of the way we go about getting to that point," Schill says. "I think it makes the customer experience so much better."

TARGET #2 Homeowners' associations

A homeowner's association is a client completely full of other service opportunities, at least for Jim Anderson of Troy Clogg Landscaping in Wixom, Mich. They're large jobs in themselves, but more importantly, they can provide better job leads for the next

season. "They're certainly not our largest accounts," he says. "But there's a lot of potential with them. It gives us an in certainly with other residential, and if we're doing a good job, the whole business will lead to other commercial and residential leads within the subdivision."

"In the springtime, while we're finishing from winter, they'll come out and realize we're an irrigation outfit, too. We've certainly picked people up that way."

Initially, they'll extend deals to an association, as well as try to provide incentives to get the contract if the numbers work out for their bid, but the biggest thing An-

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person does to get the work is pay a little attention.

"The key, really, is a relationship," he says. "I'm always available to meet with the board to try to give them information on us. We want to try to let them know where the value is, and let them know we will go the extra mile to meet with them. If you don't get in front of the board, you're just a price. We're normally not the cheapest, so my angle is to try to tell them the value of us versus somebody else."

He starts out by asking about their previous service, and whether they were happy with their work. But the real work comes with proving that

they're more than just guys with trucks, which he does by listing his qualifications and certifications through the company.

"I try to sell them on the value of that, being educated and involved in the regional and national associations," he says. "We're professional, and we can distinguish ourselves from our competition using that."

But what really makes a difference in getting a board to discuss a bid that's not the lowest price is getting the board on your side, and what does that best is connecting with a board member.

"A homeowners' association can be made up with a

salesman or lawyer or engineer, people who want to change the world for their area," Anderson says. "And with boards that have already hired us, we know who likes us and who doesn't. Whoever they hire, there's going to be pressure from someone, and it's good to be able to say 'Oh, she likes us. She knows what we're all about and she's active on the board.' It's important to have that relationship with the board because they ultimately do make the decision most of the time."

Once the relationship is established, Anderson can put work into making his deal

the best one on the table. He comes prepared to outline the whole job so he's able to talk specifically to their needs.

"I bring a copy of their specs with me, and I'll point out where they might have a cost savings," Anderson says. "I'm prepared by knowing

what they want, and I try to give them comparisons and reasons to use us."

Sometimes showing where a savings can be recognized is enough, but sometimes what he thinks they want and what the different board members say they want can upset the balance.

"Everyone's got a different



Anderson

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point of view. There's dynamics within a board sometimes that change the way you have to discuss these things," he says. "There you've got to compromise. It's really identifying the different people in that board and making each of them happy. But if you can make the one that squeaks the loudest happy, you can make everybody happy. That person will then be your best salesman, if you can make them happy."

And meeting that person's needs can come in the form of a slightly altered service, or it can come in the form of a concession on a price to make some good job leads through the season, especially when

the only hang-up is a slight change in price.

"Making a concession can go a long way," says Anderson. "I'm always willing to make one, when it's just a numbers thing. When I'm building this relationship with somebody, when I know they're backing us up, I will look to see where I can give them something that will help them seal the deal. It doesn't have to be a lot either."

"It can come in the form of a scheduling change in lawn service as the season changes, or in a few free containers of deicer dropped off without charge to be used on the sidewalks. Showing appreciation for the work cements

Hunting strategy — commercial

- Listen to what property managers tell you about their goals for the property.
- Be open about how you came up with your pricing, so they understand why they may be paying more than for your competition.
- Rely on your network of distributors, suppliers and colleagues to determine the best strategies for an efficient approach.

Hunting strategy — HOAs

- Build a relationship with the board. Be available and in front of them, so you're more than just a price or a number on the budget.
- Be prepared: Know the board's specs, identify cost savings and have an understanding of who on the other side of the table is your ally and who isn't.
- Know when to give a concession on the contract if you'll seal the deal this year — and maybe next.

Hunting strategy — residential

- Look for route density and focus on multiple services to a smaller number of homes
- Remember that people buy on looks, so dedicate more time and equipment to high-attention areas
- Dedicate people to routes so they can build connections with customers year after year.

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a relationship for when the next year comes around and cheaper companies try to get the job – but without giving as much back.

“Get involved with the board,” says Anderson. “You should both have the same interest. You want to perform a service and you want to know where their problem areas are so you can take care of them. If the numbers are good, then, you can do that.”

TARGET #3 Residential accounts

The problem for residential accounts is that they seem too small to make a profit, according to Paul Vanderzon of Amenagements Paysag-

ers Vanderzon of Quebec, Canada. “I think the biggest mistake most people make is they start out and then they panic because they’re not picking up enough clients, so they expand their area immediately,” he says.

“They pick up 15 clients in one square mile when they were hoping for 50, so they make it two square miles and get maybe 30. So when the snow does come, they’re too spread apart and their cycle time ends up being six or eight hours where ours is four. When the prices are the same, that’s just unacceptable to most people.”

A bigger account in a residential market is more

about penetration into a small area and services offered to those clients. Not just more expensive service, but more reliable service overall.

“If I’ve only got 30 in this area, let me really focus on those 30,” Vanderzon says. “I just cannot compete with 50 in the larger service area.”

Client saturation is what makes residential accounts work, especially when competitors want to focus on what they perceive as a slight edge by doing the first run earlier. But even though their first run comes earlier than Vanderzon’s, he’s able to keep his clients cleared, which



Vanderzon

keeps them coming back every season.

“People sometimes look at the residential market like it’s a race,” he says. “We never change the first

pass because it’s planned with the city plows. But we’re so saturated it’s very easy for me to stay on top of the game.”

Being conscious of where the competition is closing in can help determine where some extra attention is needed during an event.

Residential accounts can be unforgiving for a slightly slower time, but making sure each account is handled properly or even sending a truck around one more time

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makes the difference. "If I've got just a couple people complaining about the time, I'm not going to change the route just for that," he says. "But I've got one area where I'm in competition with three other companies.

"There, I might send an extra tractor, and I'll put a little more equipment in that area. You're going to have to work really hard to make me look bad there. I'm going to make sure he cannot give them as good of service as I'm giving them."

Since saturation is the goal for residential clients, taking the time to handle each property can bring more business through neighbors. But even

a clean driveway isn't going to make everyone happy.

"A lot of this industry is how it looks," Vanderzon says. "It's a luxury that I'm selling. I think sometimes we have to be careful not to get caught up in thinking we have to satisfy everyone. It's just not possible and you'll lose your margin trying.

"We try to listen to what the client has to say. It's a really strict volume and it starts to get a little dicey when you're losing customers.

Making things work efficiently for the route is one of the biggest keys for handling a larger volume of residential clients.

Without a quick route,

saturation is difficult to hold onto. Checking a route against client comments and complaints shows where attention needs to be given in the next season, but Vanderzon also tries to keep the same drivers on the same routes year after year.

Not only are drivers more familiar with the clients and their needs, the clients start to think of them as their own drivers.

"The longer the driver has been servicing the client, the better that connection is," Vanderzon says.

But the best advice Vanderzon has for expanding residential service is to do the very opposite, for just a little

while, at least. "The best way to go is to take one sector and you take care of those people and you make that work really well for your area," he says.

"Then you take that and you repeat it every single time because that's what's working for you. Then repeat that for the next city blocks.

"When you've got 100 accounts to handle, you don't have much time to deviate from your routes to see where you can change and improve. When you've got just 50, you're able to take the time to really pay attention to those 50." L&L

The author is editor of *Green Industry Supply Chain Management*.

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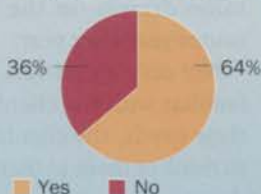


Social Snow

The latest research on how snow contractors are using social media

Editor's note: We asked snow fighters how they're using social media to connect with customers, market their businesses and communicate with their employees. Here's what they had to say.

Do you use social media?



Which services do you use?

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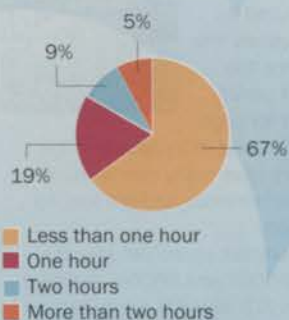
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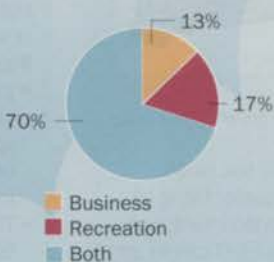
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How much time do you estimate you spend interacting using social media each day?



Do you use social media for business, for recreation or both?

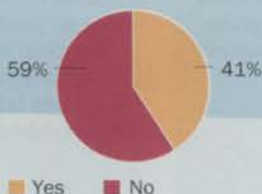


Why do you use social media for your business? (select all that apply)

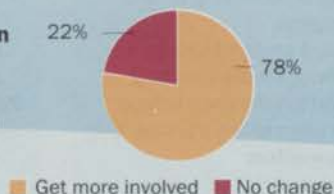
Weather updates.....	52%
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-Jeff Sneller, Sneller's Landscaping, LLC, Ada, MI



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Arctic LD Plow

The pitch: The LD plows are compatible with several types of lighter-duty equipment including backhoes, skid steers, compact loaders, and tractors.



- The steel moldboard design is made up of 32-inch-wide individual sections, each featuring spring-loaded trip edges.
- The separate sections move independently of one another, allowing the plow to contour to the surface and scrape snow and ice out of dips and recessions, all while moving up and over raised objects.
- Each moldboard section features an AR-400 hardened-steel trip cutting edge, designed to effectively scrape snow and ice down to the pavement.

For more information:
www.sectionalplow.com

Boss Box Plow

The pitch: THE BOSS Snowplow introduces B-8 (8' 4") and B-10 (10' 4")



- box plows adding to its growing box plow product lineup.
- The new B-8 and B-10 box plows feature a universal coupler fitting all skid steers for easy attachment; just drive into the universal tool carrier and connect two hydraulic couplers.
 - Adjustable trip springs let the operator adjust trip-edge tension.
 - To keep the blade on the ground at the optimal scraping angle while negotiating rough terrain, these plows feature a built-in float and pivot system.

For more information:
www.bossplow.com

SuperMaxx Series

The pitch: SnowEx has introduced its highest-capacity line of spreaders, the SuperMaxx series.



- Intended for large contractors and municipalities, the spreaders have many new features for better performance and pre-wetting integration.
- The SuperMaxx series includes the 9300X, 9500X and 9800X, available with 3.3-, 4.3- and 6.0-cubic-yard capacities, respectively.
- The spreaders feature a unique cab-forward design with up to 33 percent better payload distribution, resulting in improved safety and reduced stress on the carrying vehicle.

For more information:
www.trynexus.com

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CATCH & RELEASE

Terrible droughts and water bans make rainwater catchment systems a no-brainer in many areas of the country.

By Chuck Bowen

As restrictions continue to limit customers' ability to water their landscapes, and a record setting drought has hit the U.S., rainwater catchment systems are growing in popularity.

This summer, Julie Evans, vice president of The Fockele Garden Co. in Gainesville, Ga., and facilities manager David Williams, earned their accreditation from the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association. Here, she offers her advice on getting into this sector. "The design involves so much more than just putting a tank in the ground and putting a pipe in it. If you were only an installer, you'd want a horticulture

HOW SYSTEMS WORK

Rainwater harvesting or catchment systems funnel water from any horizontal surface into a basin or cistern. On a standard residential project, the most common installation reroutes the home's downspouts into a central tank. Large-scale commercial projects will draw rainfall from rooftops, parking lots, sidewalks and permeable paver installations.

Before the rainwater enters the main cistern, it should be run through at least one filter "to get out the big stuff," Evans says. Water drawn from rooftops and parking lots, especially, can bring along leaves, seeds and garbage that could clog the system.

The system's cistern should also have an overflow that's equal to the system's inflow. "That's very important, otherwise you get water in the house," Evans says. "Next thing you know, you're swimming."

Editor's note: Check with your local water authority first to determine if it's legal in your area to harvest rainwater. Some regions, especially in the west, prohibit diverting rainwater for private use.



Water rolls down the roof, into the downspouts and falls in a central tank.

A plant-based solution

Use smart plantings to capture and store rainwater in wet areas.

Whatever you call them – bioretention areas, detention/retention basins, rain gardens or swales – stormwater structures all do the same thing: capture and clean water.

And where the traditional approach to stormwater was to get it off site as fast as possible, contemporary designs aim to hold onto water – for as long as 48 hours – to avoid overwhelming natural and manmade infrastructure.

"How do we clean the water, how do we touch the water before it gets into a pipe or natural stream?" says Eric Sauer, ASLA and principal at CYP Studios, Centerville, Ohio. "How do we get it to slow down or hold it on site?" And these structures do more than just hold runoff. They also improve water quality, improve drainage for a property, offer a place to store snow in the winter and attract beneficial wildlife.

DESIGN. Sauer stressed that a rain garden filled with native plantings does not have to look like a wild, unkempt prairie. In fact, the best designs are the ones that don't look like a rain garden at all.

"That's a perfectly acceptable style, but a lot of people don't like that look," Sauer says.

His other main point to attendees was that a rain garden isn't designed much differently than any other landscape installation. The same factors – drainage, soil pH, solar exposure, planned use – all are still relevant. "You can't go dig a hole, plant some plants and expect things to be successful," he says. "Trial and error is not a good way to do this. You have to give it some thought."

Here are a few questions to ask when designing a rain garden:

What's the drainage area the system needs to handle? Is it a

downspout, or a parking lot or entire subdivision?

How much water are you going to get? Try to design your system to handle the largest storm your area gets in an average year – anything larger becomes cost prohibitive.

What's the soil like? Are you using native soils, or imported? What the garden sits in will determine your plant palate.

Where is the system installed? "Most of our failures that we see are when these are brand new.

The root systems haven't taken hold and you get a big storm," Sauer says.

"You're dealing with water that the system can handle after a year, but how do we handle that until the system is established?"

Use core mats, erosion control blankets or temporary silt fences.

What's the salt exposure? If you're building near roadsides, or parking lots, you'll need to take this into consideration. The right plants can tolerate high exposure to salt.

MAINTENANCE. Just as the design of rain gardens follows traditional principles, so too does their maintenance.

You have to cut back growth in the spring, remove debris and mulch.

Areas to watch include the plants' absorption of chemicals used on the property.

Plants used in these systems are designed to suck up a lot of water, and they'll take up anything else, too.

Also, the systems need a bit more attention after their initial installation.

Topsoil erosion and plant establishment are very important to make sure the system takes root successfully.

"Erosion control is critically important on all of these," Sauer says.

Eric Sauer, principal at CYP Studios, Centerville, Ohio, gave the following list of trees, shrubs and perennials that perform well in rain gardens.

Trees

Swamp White Oak – Very tolerant. A street tree that is rough at first like ginkgos, but becomes very attractive.

It's tolerant of moist and dry conditions, does have acorns.

Bald Cypress – Not for pocket rain gardens, but an overall large scale development-wide system, this tree is a beautiful tree, can grow standing in water and turns red in the fall.

River Birch – They don't like to dry out; will drop leaves in the summer.

Sycamore – Does fruit, but the bark texture as it ages is very attractive. Works as an urban tree, and is underused.

Black Gum – Slow growing, hard to transplant and hard to get big specimens. Good especially in parking lots, great red color in the fall.



Swamp White Oak



Bald Cypress



Magnolia



Serviceberry



Witch hazel

Small trees and large shrubs

Sweetbay Magnolia – Flowers off and on in summer

Pagoda Dogwood – Remember, not everything has to be native; it can be adaptive.

Serviceberry – Delicious fruit

Witch Hazel – Almost blooming right now, great shrub

Shrubs

Winterberry and Chokeberry – Red fruit in the fall, tolerant of wet feet

Virginia Sweetspire itea – Not happy dry; likes moisture to perform

Arrowwood Viburnum – Blue muffin doesn't mature so large (5-6 feet); white flower in summer, blue fruit in fall, full shade to full sun, and it tolerates from wet to dry.

Perennials, grasses

Rush (Juncus spp.) – Good seed heads, 12-36 inches in height and semi-emergent on the side of a pond.

Switchgrass (Panicum spp.) – Makes a monoculture stand in grass prairies. It's 3 feet tall, and softer with a blonde color in the fall and likes wet feet. It is aggressive, so be careful.

Bulrush (Scirpus spp.) – grows 12-18 inches to 6-7 feet tall, woody stems in some cases, becoming more common in perennial nurseries

Sedge (Carex spp.) – Thrive in full shade; interesting color in a woodland environment

Perennials, flowers

Iris (Siberian and Flags) – Like an ornamental grass with a bloom in summertime; flag leaves can go 36 inches and be aggressive in wet environment

Daylily – How can you go wrong?

Liatris – Drier growing, but a magnificent plant that attracts wildlife.

Milkweed (asclepias) – Great butterfly attractor

Cardinal flower (lobelia) – Love wet feet, bright red color

Ferns (royal and cinnamon) – They can do rain gardens in the woods and work with the shade that you've got.



Lobelia

Plants not to use

Invasive species – Check with your state's Department of Natural Resources for its noxious weed list. Also avoid plants with aggressive root systems (like willows).

Dry-loving plants (Taxus spp., sedum)

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IRRIGATION ADD-ON

person to talk to about what's happening in the garden," Evans says.

She stresses the importance of understanding the nuance and cross-discipline that these systems demand.

"Typical irrigation systems that are installed are not really tuned into ex-

actly what a plant needs. They're more broad-stroke," she says. Evans says that Fockele, with a strong background in plant knowledge, brings all three disciplines together – water management, plant health and construction expertise.

"If you have a landscape where you

The Fockele Garden Company

Julie Evans, vice president
Location Gainesville,
Ga. **EMPLOYEES** 42
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million **CUSTOMERS**
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Evans

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have a lot of stormwater runoff or a wet area that holds water, those are all parts of water in a landscape. Rainwater harvesting is one part of a system," she says.

DESIGNING THE SYSTEM. You can't just install a tank with a pump and run water into it. Instead, Evans says to consider what the customer wants from the system.

How many and what kind of plantings do they have? How much water do they need? How much does it rain, and how often? Where will you draw the rainwater from? "You start at the end and go backward," she says.

Most rainwater systems only hold enough water to reliably run dripline or small spray zones, so the rain tanks will probably run empty in the summer before they refill. "If you put rotors on an irrigation system, you'd run a tank dry."

Evans says clients – and contractors – need to understand that these systems do save water, but they don't pay for themselves. A typical commercial installation could run as high as \$60,000; a smaller single-family home system would run about \$2,500 she says.

SELLING THE SYSTEM. A main selling point for Fockele is the ability of these systems, which make up about 10 percent of the company's design/build revenue, as an integrated part of a larger construction project. to protect landscape investments even during water bans. "The city or county can be under outdoor water bans, so what are you supposed to do? How do you protect your investment?" Evans says. "The last big drought pushed people. Everybody knows water restrictions are a reality and they want to be able to keep their plants alive." L&L

Exmark 30 Stand-On Aerator

The pitch: The Exmark Stand-On Aerator is durable, productive and reliable.



- The split-tines allow for easier turning, even in reverse and can be replaced easily allowing for little downtime and are self-cleaning.
- The Kawasaki 481CC engine lets this machine travel at speeds up to 7.5 miles an hour allowing aeration of up to 2.3 acres per hour.
- Hydraulic-actuated split tine system has adjustable down force of up to 1,200 lbs. and the self-cleaning tines have an adjustable core depth from 2-5 in.

For more information:
www.exmark.com

Grasshopper AERA-vator

The pitch:

Aerate and loosen compacted soil in less time with less labor with a



Grasshopper AERA-vator coreless lawn aerator.

- The PTO-driven AERA-vator works without slicing or cutting, improving turf development and water absorption with little surface disruption.
- The vibrating tines deep-fracture soil instead of plugging cores, which means turf areas are immediately available for use.
- The AERA-vator attaches in place of the out-front mower deck for zero-turn maneuverability.

For more information:
www.grasshoppermower.com/aerate

SourceOne DT220 Detatcher

The pitch:

SourceOne's DT220 Dethatcher is a low-maintenance and durable detatcher.



- The flail blade assembly has 11 blade height settings to remove thatch without disturbing root structure in virtually any turf.
- No tools are needed to make height adjustments.
- Can be turned into a combination one-pass seeder with the addition of SourceOne's DT020 Seeder Kit or convert to a slicer with the DT010 Slicer Kit.

For more information:
www.sourceoneope.com

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Toro Dual Hydro Stand-On Aerator

The pitch: The Toro 30-in Dual Hydro Stand-On Aerator boasts a Kawasaki FS481 V-Twin engine with integrated hydraulics that follow the contours of the ground to pull plugs over hills.



- Applies up to 1,200 lbs. of down pressure on the tines to pull up to 5-in cores, and operators can finely tune the system to pull any length of plug.
- Electronic controls allow the operator to raise and lower the tines instantly for quick zero-turn maneuvers without taking their hands off the controls.
- With a travel speed of 7.5 mph and an aerating width of 28-in, this model can aerate 2.1 acres per hour.

For more information: www.toro.com

Turfcod TurnAer XT5 Aerator

The pitch: Now with increased speed and a new weight system, the TurnAer XT5 is more efficient and performs better on hills.



- With a new gear ratio system, the aeration speed is increased by 14 percent.
- The new weight system allows operators to adjust the weight in the back of the aerator, improving hill performance and control on hills.
- Operators can steer and reverse with tines in the ground eliminating need to stop, lift and turn with each pass.

For more information:

www.turfcodirect.com

TurfEx Thatch, Groom 'N' Sweep Package

The pitch: TurfEx's Thatch, Groom 'N' Sweep Package, an attachment system designed specially for zero-turn mowers, can be converted from a sweeper to a dethatcher.



- Available in both 48- and 60-in. widths, the Thatch, Groom 'N' Sweep Package uses a universal mount that easily fits the form of most major manufacturers' zero-turn mowers.
- The attachment includes two rows of brush sections, which can be replaced with spring-mounted tines to turn the sweeper into a dethatcher in minutes.
- Contains special tines for keeping turf damage to a minimum.

For more information:

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BOBCAT CT225

The pitch:

Designed for grounds managers and landscapers, the Bobcat CT225 compact tractor is great for labor-saving productivity and all-around versatility.



- Features a standard suspension seat, easy-to-reach controls, tilt steering, a cup holder and open foot space.
- A hydrostatic drive system makes changing directions easier.
- Add optional turf tires for minimal ground disturbance on sensitive surfaces.

For more information:

www.bobcat.com

Cub Cadet Series 1000 with EPS

The pitch:

The Cub Cadet Series 1000 Lawn Tractor is an innovative and easy-to-handle lawn tractor.



- Ultra-tight turning radius and electronic power steering allows users to make tight turns quickly and easily.
- Professional-grade engines
- The unique domed deck design and discharge chute work together to improve the cut.

For more information:

www.CubCadet.com

Husqvarna Fast Tractor

The pitch:

Husqvarna has launched the Fast Tractor, which can reach speeds of 7-8 miles per hour.



- The Fast Tractor comes standard with a 24-hp Kohler engine, 20-inch rear tires, F7 hydrostatic transmission, 48-inch reinforced cutting deck.
- Has comfort features such as a high-back seat with armrests, push/pull button blade engagement and an ergonomically-designed user interface.
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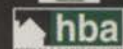
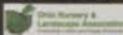
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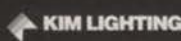
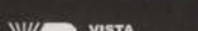


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KIOTI RX6010C Utility Tractor

The pitch: The Kioti RX6010C utility tractor has a 59-hp Daedong diesel engine.



- The telescoping category II three-point hitch of the RX6010C provides 3,710 lbs. of lifting power.
- Controlled from the operator's station, the hitch is available to operate a wide range of Kioti and other implements and attachments.
- The front-end and hood design has a new one-touch hood control release.

For more information: www.kioti.com

Yanmar Lx HST Tractor

The pitch:

Yanmar America's Lx HST series compact tractor features a hydrostatic (HST) transmission.



- The new HST transmission gives users a car-like feel.
- Comes equipped with 41-, 45- and 49-hp Yanmar diesel engines.
- The Lx HST tractors are powered by specially-designed, direct-injection or turbo diesel engines.

For more information:

www.yanmar.com

Steiner 440 4x4 Tractor

The pitch: The new Steiner 440 Tractor utilizes 4-wheel drive and all-wheel, and articulating power steering with an oscillating frame to maintain compact agility.



- Features non-permeable all-steel fuel tank and oversized filler neck with tethered fuel cap and 200-watt halogen quartz front headlights.
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www.steinerturf.com



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Delta Systems Digital Fuel Gauge

The pitch: Delta's new fuel gauge is a useful solution for outdoor power equipment and off-road vehicles.

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- Bar graph improves the look of the dashboard.
- Can be designed for single or dual tanks and is compatible with both diesel and gas engines.

For more information:
www.deltasystemsinc.com



Flexhaust Mulch Blowing Hose

The pitch: Flex-Tube PU Outdoor Transfer Hose is a flexible polyurethane hose that provides a lightweight alternative to conventional, heavier hoses.

- A coextruded all plastic hose that features urethane construction.
- Includes a drag-resistant spiral ABS helix wear strip.
- Available in standard 4, 5, and 6-inch I.D. sizes and 50, 75 and 100-foot lengths.

For more information:
www.flexhaust.com



Syngenta Caravan G

The pitch: Caravan G controls a wide range of insect and disease pests including white grubs, chinch bugs, ants, brown patch, leaf spot and red thread.

- This ready-to-use product comes in a 30-lbs. bag with an easy-to-close zipper seal.
- While timing and geographies will vary, one application of Caravan G made between May 15 through July 15 can yield season-long grub control and up to one month preventive brown patch control.
- Approximately, 2.0-2.8 lbs of Caravan G are needed per 1,000 square feet.

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www.greencastonline.com



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John Moehn

Scott's Lawn Service

Interviewed By Brian Horn

Having worked in the corporate wing at Scott's Lawn Service, John Moehn, president of J M Systems, learned a lot about what made franchisees successful.

Now, as an owner of nine Scott's in Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee and South Carolina, he is able to apply those lessons learned to his franchises.

Lawn & Landscape spoke with Moehn about what he learned working in the corporate world, as well as what it's like transition from being part of the day-by-day operations to handling more big picture strategies.

What did the franchisees who failed do wrong? A lot of them weren't involved day to day and didn't hire the right people to run the franchise. They got into the franchise system and they applied their principles that they knew and



they learned to a model that was different than what they were possibly doing before.

They were always trying to do things their own way and put their own spin on it versus listening and buying into a system that you are paying for – hopefully a brand that is successful and is proven already.

What is the main challenge in getting a franchise off the ground?

Hiring successful people and training them to consistently give the message that you want to give, and produce the quality work you want done. If you want to be large, you can't do this alone and you'll have to have employees out there representing your company. If you go into it undercapitalized, you are going to have a lot of issues and you can't spend the money to

let people know you're there. There are a lot of strong successful brands out there in markets that people don't even know that you're there because you don't spend the money.

What is a best practice to hiring?

Don't get in a hurry and hire someone for the wrong reasons. Understand that hiring somebody and training them to do the right things is going to take several weeks if not months to get them to do what you want them to do. If you make the wrong decision you are starting over again, so don't get in a hurry and train these people. And make sure you do train them when you hire them.

What was it like when you opened your first franchise?

You don't have the luxury of having different managerial levels when you start things up. You are everything. There were a lot of 14-hour days that went into that business.

You walk into a business and turn on the phones and hope they start ringing. When you invest a lot of money into something, you've got this nervous thing in your belly

that you've got to make it work and you're going to put your heart into it.

What was the transition like from working on day-to-day operations to bigger picture strategies? The biggest challenge to me was delegating the things that you like to do that you shouldn't be doing. There are certain things that everybody inherently feels they are particularly good at and like to do but they are not key to making your business successful.

You have to give those up things up and let people make decisions. Sometimes, they are going to make the decision that you wouldn't have made, but you have to know some of those things aren't going to make or break the business.

They've got to make it their own too in some ways. You have to realize that there are people out there that do just a fine job and they might not do it exactly the way you did, but there is nothing wrong with the way they do it. L&L

For the full story, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "Moehn."



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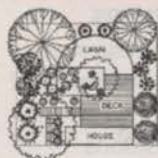
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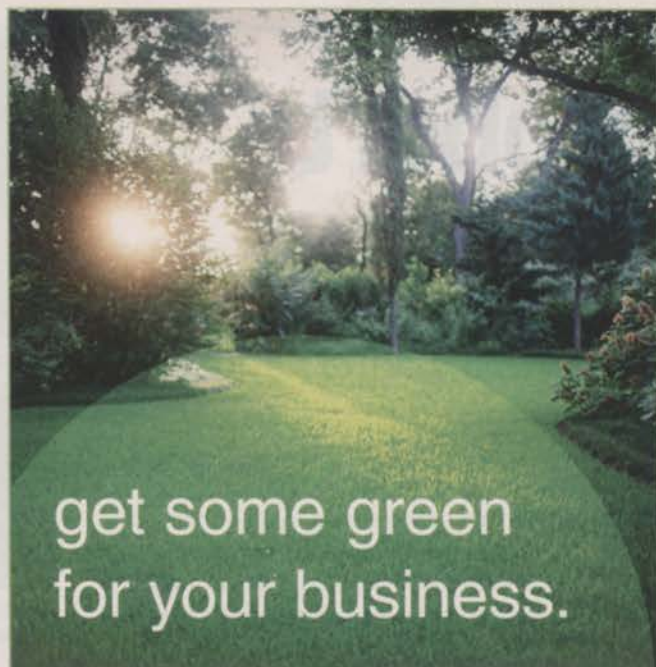
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There's a first time for everything – the first sale, the first expansion, the first mistake and maybe even the first award. To help gain insight into the successes and lessons learned by successful business owners, every month *Lawn & Landscape* will talk to companies who have surpassed those milestones and have become some of the newest members of our Top 100 list.



The staff at Clintar Landscape Management in Markham, Ontario, shows some enthusiasm at fall company meeting.

COMPANY: Clintar Landscape Management **LOCATION:** Markham, Ontario **TOP 100 RANKING:** 20 **2011 REVENUE:** \$50.5 million

What services did you start out providing and how or when did you expand to offer more services?

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Our overall plan is to be the outside providers. If it's outside the front doors, we try to look after it, whether it's irrigation, lawn cutting, spraying, fertilizing or parking lot maintenance. We try to be the one-source provider of everything outside the building. We've got everything covered except electrical.

What else has changed about your company as it has grown?

Certainly growth has caused a lot of change; new layers of management and supervision, it's a constantly evolving people thing.

Technology has also changed a whole heck of a lot.

We are now outfitting our vehicles with BlackBerry Playbooks to track labor and eliminate manual recording on job sites.

Is that a way you can enforce your quality of service?

It helps to verify where we are and what we're doing. We also do that through GPS so that we can substantiate where each crew is and what time they arrived and what time they left.

It's particularly helpful in the snow removal business because customers want to know when you arrived.

To what do you attribute your company's growth?

Our people. It's not a very unique answer, but it's the truth. I truly believe that selecting only good people makes it so much easier.

And I think that for anybody that's grown beyond a certain size, it has to be the people. Anybody can buy a truck or a lawn mower and a snowplow, but you've got to have very good people to make it all work and keep the customers happy. Our retention rate is basically due to having people who love their job.

We spend a lot of time thinking about how to approach training – we probably spend a disproportionate amount of time on training. We're not one-man bands, we're teams.

I was thinking of that the other day watching the Masters – it's an individual sport,

it's not a team sport. We're the opposite, we're a team sport, and I'm kind of the coach.

In building your business, what are some of the biggest decisions that you had to make and how did you deal with those choices?

A big decision was to grow by way of franchising rather than branch offices. That developed about ten years into running the business. It helped bring in equity and capital. Having franchise owners invest their own money was a motivating factor. I always thought that an owner close to the customer would always outweigh a branch manager.

I don't know whether I will ever prove it, but I hear it from the customers that they like to know that they are dealing with someone with a vested interest. **L&L**

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