

THE LIST: SEE WHO'S UP, WHO'S DOWN AND WHO'S OFF | 13 NEW COMPANIES JOIN THE TOP 100

MAY 2017

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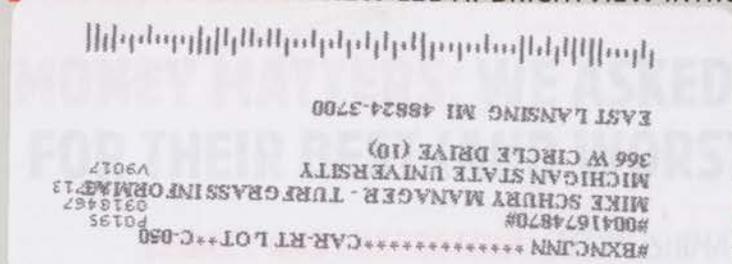
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GROWTH CHART: HOW BAYTREE LANDSCAPE BOOSTED REVENUE BY 60 PERCENT

BACK IN BUSINESS: A NEW CEO AT BRIGHTVIEW INTRODUCES HIMSELF WITH A BIG ACQUISITION



TOP 100 EXECUTIVES (T) FINANCIAL ADVICE

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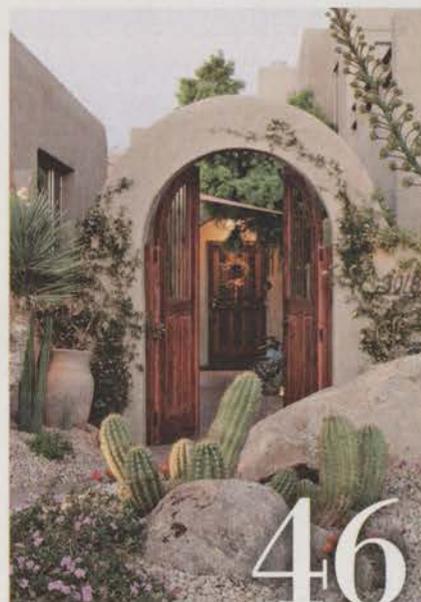


IN EVERY ISSUE

- 6** Online Contents
- 8** Editor's Insight: 20 years of the Top 100
- 12** LL Insider
- 38** Grunder: ► Silent profit killers
- 40** Huston: Pushing a rope
- 42** Words of Wilson: Promotion power
- 44** Green Guides: The foundation of business success
- 122** Hire Power: Invest in your workforce



COMPANY PROFILE



46

Winning out West

48 Aaron Clark sustains a culture of teamwork that drives his people to succeed

DID YOU KNOW?

➔ Instead of a web page dedicated to testimonials, it's better to post a few of your best ones throughout your site. PG. 102

55

Legacy & leadership

One year after her husband's death, Jackie Ishimaru-Gachina stepped up and took the reins.

58

Electric avenue

Sebert Landscape embraces new technology to cut down on its carbon footprint.

60

An outsider's perspective

L&L sits down for an exclusive interview with Andrew Masterman, the new CEO of BrightView.

66

Maintenance in the mix

The team at Juniper made it a priority to focus on growing its maintenance side and the move has paid off.

68

Turf return

Gothic Landscape fixed the yards of some unhappy California homeowners.

70

New to the list

Learn more about what's working at some of the 13 companies that weren't on our list for 2016.

PLUS:

In honor of its 20th anniversary, this year's commemorative 2017 Top 100 poster includes data looking back on the list's history.



This backyard designed by Lotus Gardenscapes went from a claustrophobic feel to an open space made for entertaining guests.

88

92



100



FEATURES

When's your weekend?

10 As you start the 2017 season, find out if your work week matches up with the 240 people who responded to our 2016 Benchmarking Your Business survey.

The right tools

75 Get your hand tools ready for a successful start to the season.

Digging done right

84 Before you dig that trench, make sure you have the right equipment in your fleet.

Partying & playing

88 A Michigan family tasked Lotus Gardenscapes to take their cramped outdoor area and make it more inviting.

No job too big

90 Compact equipment can take on large jobs in tight spaces.

The follow-up

92 Even if you treat a lawn in the beginning, you may still have to hit it with a post-emergent.

Hip homepages

100 Trends are always changing, and that includes what is popular when it comes to website design.

Contemporary convoys

104 To get your crews to job sites efficiently, check out these new vehicles to add to your fleet.

Just like marriage

106 Your relationship with your vendor is similar to one you may have at home.

The life of a deal

110 If you have any thoughts about selling your business years from now, start preparing for the complicated venture.



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4 WAYS TO DOMINATE SOCIAL MEDIA

Implement these strategies to get the most out of your efforts. **By Kendall Hines**

CONSUMER ATTENTION IS RAPIDLY shifting from traditional marketing channels (TV, radio, print, etc.) to much newer platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. You cannot just cut a check blindly and win with social media without actively participating in the platform. You need to become a practitioner and become dedicated to understanding and learning this new world to have success with it. While many of the same tried and

true methods for making customers properties gorgeous haven't changed, the ways that we in the green industry must adapt our sales cycle and process must. Customers today make decisions quicker and do their due diligence when searching for home services.

Head to bit.ly/4waystodominatere for four tips that you can implement in your business to see measurable returns on your energy and effort invested into the social media cosmos.



KEEP TABS ON THE TURNAROUND TOUR

We're partnering with The Harvest Group to help three lucky companies turn their businesses around. From nearly 50 applications from lawn care and landscaping businesses across the country, a panel of experts chose Freedom Lawn and Landscapes, Vineland Landscaping and Wade's Lawn Service.

Sponsored by Fleetmatics, the three companies will receive a year's worth of consulting, including on-site visits, phone calls and a customized plan for operations, growth and profitability from The Harvest Group, a \$25,000 value. As they work with consultants Bill Arman and Ed Laflamme, head over to bit.ly/TurnaroundTour to read and watch their progress.

CURIOUS HOW YOU COMPARE?

THIS ISSUE IS OUR ANNUAL TOP 100 ISSUE, where we list the top 100 companies in the U.S. and Canada. Curious to see how you stack up to the competition in your area? Wondering how long it might take your company to make the list? Head over to bit.ly/Benchmarkreal to see in real time how you compare to other companies in the industry.



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OVER ON INSTAGRAM, we like to highlight companies we visit when we travel. In April, Digital Content Editor Kate Spirgen headed down to Florida to visit with Honda.

This photo was taken by Kate at Sun 'n Fun, the air show in Florida. Read more about the trip on page 20.



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Chuck Bowen
Editor | Lawn & Landscape

I had a similar interview with Zino and Kerin in 2015, so I hope things go better for Masterman.

20 years of the Top 100

Lawn & Landscape has been publishing a list of the largest 100 landscape companies since 1998. (In 1997, we published a top 50 and in 2009, we published 150). A lot has changed in the industry since last year's list (not to mention during the intervening 20 years). Here's a few:

Scotts, which spent most of the last two decades in the top 10, is no longer even on the list. It was acquired last spring by TruGreen when Jim Hagedorn decided to go into "urban hydroponic growing" (Read: weed).

It's odd to not have Scotts – a name so synonymous with American lawn care – on the list, but there are 13 new companies this year, including Baytree Landscape Contractors at number 75, which reported the largest growth out of any other company on list. Five Seasons Property Management/Asplundh, a holding company for the huge tree care firm that has been quietly acquiring multi-million-dollar maintenance firms across the country, is new as well, coming in at number 7.

We also welcomed Heartland, a private equity-backed firm in the Midwest at number 34, Pierre Landscape at 47, Earthtones Design at 69, The Loving Group at 80, Dennis' 7

Dees at 83, Parker Interior Plantscape at 85, Designs by Sundown at 91, Ecoscape Solutions Group at 95, Cleary Bros. Landscape at 97, Munie Greencare Professionals at 98, and Heron Lawn and Pest Control (acquired in April by pest control giant Rentokil) at 100.

BrightView isn't new (it formed officially in 2015), but the \$2.2 billion company has a new CEO, after Roger Zino and Andrew Kerin left late last year. I sat down with Andrew Masterman, who comes from a long tenure in the manufacturing and engineering world, at their headquarters outside Philadelphia for an exclusive interview where he explained what he's doing to keep BrightView at the top of the list.

I had a similar interview with Zino and Kerin in 2015, so I hope things go better for Masterman.

The Top 100 list is one of the most intensive research projects we do all year, and comes together only thanks to the hard work from all the editors on staff. I hope the two decades of data and the stories this month help you understand and implement the strategies and tactics used by some of the biggest companies in the industry. – *Chuck Bowen*

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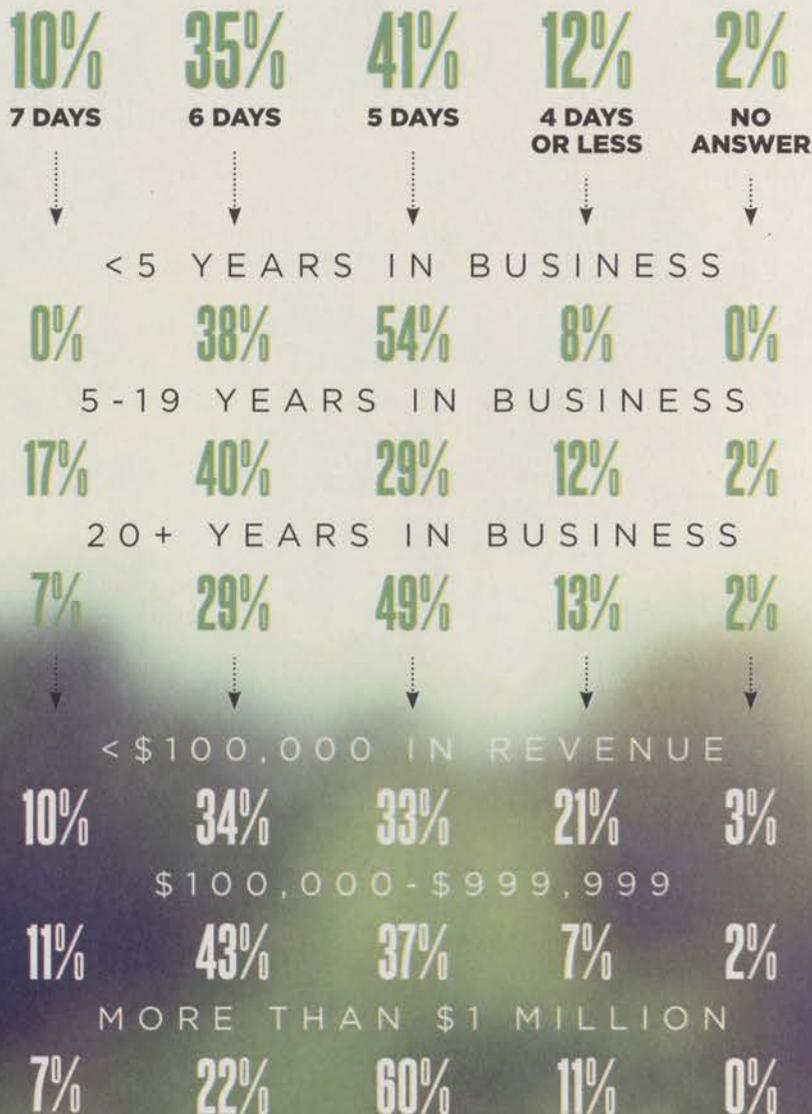
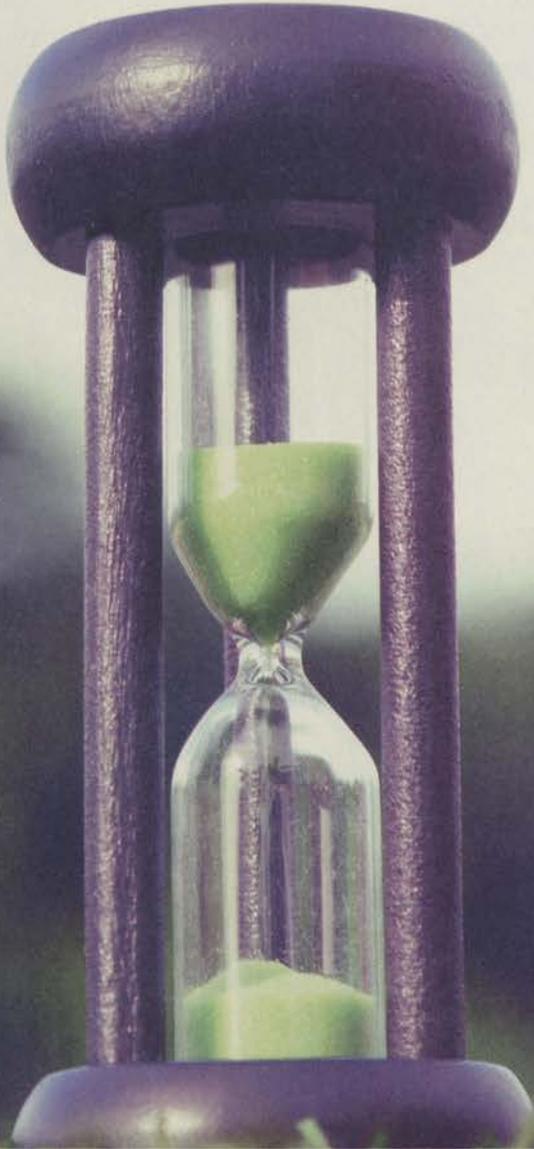
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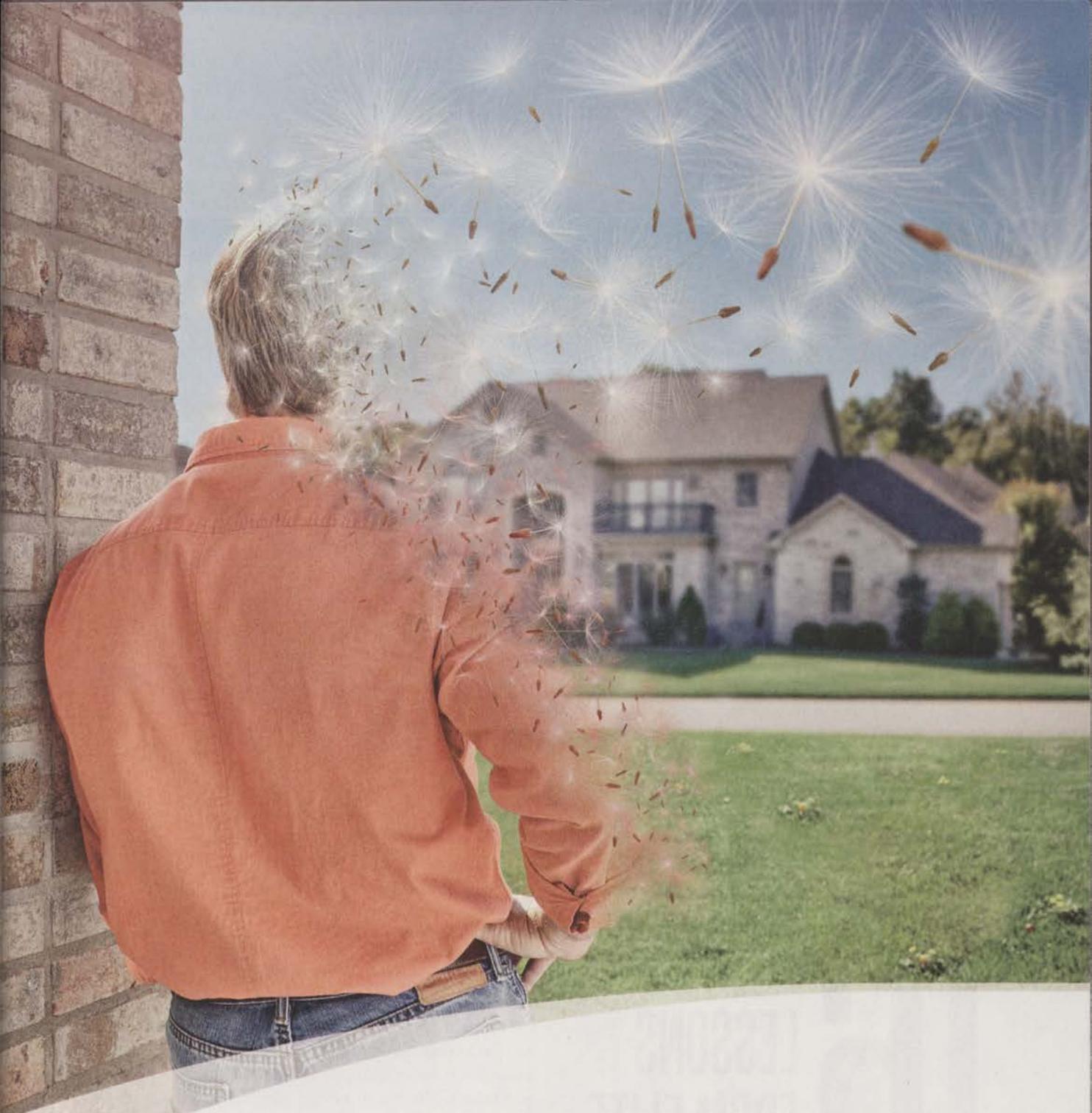
WHEN'S YOUR WEEKEND?

→ AS YOU START THE 2017 SEASON, find out if your work week matches up with the 240 people who responded to our 2016 Benchmarking Your Business survey.



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Elite Grounds is a \$5.5-million company based in Pleasant Grove, Utah.

16 LESSONS FROM ELITE GROUNDS

From employee incentives to fleet management, find out how this Utah-based company is operating.

By Brian Horn

PLEASANT GROVE, Utah – Kris Ashby and Mark Minson have maintained a great working relationship since starting their company in 2003. The co-owners of Elite Grounds, a \$5.5-million company in Pleasant Grove, Utah, met while working at Brätt Landscaping.

Ashby, general manager, loves the operations side of the business and Minson, CFO, loves the financial side, which makes for a great balance, Minson said. Brent Gurney became a part owner this past year.

Lawn & Landscape spent some time at the company while in town for the National Collegiate Landscape Competition, and here's what we learned.

- Elite is a commercial/residential landscape maintenance company but also provide snow removal, design/build and irrigation. It has 30 year-round

employees and 90 during peak season and a service mix of 70 percent maintenance, 20 percent snow and 10 percent design/build and irrigation.

- Minson said his role on the financial side is to explain and to get managers the numbers they need within a few days of requests being submitted. He also educates managers on the basics of understanding the numbers.

- Elite has two sister companies. Ashby owns another landscaping company about 25 miles away called Spectrum. Minson owns Elite Repairs, which is on the Elite Grounds property.

Elite Grounds hires Elite Repairs as a mechanic, but the repair company is also free to fix other equipment, including the competition's. Spectrum and Elite Repairs were under the Elite Grounds umbrella, but during the Great Recession,

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they wanted to put their eggs in different baskets. "It didn't put the burden on Elite Grounds," Ashby said.

- The company has a manager's assistant position, which is used to help train recent college graduates (most managers have college degrees) to eventually become managers. Ashby said it takes two years training to be ready to become a manager.

- Elite doesn't have managers assigned to crews by service. So, there are no irrigation managers and no maintenance manager. Instead, each manager has crews that perform all the services Elite offers. Those managers have the autonomy to run those crews

**Kris ASHBY**

how they see fit. Each manager must have a maintenance and snow crew, but if one manager wants to add holiday lighting or build up the installation side, and it makes financial sense, that manager is allowed.

"I want to let every manager grow their own group the way they want to," Ashby said. "If

**Mark MINSON**

they like construction, they can do construction."

- Managers check in with Ashby every day by 9 a.m. That can be in person, by phone, or, Ashby jokes, by smoke signal. "I don't care how they check in," he said. Ashby wants to know what is slowing the manger down, and how he can help.

- Because he wants his managers to have their own style, one drawback to Ashby's management style is having to communicate company-wide policies differently to each manager to get buy-in. One manager may respond better to one method of communication than another. "But that's fun for me," he said.

- Elite uses two methods when ordering trucks. If they need more than five, then they can order them painted in Elite's color, yellow. If they only need one or two replacements, they come in white, and managers are given those to drive. After a year or two when they start to show some wear and tear, those will

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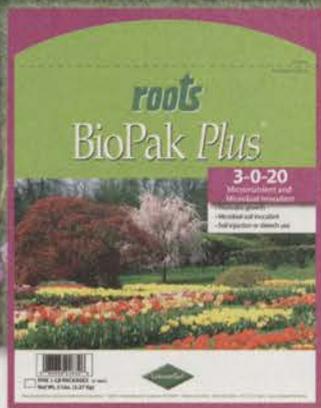
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If Elite orders five or more trucks, they come painted yellow. If not, the trucks are white and driven by managers before entering the fleet.

“THEY AREN'T PASSING RESPONSIBILITY OFF – CAN'T PASS THE BUCK FOR A BAD HIRE.”

– Kris Ashby, co-owner/general manager

be painted yellow and added to the job fleet.

- One major change in the last year and a half was starting a human resources department when he hired his daughter-in-law, Kylee Ashby, who leads the department. Before Kylee, the company had culture-building activities like company breakfasts and company outings, but the company has grown to the point where Ashby and Minson didn't have time to keep those organized and effective.

- Kylee's also involved in recruiting employees for field labor positions. One year when the company needed a lot of field labor they started a referral bonus program. Employees received a \$25 bonus for every employee

who lasted two pay periods (usually a month), up to 3 employees and \$75. “Normally if they stay a month, they'll stick around the whole time,” Kylee said. The employee who made the referral also received two raffle tickets for every successful referral. At the end of the season there was a drawing and the winners received prizes like an iPad.

- In the winter, Elite pays an additional \$1.00 per hour to each current employee for each qualified employee that they bring to help with snow.

- Kylee's desk is at the top of the stairs in the office so every employee has to walk by her every day. Ashby said that helps Kylee build a rapport with the employees, so when they have an issue, they can go to her.

- Managers are responsible for hiring workers for their crews. That creates even more ownership of each manager's respective crews, especially if they make a bad hire. “They aren't passing responsibility off – can't pass the buck for a



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bad hire," Ashby said.

- All employees are given 11 sets of uniforms. Every week, the uniforms are washed by a company Elite pays. They can have any variety of short-sleeved or long-sleeved shirts, and pants or shorts, as long as they meet safety requirements.

- Ashby spends no money on advertising, instead using his bright, yellow trucks and uniforms seen

around town to serve as a method of marketing the company.

- Five years ago, Minson's major goal was to get the company's cash flow under control. That involved building in more profit in job bids. He then used that extra income to pay of equipment and pay down other debts. "And then we were able to put away some and have a rainy-day fund," he said.



Miimo uses a boundary wire that can be installed either above or below ground to maintain lawns with a continuous cutting system.

MIIMO MAKES ITS DEBUT

Honda's new robotic mower offers set-it-and-forget-it care for lawns. **By Kate Spirgen**

LAKELAND, Fla. – Honda announced its entrance into the U.S. electric market in April with the robotic mower Miimo. Introducing the mower at a press event in Lakeland, Florida, Honda showcased everything from its marine offerings to the HondaJet to their line of handheld landscape equipment and generators.

Miimo uses a boundary wire that can be installed either above or below ground to maintain lawns with a continuous cutting

system. "Micro-computer sensors and wire keep it where it needs to be," said Adrienne Hall, senior product planner.

The mower features a cutting width of 8.7 inches with a height range of 0.8 to 2.4 inches. "The blades go both ways, so the blade stays sharper longer," said Nina Bryson, senior manager of marketing and marketing research.

Users can choose from three mow patterns and set up to five mowing zones. A seasonal timer

PHOTO BY KATE SPIRGEN

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The mower features a cutting width of 8.7 inches with a height range of 0.8 to 2.4 inches.

allows users to set Miimo to mow more or less often, depending on the weather and growing conditions. It can handle slopes as steep as 25 degrees, after which it will shut down. The robotic mower cuts less height from grass more frequently and disperses the clippings, eliminating cleanup needs.

Miimo is available in two models:

- The HRM 310 can mow for up to 30 minutes with a 22.2-volt/1.8 amp-hour battery. It will recharge in 30 minutes. It weighs 26 pounds. It's ideal for up to half-acre areas.
- The HRM 520 can mow for up to an hour with a 22.2 volt/3.6 amp-hour battery. It will recharge in 60 minutes.

It's ideal for areas up to three-quarters of an acre. When Miimo reaches less than 30 percent battery life, it will head back to its charging dock to reload, and then head back out into the field.

Sensors keep the mower moving if it bumps into objects, and if lifted, an alarm will sound and it will shut down. A code set by the user will then be required to restart the mower.

Miimo has been available in Europe for several years and will be available for purchase in the U.S. in June at select Honda Power Equipment dealerships nationwide, excluding California.

Although it hasn't been introduced yet to the public, Honda has run it through their "product familiarization program," making it available to its staff and dealers.

The HRM 310 will have a price point of \$2,499 and the HRM 520 will be \$2,799. Both come with a two-year warranty.

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Along with the tax, The Huskey's, standing far right, also give public recognition to places that support a healthy environment.

CALIFORNIA COMPANY SELF-IMPOSES CARBON TAX

The funds will be used to support a local environmental organization. **By Brian Horn**

Luke Huskey will be the first to admit it – his company's trucks and equipment are not fuel efficient. And Huskey says it's hard for him to find fuel-efficient trucks and equipment that would meet the heavy demands of landscaping at his company, Greener Environments in San Luis Obispo, California. But

as a firm that wants to be environmentally conscious, Huskey wanted to do something to offset the harm he felt the equipment was doing to the environment.

So Huskey and his wife, Melody, who co-owns the company, placed a carbon tax on the company's net revenues to compensate for the use of gas-

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oline-burning equipment. The carbon tax is calculated monthly at a rate of \$25 per ton of CO₂ emitted, with the accumulated funds donated at the end of the year to a local environmental organization.

“Our company has environmental stewardship built into its business model, but we always have had this ongoing frustration of not having options for fuel efficient trucks and machinery,” he says. “We are trying to work towards a healthier planet, but at the same time our trucks are getting 8 miles per gallon. It didn’t feel right to us.”

Huskey calculates how much



The carbon tax is calculated monthly at a rate of \$25 per ton of CO₂ emitted. Huskey estimates the tax will fall between \$1,000 and \$2,000.

CO₂ the company’s equipment emits by using the U.S. Energy Information Administration’s estimate of 19.64 pounds of CO₂/gallon of gasoline and 22.38 pounds of CO₂/gallon of diesel.

“At the end of each month we add up our total fuel usage and do the math to come up with the total CO₂ emissions for that month and then tax ourselves accordingly,” he says. “The tax is then transferred into a separate account.”

They decided on \$25 based on the average rates of countries and municipalities that have similar taxes.

“We determined that \$25/ton was about the average of all the different tax rates we came upon during our research,” he says. “This rate will increase every year until we can reduce our carbon emissions to the relevant equivalent of 10 percent of our

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2016 carbon emissions.”

The company may also use the funds to donate environmentally-friendly landscaping.

“We will use the money from our carbon

tax account for the materials and labor costs of new sustainable landscaping for a suitable non-profit, school or public space,” he says.

“If there is no suitable site for this, or if there

is leftover money in the tax account, we will simply donate the proceeds of the tax to an environmental organization that is doing work that will offset the carbon we emitted that year.”

The Huskeys came up with the idea after reading a book by Patagonia founder, Yvon Chouinard, where he wrote, “The next step in our responsibility is to pay for our sins until such a time that we hope we can stop sinning.”

“With the high fuel usage of our operations in mind, I interpreted this as ‘Until we can get vehicles and equipment that don’t have a high environmental impact, we can at least offset that impact with a carbon tax,’” he says.



“WE ARE TRYING TO WORK TOWARD A HEALTHIER PLANET, BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, OUR TRUCKS ARE GETTING 8 MILES PER GALLON. IT DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT TO US.”

— Luke Huskey, Greener Environments

Huskey estimates the tax will generate between \$1,000 and \$2,000, and the company will not raise prices to offset the tax.

“We didn’t feel it was right to make other people pay for our self-imposed carbon tax, so the tax comes off of our net profits,” he says.

Along with the carbon tax, the company offers free hands-on classes in sustainable design, water catchment and drought-resistant landscaping, as well as certification through its Green Landscapes Initiative which gives public recognition to businesses, homes and public spaces that support a healthy environment.

The company also offers several e-books available for free download via their website on topics such as rainwater harvesting, tips on California-friendly landscaping, and how to avoid costly mistakes when landscaping at greenerenvironments.net.

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SAFETY TRAINING & CHECKLISTS

ASK THE EXPERTS

Q: I was interested in learning what Maryland requires in terms of training before a new technician is eligible to be "on the road?" We have used the severely outdated videos in conjunction with some written material to satisfy what we thought to be the requirement up to this time.

However, we were hoping to revamp our training and on-boarding program so that it is more up-to-date, relevant and fresh and wanted to ensure that we were still meeting Maryland state requirements.

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A: I assume when you use the word “technician,” you are referring to your employees who load, transport, mix and apply chemicals, namely pesticides to turfgrass and ornamen-

als. The State of Maryland no doubt requires that these technicians be certified through EPA requirements, or that at least their direct supervisor is fully certified. State regulations

differ and you may want to contact the Maryland Dept. of Agriculture or you could start by contacting your local extension office to get the latest information on testing and training resources, dates and sites. By using Google, you will find multiple resources for keeping your technicians up-to-date and safe.



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Q: We were discussing at my company setting up a true fleet management and driver training program for new employees. I was looking around to find forms we could use for this program but have not found anything initially.

A: One option for driver training is the materials available from the National Safety Council (NSC) in Itasca, Illinois. Their programs are labeled as Defensive Driving Courses (DDC) and the training options are found on their website (www.nsc.org). Training sites in many areas should be available. If you have enough employees in need of training, your most economical option may be to hire a certified DDC instructor and conduct the needed training at your headquarters. Obviously, the sooner the better.



IT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO LEARN HOW TO NEGOTIATE WITH SUPPLIERS IN ORDER TO KEEP YOUR COSTS DOWN.

Q: My company is just starting to work on an AWAIR (A Workplace Accident and Injury Reduction) program and with that we are trying to find a pre-job safety checklist.

We have been looking online and not finding much pertinent to our industry that makes sense for us. Just curious if you have anything that might give us a starting point to work from so we don't have to start from scratch. Any information would be helpful.

A: I received your request for information on pre-job safety checklists and wanted to suggest that the new NALP Safe Company Program may have the resources you need.

In the updated Safe Company Program Manual, there are job site safety checklist,



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dispatch yard safety checklist and repair shop safety checklist forms that should be helpful to you for updating your hazard ID audits and providing guidance for your worker safety awareness and training initiatives.

There are other template audit forms available from safety specialists at several universities, but they are targeted more at farm machinery than landscape equipment. They could be adapted however, especially with PTO-driven equipment and with hitching of

towed machines and mounting of front buckets on tractors.

Sam Steel
NALP Safety Advisor

Q: I've had residential clients for the last seven years; however, I'm transitioning to commercial clients now that I received certification as a Women Owned Business.

The profit margins seem different from residential, and there are a lot more requirements and rules I didn't know about. Profit margins are smaller, certainly.



How do I bridge the learning curve from residential to commercial clients? Cash flow is also an issue. Can a small, growing business handle this kind of work?

A: Being a woman owned business gets you the opportunity to bid, however it does not guarantee you work unless you are still the low bidder especially in the commercial landscape arena.

It is important for you to learn how to negotiate with suppliers in order to keep your costs down. You should ask for discounts

from suppliers when you buy larger quantities of material for commercial jobs. You can also do change orders anytime you are asked to do something extra or that was not included in the scope of work you bid.

Rich Arlington,
Arlington Lawn Care
NALP Trailblazer

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3 Simple Ways You Can Run a Smarter Company This Year

This year is looking to be another strong year for the landscape industry. Contractors I speak with are busy, customers seem to be spending, and opportunities are out there for companies of all sizes.

But anyone in this industry knows that nothing comes easy. Challenges crop up, even when times are good. Here are 3 ways great landscape companies are rising up to meet these new challenges – or steer around them – to maximize their profit this year.

Reduce Your Dependence on Labor: Do More With Equipment + Technology

Despite some landscape contractors considering themselves 'equipment junkies,' most of the contractors I meet are underequipped. The idea of having monthly payments scares off a lot of companies. Despite once-in-a-

lifetime type of interest rates, many companies won't invest in equipment until they can purchase it with their own capital. Or they keep equipment past its prime, because it doesn't have any 'payments.'

In a busy economy, it's never more important than to be properly equipped. The right equipment and work tools allow your crews to do more work in less time. This is extremely important for two reasons:

1. With a shortage of labor supply, we must get creative with ways we can do more work with less staff
2. We need to capitalize on as many of the opportunities (jobs) that we can while they are available. Equipment

allows us to complete jobs in less time, adding a few days – or even weeks – of extra opportunity in the season.

Beyond even these reasons, being well-equipped gives us some other powerful tools to outsmart and out-manage our competitors.

- When we complete our jobs in less time (labor hours), we lower our costs of production. Now we've got more control when pricing work competitively (or not); we can choose to improve profit or we can reduce our price
- By reducing time to complete jobs, we can finish more work in a season (or a week, if we're in maintenance). It's highly likely we can grow our revenue without increasing overhead expenses (*authors note: I treat equipment as a job-cost, not overhead). Growing sales without growing overhead is an effective way to either grow our

profits, or reduce our overhead markups – which makes our prices more competitive.

And while we're on the topic of equipment, here's a few key tips I've learned in my business over the years:

- Don't be cheap on equipment. Focus on the productivity gains you'll get from your equipment. Savings on labor can easily outweigh a few hundred dollars in equipment payments. If you can use an \$800/mo skid steer 3 days a week, it's only costing you \$8.33/hr, plus fuel and repairs. Even if good labor wasn't in short supply, you'd never find labor that will work for that cheap and get that much done!
- Standardize your equipment – equipping crews with same models and brands makes it easier/cheaper to stock spare parts, filters, etc. It's also easier to train employees on the use and care of your equipment and tools.
- In the age-old debate of whether you should own equipment, or lease/finance it, remember that the biggest cost of equipment is production downtime when it breaks down. Lost revenue due to lost productivity is like the bottom of the iceberg – you don't see it as easily, but it dwarfs the costs that you can see.
- Think of software or technology like equipment for the office. If your company is still paperwork heavy – you've got too much overhead, too many mistakes, and your spending too much time tracking these mistakes instead of planning your work so you avoid them!



Mark Bradley is the president of TBG Environmental and the Landscape Management Network (LMN). LMN helps great contractors become great businesspersons with its suite of budgeting, estimating, and mobile timetracking software. **Learn more at www.golmn.com.**

IF YOUR COMPANY IS ...

- Mature
- has well-developed systems and procedures
- has a strong layer of great middle-management
- and/or has consistent types of jobs

Lower field wages can be a good strategy. These kinds of companies are like McDonald's. Systems drive the company – and field crews aren't often asked to think/plan/manage independently. They simply need to execute the systems and report problems.

- Young/newer
- hasn't developed strong systems and procedures
- lacks a strong layer of middle management
- and/or has jobs that are highly variable in nature

Hiring at low wages might be costing you more money than you're saving. Mistakes or bad planning are expensive when you consider the revenue lost because of these mistakes. Better staff will cost more, but will result in better production with less supervision.

Spend More on Key Staff (and Attract Better Staff While Doing it!)

My experience is that too many contractors try hire the wrong kind of staff. They try to increase profits by keeping payroll costs low. For some companies this can work, but it's not for everyone.

Established, system-driven companies that perform repeatable work can get the best of (cheaper) employees who aren't independent, motivated thinkers. The company's systems, supervision, and procedures drive the correct behaviors and with repeatable work, there's little opportunity for major mistakes.

Unfortunately, many smaller or less-systemized contractors try to hire the same type of staff, but they lack the necessary systems, procedures or even supervision to keep

these staff productive. Left to make decisions in a complex environment (e.g. more complicated/variable jobs), cheap staff cost companies tens of thousands of dollars in lost revenue through mistakes, poor decisions, or just lack of motivation.

The average 3-person landscape install crew generates around \$2,500/day of revenue (finished work). Losing a half day to a mistake, forgotten material, poor productivity, or poor planning costs your company over a thousand dollars in missed revenue opportunity! If a more skilled (and more highly paid) foreman can help you avoid just a few mistakes a year, they can contribute to more profit – even if they increase your payroll. They can help justify their wages with less supervision (less demands on your time!), better training and development (of their laborers), and better company culture.

The 3 R's of Unbillable Time – Reduce, Reduce, Reduce

Average companies work hard, but they accept problems as a normal part of doing business. They're happy when things go right and frustrated when things go wrong – but they're "too busy" to truly spend time to eliminate problems that cause waste and inefficiency.

It's easy when sales are good to ignore small problems, but ignoring those problems is extremely costly! Pay extreme attention to your company's unbillable time. These are hours that are spent working (i.e. on payroll) but they don't complete any revenue-generating work. These hours are extremely expensive.

Learn the true cost of your unbillable time and teach all your key staff. Teach them not just the costs of payroll, but the real cost of waste and problems by using lost revenue as the metric. Brainstorm a list of daily/weekly obstacles that cost valuable production time.

I've based the following sample on a single 3 person crew. For each mistake we estimate how many crew hours are lost per week, and per year (based on a 36 week season) due to the waste. Then we look how much potential revenue is lost due to these mistakes (assuming the average 3-person design-build crew completes \$2,500/day of finished work).

Start with simple, avoidable problems in the table at bottom left.

The list of simple mistakes can

go on and on, but just those 4 items alone represents over \$30,000 in lost potential revenue for each and every 3 man crew you have!!! Smart companies that grow revenue through reduced unbillable time not only have higher profits, but they lower their overhead (as a percentage of their sales), which helps them compete against just about anyone.

Exhaust that list and then have the 'big thinkers' in your company brainstorm more strategic ways to reduce unbillable time:

- Could you contract out the washing/cleaning of your trucks – and keep your crews on the jobs longer?
- Could you use vendors for deliveries more often – and keep your crews on-site and producing revenue?
- Could you use technology to reduce paperwork and keep better track of on-time job performance?

There are hundreds of ways you can reduce unbillable time in your company and keep your crews focused on what they come to work to do every day – to generate value for the customer and revenue for the company.

Mark Bradley's Corner is an occasional advertorial series sponsored by LMN. For more information, visit their website at www.golmn.com.

PROBLEM (HRS BASED ON 3-PERSON CREW)	MAN HRS/WEEK	MAN HRS/YEAR	POTENTIAL REVENUE LOST
Extending breaks: 5 min (each) per day	2.5 hours	90 hours	\$9,000
Talking on cellphones: 8 min (each) per day	2 hours	72 hours	\$7,200
Waiting at gas station: 10 min, 2x per week	1 hour	36 hours	\$3,600
Trips to shop/vendor for forgotten items	3 hours	108 hours	\$10,800



SALES CALL offers landscapers Marty Grunder's practical and tactical advice on how to improve their sales and marketing, and grow their company's bottom line.

SILENT PROFIT KILLERS



I'M SITTING DOWN TO WRITE THIS COLUMN after having just wrapped up an exhausting, inspiring, whirlwind tour around and across the country, speaking to and coaching green-industry pros who are all striving to get better.

We spent a lot of time talking about vision, mission and core values, about finding prospects and closing sales, and about leadership. These factors are all critical to success. Mastering them can be the difference between a mediocre business and an extraordinary company. That's why I never shut up about them, both in my work with landscape professionals and at my own landscaping company.

But it's also true that you can get these things right and still not find yourself in the black at the end of the season. Why? Because you might very well be employing what I like to call Highly Effective Net-Worth Reduction Tactics. These silent but deadly killers slowly but surely siphon off your profits without you even knowing it.

Here are four of the worst:

UNDERPERFORMING EMPLOYEES. If you have jobs coming in over-time and over-budget, or dissatisfied clients, or broken equipment, underperforming team members are likely the cause. The question is,



MARTY GRUNDER is a speaker, consultant and author. He owns Grunder Landscaping Co.

what's causing this? Is it them, or is it you? Have you clearly communicated your expectations? Have you trained your team thoroughly? Do you check in with them regularly to monitor their progress and listen to their concerns? If you have and problems persist, then it may be time for you to usher your underperformers out the door.

POOR RELATIONSHIPS. Landscapers rely on a host of vendors and subcontractors to fulfill our clients' needs. We can't succeed without them; they are truly our partners – and we need to treat them that way. If you want them to deliver their products and services on time, then pay them on time. If you want them to do top-quality work, then show your appreciation for it. Discuss with them your goals and expectations. The reverse is true, too. As my con-

sulting partner Jim Cali points out, just as your vendors and subcontractors' business is important to you, your business is important to them. You have leverage in negotiating better terms. Use it.

INEFFICIENT CONTRACT, DEPOSIT AND COLLECTION PROCESSES.

Running inefficient or ineffective contract, deposit and collection processes can seriously eat away profits. Verbal work orders are trouble, folks. Get everything in writing, with contracts for significant jobs and at least an e-mail confirmation for small ones. This protects you and your clients. At Grunder Landscaping, we don't begin any work without a signed proposal or e-mail agreement in hand. For jobs of \$2,500 or more, we require a deposit of one-third the estimated cost. This helps establish the client's commitment to the project, and it helps us with cash flow.

As soon as we complete a job, we invoice. If you have an accounts receivable problem, you might very well have a client satisfaction problem.



ONLINE: You can now view Marty's video series "60 Seconds for Success," where Marty will give you quick tips on how to run your business better. Download the Layar app, then use your mobile device to scan this page. The video will then play on your mobile device. This month, Marty talks about his core values.



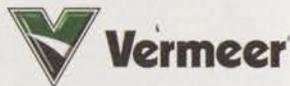
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SUMMER OR FALL. As difficult as it may be to plan for late summer and fall when you can scarcely see your way around the incessant landscape demands of spring, you've got to do it.

Sell your clients now on seeding and planting for fall. If there's work they want done now that you know you can't get to until later, do not overpromise and underdeliver. Instead, convince them you're worth the wait. Let them know how much you want to work with them. Offer a discount. If you want to finish your business squarely in the black this year, you've got to see your business through the fall.

Do you have other Highly Effective Net-Worth Reduction Tactics landscape pros should avoid? Shoot me an email at mgrunder@giemedia.com. As always, I'd love to hear from you. **L&L**

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PUSHING A ROPE

• DURING COLLEGE, I'D OFTEN WORK CONSTRUCTION JOBS

in the summer. Occasionally, I'd work on a dairy farm in Maine owned by an old-timer named Lincoln Partridge. We called him "Link." Link had euphemisms for most facets of life. "Three things are impossible," he'd say. "First is climbing a fence that's leaning toward ya. Second is kissing a girl that's leaning away from ya. Third is making someone else successful." Often he'd add, "It's like trying to push a rope. You can't do it."

IT'S WHAT I DO. I often go into the offices of new clients who are either losing money or barely breaking even at the end of the year. Ninety-nine percent of the time, the problem is in their pricing, production or lack of volume – or a combination of all three.

For potential new clients, once I explain how I might help them improve their bottom line and provide some references, it's somewhat of a "no-brainer" to hire me to help fix the problem. Either you want to make money or you don't. It really comes down to doing a simple cost-benefit analysis. "If I pay Jim \$X, what are the chances that I'll get back more than \$X?"

Business entrepreneurs are constantly conducting hundreds – perhaps thousands – of cost-benefit analysis scenarios when making business decisions. "If I purchase



JIM HUSTON runs J.R. Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm.

a \$60,000 skid-steer, how will it impact my bottom line? How will it improve productivity? How might such a purchase lessen my risk by making me less dependent upon labor?" This is how successful business entrepreneurs think. They're constantly analyzing the margin. If I do \$X, will I realize revenue more than \$X.

I insist that my potential new clients subject me and my services to such an analysis. If they don't understand the concept or can't do such an analysis, perhaps they shouldn't be in business for themselves. If they refuse to do such an analysis, they definitely should not

own a business. And I probably don't want to work with them.

FIX THEN BID. Somewhere on the interstate in the Midwest, I received a call from a young green industry contractor with a design/build installation company. He had talked with some of my clients, whom he knew and who once had problems similar to the ones he had.

He was considering employing my services. His sales the previous year were just shy of \$1 million. However, at year's end he had barely broken even. He knew that something in his company was wrong but had no idea what it might be.

We talked for about 20 minutes. He told me that he fully expected to sell and install at least \$1.5 million in 2017. I told him that I could come to his office in about 10 days

and we could diagnose and fix his problem(s) at that time. The 2017 season was about to start in full force and it would be good to correct whatever was wrong before he priced and installed a lot of work. For whatever reason, he thought that this timeline was too aggressive and he decided to do the \$1.5 million in sales prior to addressing the problem.

The logic of his decision totally baffled me. He did \$900,000 in sales and barely broke even. Now he wanted to do twice that amount without addressing or fixing the problem(s). Why would you not want to first fix the problem?

My conclusion was: 1. He either did not understand the purpose of a business within a capitalistic system. 2. He wasn't really serious about identifying and fixing the issues. 3. A combination of both 1 and 2.

DON'T TWIST THEIR ARM. Toward the end of this conversation, I was careful not to attempt to talk this young contractor into a consultation. It's my philosophy that a new client needs to do his or her homework, talk with references, have clear and realistic expectations and really want to work with me. Arm-twisting is counter-productive. Otherwise, he or she won't be mentally and emotionally prepared for our time together.

Reflecting later on this phone call, I wondered why this young green industry contractor didn't get it. Did he not understand that the purpose of a business is to make a profit? Perhaps he didn't understand how to do a cost-benefit analysis? Or perhaps I did not give it my best shot?

It was then that I remembered "Link" Partridge's advice and his three things that are impossible. You encourage and support people and you give it your best shot. But when it's all said and done, and in the final analysis, you can't push a rope! **L&L**

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PROMOTION POWER

• **AS CEO, BEING THE CHIEF INSPIRATION OFFICER** can be a lonely job. Especially if you feel you're the only one doing the inspiring. But what if the inspiration bubbled up from the ranks? What if your employees were so excited and so motivated and engaged, their spirit to win transformed your business?

True engagement is contagious. Your employees can't be told to feel excited. People and teams are passionate when they feel their ideas, commitment and relationships they've formed in the greater workplace community are valued, and that their efforts count.

Getting your employees motivated about their jobs is not easy. But there are some things you can do to help re-engage employees' sense of purpose and improve productivity. One way to do that is to promote from within.

A RISING TIDE OF KNOWLEDGE LIFTS ALL BOATS. Just as your rise to the top often relied on others helping you, your employees' ability to grow in their roles depends on others helping them. In other words, it is a competitive advantage to work for a company where upward mobility is part of the culture and where continuous learning, and performance improvement, occurs at all levels. When your employees work



BRUCE WILSON is principal of green industry consulting firm Bruce Wilson & Company.

together to advance the knowledge of the whole team, your company will always have a pipeline of people prepared to step up.

Helping your employees move up the ladder is good for morale and good for business. Employees that are performing and competing to get ahead drive your business forward. You don't have to push them. All you have to do is manage it.

HOW TO GROOM YOUR COMPANY'S PIPELINE.

1. Link training to your company's overall strategy.
2. Make career pathing and pipeline management part of your core values.
3. Identify organizational obstacles to successful learning and remove them.

4. Provide opportunities for stretch assignments and training across functions.
5. Invite employees into problem solving; challenge them to come up with solutions to exercise critical thinking.
6. Develop a career path roadmap that includes stepping stone positions to help employees gain skills and confidence.
7. Encourage a progressive bucket brigade of people training their replacements to preserve institutional knowledge and best practices.
8. Make smart recruiting, employee referrals and formal and informal training operational priorities.

IDENTIFY HIGH PERFORMING EMPLOYEES EARLY ON AND NURTURE.

1. Look for natural ability, the desire to take on challenges and responsibilities, and the ability to communicate.
2. People that demonstrate

strategic perspective and clarity of focus.

3. People that demonstrate an interest in results and in your expectations for success.
4. People that are "we not me" and who value teamwork.
5. People that behave ethically and can represent your company in your community.
6. People that reflect aptitude for learning, expertise and agility, and who can encourage others to succeed.
7. People that have the courage to make tough decisions and take calculated risks.
8. People with emotional intelligence who demonstrate empathy, learn from mistakes, work well with others and can be effective leading change.

HIRE SMART. CLOSE THE DEAL WITH HIGH PERFORMERS.

1. Have a true career path model to showcase opportunities in your company for advancement.
2. Provide context for growth. Offer them a career not just a job.
3. Take an interest in them personally, learn what makes them tick and what their passions are.
4. Invite them to spend time understanding your organization's strategic viewpoint and meeting employees representing different roles so they can visualize what it would be like to have an impact in your business and find a sense of purpose.

IN GAME ADJUSTMENTS. I believe in stressing that it is up to them to get promoted, not up to me to promote them. I stress the need to train their replacement. In my company, we have a coaching-mentoring culture, placing more emphasis on regular coaching than annual performance reviews. We call it, "coaching during the game." As in sports, we course correct in real time. We do not wait for year-end reviews. **L&L**

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THE FOUNDATION OF BUSINESS SUCCESS



A HOUSE IS ONLY AS STRONG as the foundation it's built upon, as I learned during one of my many summer jobs as a young adult. So, as I began my first lawn care business in 1984, one of the first things I did, after buying an old used van, was to craft my core values and put them on paper. In reality, I did not have a clue as to where I was going, as I just wanted to start it up and make more money than I could as a teacher, which unfortunately was not hard to do.

I had no idea I'd build my first business into what it became, and was not even dreaming of building a third business to becoming one of the largest in our region. And I really had no mission statement at that time – I just wanted to get customers, pay the bills and stay in business. The mission statement came a few years later, after I'd figured a few things out.

But I knew then, and I know now, what I believe. We all have core values, personally, and in the business world. We use them daily, hourly, every minute to make decisions and govern our thoughts, words and actions. It was not that difficult for me to put the values, six of them at the time, on paper, as I started my business. It was easy that first year, because it was just me. The challenge begins



BRAD JOHNSON is founder of LawnAmerica, which he sold to Swingle in 2016.

when it grows to two, then 10, and eventually 50 or more people, who are charged with sharing those same values.

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR. In most cases, the core values of a company begin as a reflection of the founder or owner. As the company and the owner evolves, those values may change a little – a new one added, or one be taken away. In my case, the six core values remained pretty much the same with just minor edits in the wording.

We added a 7th value about 10 years ago, a reflection of seeing the

importance of taking care of our people, which was not even on my radar when I started. These core values stood the test for 31 years over three different companies, each one being successful. They served us very well and were the base of our success.

Values, in order to really have a positive impact on the company culture and performance, have to be fully believed in and implemented. Many companies have "words on a wall," that are more hype than substance. And even in the best of companies, if we are honest, everyone can be susceptible to failing on core values. It happens in leadership, and on the front lines where our employees sometimes don't work and act in a way that fully reflects the core values of our companies.

“AS THE COMPANY AND THE OWNER EVOLVES, THOSE VALUES MAY CHANGE A LITTLE – A NEW ONE ADDED, OR ONE BE TAKEN AWAY.

MUST BE A CONSTANT. For company core values to be successful, they have to stand the test of time. Processes, people, markets and such will all change. True values should not change and be applicable over time. Values must apply to every worker in the company, so they must be broad strokes of how an employee views their work, how they act, the words they speak and how they perform their jobs. Values must prioritize what a company does, and how they do it. Values should show the role that a company plays in their community, and in our world.

Good core values will attract the type of candidates that are a good fit for the company. For example, if high morals and integrity are important enough to be listed as a core value, more than likely, you'll attract folks who value that value.

Without a solid and relevant set of core values, a company will just drift, and eventually evolve into something that the founder may not even recognize. And those values, assuming they are the right values for the company, have to be fully bought into by leadership and all employees, for them to be even worth the paper they are written on. That will always be the challenge for owners and leadership making sure that your people actually demonstrate their belief in those values by their actions and work. **L&L**

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LEGACY AND LEADERSHIP: JACLYN ISHIMARU-GACHINA OPENS UP ABOUT TAKING THE REINS AT GACHINA LANDSCAPE AFTER HER HUSBAND'S DEATH IN 2015



WINNING OUT WEST

Aaron Clark sustains a culture of teamwork that drives his people to succeed. **By Brooke N. Bates**



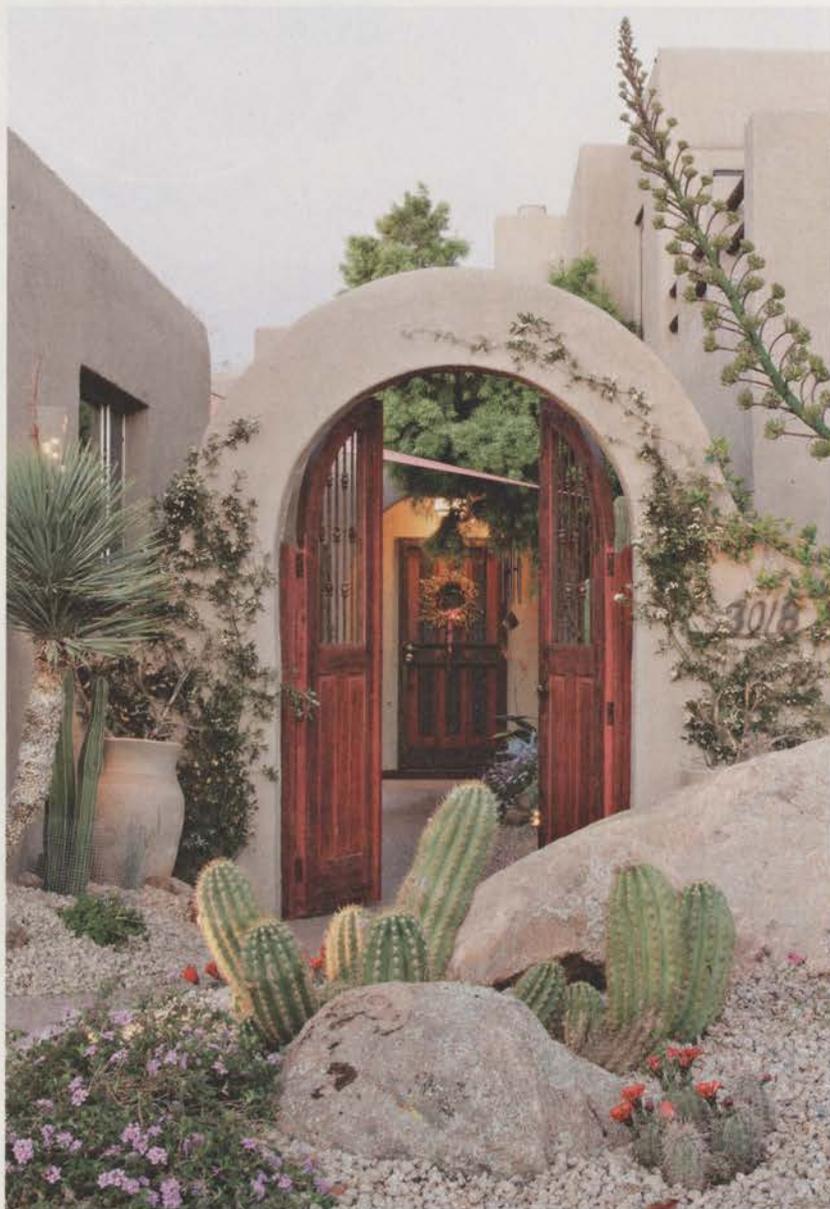
PROVIDING PHONE AND INTERNET SERVICES

isn't that different from providing lawn care services. In fact, they're "eerily similar," says Aaron Clark, who has launched companies in both industries.

At the telecom company Clark started and ran for 11 years, technicians installed equipment for his patented technology, and then performed monthly maintenance. Now, Clark manages technicians who install landscapes and irrigation systems, and provide ongoing sprinkler service and lawn care maintenance.

"What the workforce is doing may be different, but managing that business was almost identical to managing this business," says Clark, who purchased Desert Foothills Landscape in Cave Creek, Arizona, north of Phoenix, two years ago.

Although his experience outside of the green industry gives him a fresh perspective, Clark is no stranger to lawn care. He started his first lawn care company at age 12, mowing lawns around his neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio. He expanded as customers asked for mulching, tree trimming, snow shoveling, and new flowerbeds. The oldest of six kids, Clark enlisted the help of his brothers, who managed the company when he left for college.



Aaron Clark bought Desert Foothills Landscape two years ago. The company provides design/build, maintenance and irrigation services in Cave Creek, Arizona, just north of Phoenix.

Clark's business classes piqued his interest in retail and distribution. As part of his thesis for a final exam, Clark invented (and patented) a talking poster that sold millions, launching his career as a successful inventor and entrepreneur. After selling his last startup to a public company, Clark started looking for his next venture.

"It didn't matter what industry it was in. I was looking for the best company," he says. "I came across Desert Foothills because they were really known for their work. They were known around town as the best of the best."

The owners, Mark and Juanita Wdowiak, were retiring after 20 years running the business. What they'd built caught Clark's attention.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DESERT FOOTHILLS LANDSCAPE



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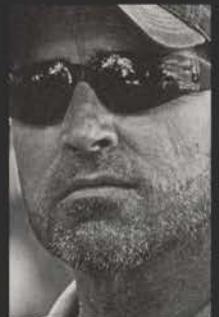


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Incentives to exceed expectations

"The people and the culture at the company were fantastic.

That's what drew me to the company, and what draws customers to us,"

he says. "What I've learned over the years in all the different ventures I've done, is if you've got good people, you're going to be successful."

Here's how Clark harnessed that culture to foster a winning team.

MAKING EMPLOYEES FEEL IMPORTANT. Clark knew that employees held the key to the company culture, so when he came



Aaron CLARK

Aaron Clark wants employees at Desert Foothills Landscape to feel important, happy and satisfied – but he knows it's not sustainable to keep giving them raises every time they succeed. So when he purchased the company two years ago, he implemented an incentive program to reward employee performance beyond a paycheck.

"It's not part of their core pay, but if they finish jobs within a certain timeline, that makes the company more efficient and helps create a little extra profit, so we can give some of that back," he says.

For sales associates, incentives work like commissions. For landscape crew members, incentives are based on project timelines built into the initial quote. It varies by project, but for example, if crews finish a two-month project in one month, each employee might get \$100 and the foreman gets double.

The catch is that "quality cannot be

compromised," Clark says. "A lot of people in the industry are against this type of program because they think, 'Those guys aren't going to care about anything but pushing numbers and getting their incentive.' That's why nobody gets anything unless the customer is head-over-heels phenomenally excited about their results."

That's also why Clark doesn't make incentives a large part of his team's pay. "It's a kicker, it's icing. It's just a little something for a job well done," he says. If incentives dangle too much dough in front of employees, they start to count on it, and may cut corners to get it. He makes sure his team understands the bigger picture of how and why they earn incentives.

"Implementing these programs comes with some responsibility to assure that we're not just chasing money," he says. "We're going to provide even better service, and the company's going to do a little better, and then some of that's going to be given back."

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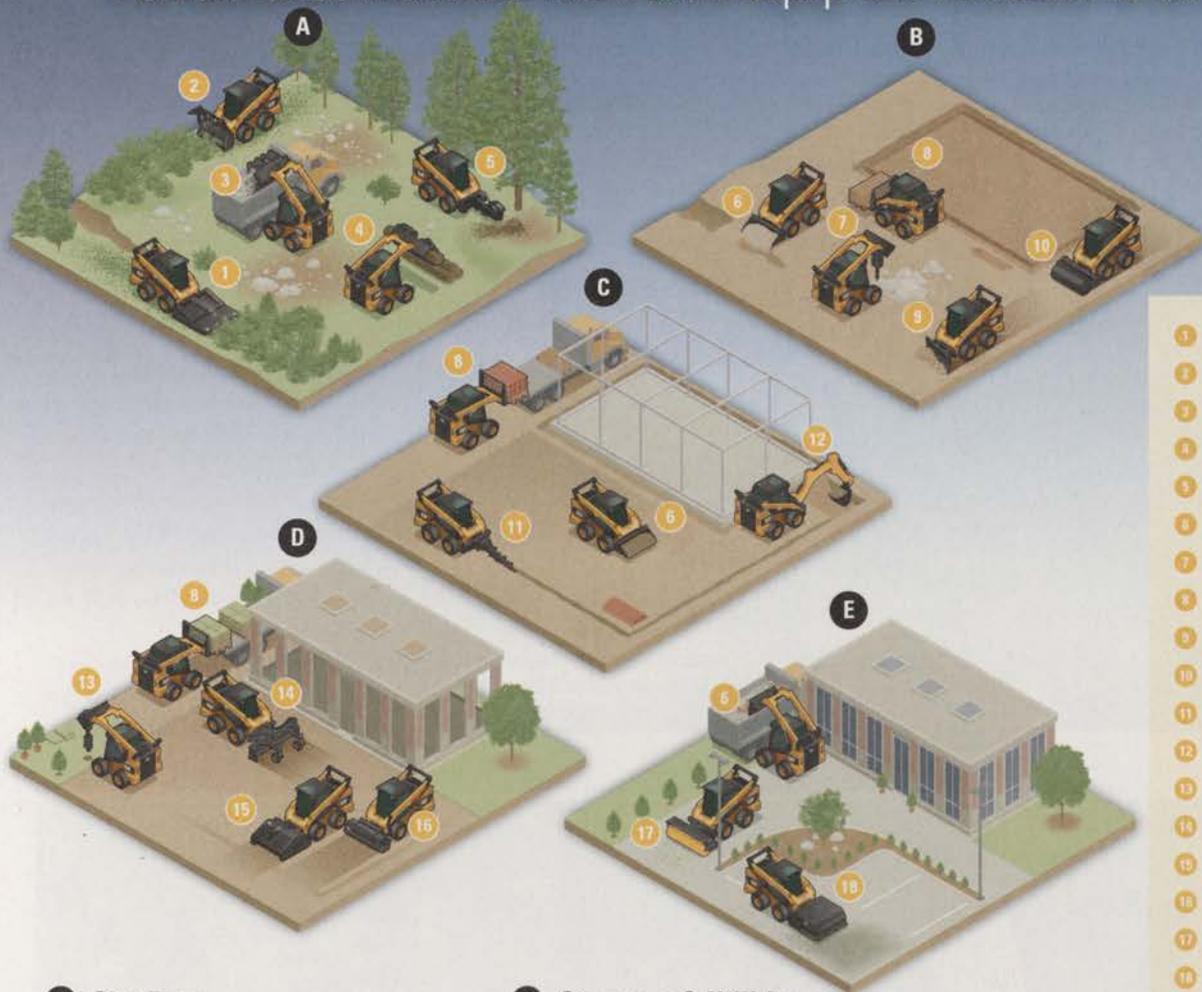


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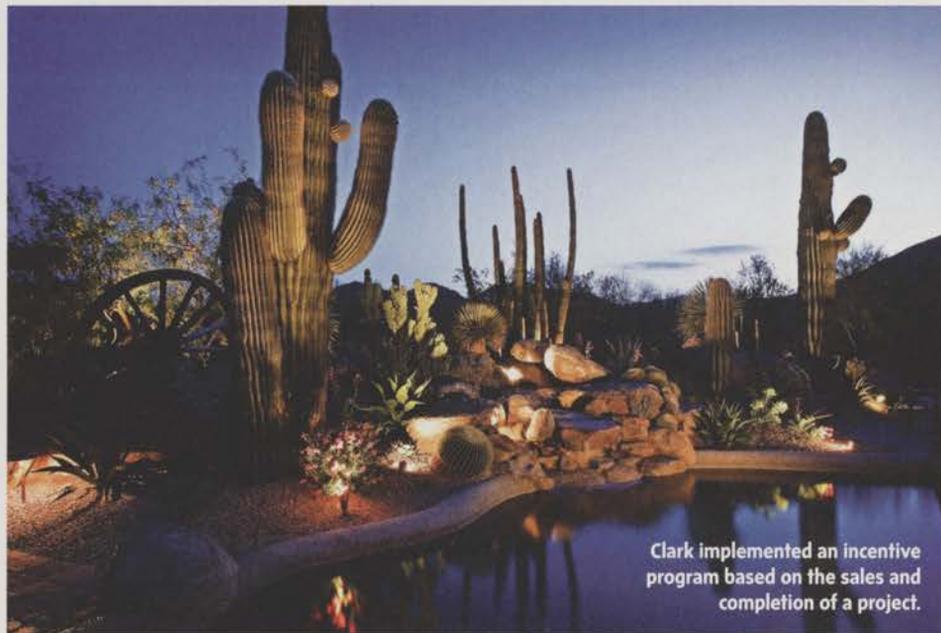
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Clark implemented an incentive program based on the sales and completion of a project.

onboard he listened to them with respect. He didn't think of them as employees, but fellow professionals – and that nuance was critical.

"The stereotype is that landscaping companies aren't always treated like 'real' companies," he says. "But if you treat it like a real business, every worker is a professional – even if they might not be using sophisticated code, computers and servers like in telecom.

"The workforce deserves the same attention and respect as the highest level professional in any industry. If you look at it like that, then everyone begins to feel important."

In fact, he says, "I don't even like to call them employees, because I think a good manager feels like he works for

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them, not the other way around. It's my job to keep them happy, satisfied, motivated and challenged. I'm constantly asking, 'What tools do you need to do your job well?'

When Clark started, the company rented cranes to transport large specimen cacti from its in-house nurseries to jobsites.

Not only was this a huge expense, but the logistics impacted timelines and budgets as crews sat around, waiting for cranes. Clark decided to purchase 14-ton and 90-ton cranes to ease the burden.

"It was a huge investment, but now we're totally in control of the process and the timelines," he says, which makes a difference, not just on projects, but in employee morale. "If you create a culture of success and you've got people who like to perform, they'd rather be working."

GEARS WORKING TOGETHER. "When I came in, I wanted everyone to understand what everyone else does and how important it is," Clark says. "If they understand that we're all gears working together like a watch, then they don't want to let each other down."

"They know another division is counting on them to perform, and if they don't, they know how it's going to jam them up."

Clark regularly shares updates from each division. There's the landscape division, which designs, builds and installs large, month-long landscape projects, accounting for about 65 percent of the company's revenue.

Then there's the specialty division, focused on smaller projects that only take a few days, like installing or repairing irrigation. The maintenance division is responsible for lawn care services like mowing, trimming and other gardening tasks that their high-end residential clientele request. The company also operates an off-site cactus farm where it grows plants for its projects, and a private on-site nursery where clients can select plants.

Once a quarter, the entire team of 150 comes together for an update about each department and other news and changes in the company.

"It gives them confidence that they're not

on an island," he says. "It gives them a sense that they're important to each other. Whenever I have to solve a dispute, that's my go-to: I talk about the whole company, what's going

on around them and what they're affecting.

"It puts responsibility on their shoulders if they can get that picture of 'we' rather than 'me.'" **L&L**



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Will not diminish lumen output or truncate beam spread like drop-in fixtures

Easy design & installation
9 to 15 volt operating range nearly eliminates voltage drop and delivers full stated lumen output even over long wire runs

15 YEAR LIMITED WARRANTY

On the light engine and electrical components. Warranty subject to change without notice. Visit www.kichler.com for full warranty and limitations.

View our full line of integrated products at kichler.com/landscape

KICHLER

IT'S NO LONGER BUSINESS AS USUAL.

AMERICA'S
LONGEST-LASTING
PICKUPS¹

AMERICA'S
MOST EFFICIENT
WORK VAN²



GET \$500 COMMERCIAL CASH ON TOP OF CURRENT OFFERS ON 2017 PROMASTER, PROMASTER CITY AND 3500 CHASSIS CAB.³

Ram has a full line of commercial vehicles to help you outpace the competition. From efficiently designed Ram ProMaster[®] and Ram ProMaster City[®] work vans to hardworking heavy duty pickups, they've been designed to help you work smarter and squeeze more productivity out of every day. Expanded cargo capacity with the ProMaster means one less load. Greater fuel efficiency on ProMaster City means one less stop; and a higher residual value means more for your bottom line! So if you're still operating under the banner of "business as usual," it's time to change the game.



COMMERCIAL
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¹ Based on IHS Automotive VIO registration data for all brands of GVW 1-3 pickup trucks continuously sold in the U.S. since 1988, Dodge and Ram have the highest overall percentage still on the road. ² Efficiency based on best-in-class payload, cargo capacity and fuel efficiency on Ram ProMaster City[®]. EPA estimated 28 mpg hwy. Actual mileage may vary. Class is small commercial van segment. ³ Offer for Commercial buyers/lessees who take delivery by May 31, 2017. See dealer for details. ⁴ 2017 Ram ProMaster City[®] has better retained value than Ford, Chevy or Nissan in its segment. ALG is the industry benchmark for residual values and depreciation data, www.alg.com. Ram ProMaster City[®] has higher residual value than Ford Transit Connect, Chevy City Express or Nissan NV200 in the small commercial van segment. Ram is a registered trademark of FCA US LLC.

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GROWTH CHART: HOW BAYTREE LANDSCAPE BOOSTED REVENUE BY 60 PERCENT

BACK IN BUSINESS: A NEW CEO AT BRIGHTVIEW INTRODUCES HIMSELF WITH A BIG ACQUISITION

MONEY MATTERS: WE ASKED TOP 100 EXECUTIVES FOR THEIR BEST (AND WORST) FINANCIAL ADVICE

LEGACY AND LEADERSHIP: JACLYN ISHIMARU-GACHINA OPENS UP ABOUT TAKING THE REINS AT GACHINA LANDSCAPE AFTER HER HUSBAND'S DEATH IN 2015



Success is **CONTAGIOUS**

It is an honor for **The Toro Company** to sponsor the Lawn & Landscape Top 100 list. We take pride in supporting this opportunity to recognize leaders in the field whose stories inspire us all. Success truly is contagious when you surround yourself with positive examples, and you'll find them in this report.

As landscape industry professionals, we share a common goal – not only to create beautiful landscapes but also to care for the land and its resources. The stories in this issue are a perfect example of how the choices you make can lead to vibrant futures, and we congratulate all of this year's landscape companies on their continued success.

This year's Top 100 is based on 2016 revenue from landscape profit centers, as reported by each of the listed companies. The companies on this list earned a combined revenue of \$9,161,843,124 in 2016, which is an increase of \$594,598,970 or 6.9 percent, over 2015. Companies on the list also reported total employment of 95,125. Based on the data, the average growth expected in 2017 is 9.9 percent.

The list includes companies from 26 states and four firms in Canada. From the oldest company, Davey Tree Expert Company founded in 1880, to the youngest company, Five Seasons Property Management, founded in 2015, they represent a lot of experience and innovative thinking.

We at Toro share that spirit of innovation, building on more than 100 years of history by looking toward the future and listening to our customers. We never stop working to develop new features and products that help landscape companies save time and be more productive and profitable.

For example, our new Titan HD zero-turn mower is equipped with tool-mounting brackets so that operators can carry what they need with them to save time and trips back to the truck. And all of our products are backed by local dealers who are committed to helping customers grow their business with the right equipment, service and support.

We hope this year's Top 100 report gives you a pulse on the strength of the industry and a positive outlook for what's ahead. As always, we are here to serve you with the equipment you need and wish you much success. Take care and keep growing in 2017! ●

DAVID ALKIRE
VICE PRESIDENT, RLC BUSINESSES



"The stories in this issue are a perfect example of how the choices you make can lead to vibrant futures, and we congratulate all of this year's landscape companies on their continued success."

2017 COMMEMORATIVE POSTER



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MAPPING REVENUE

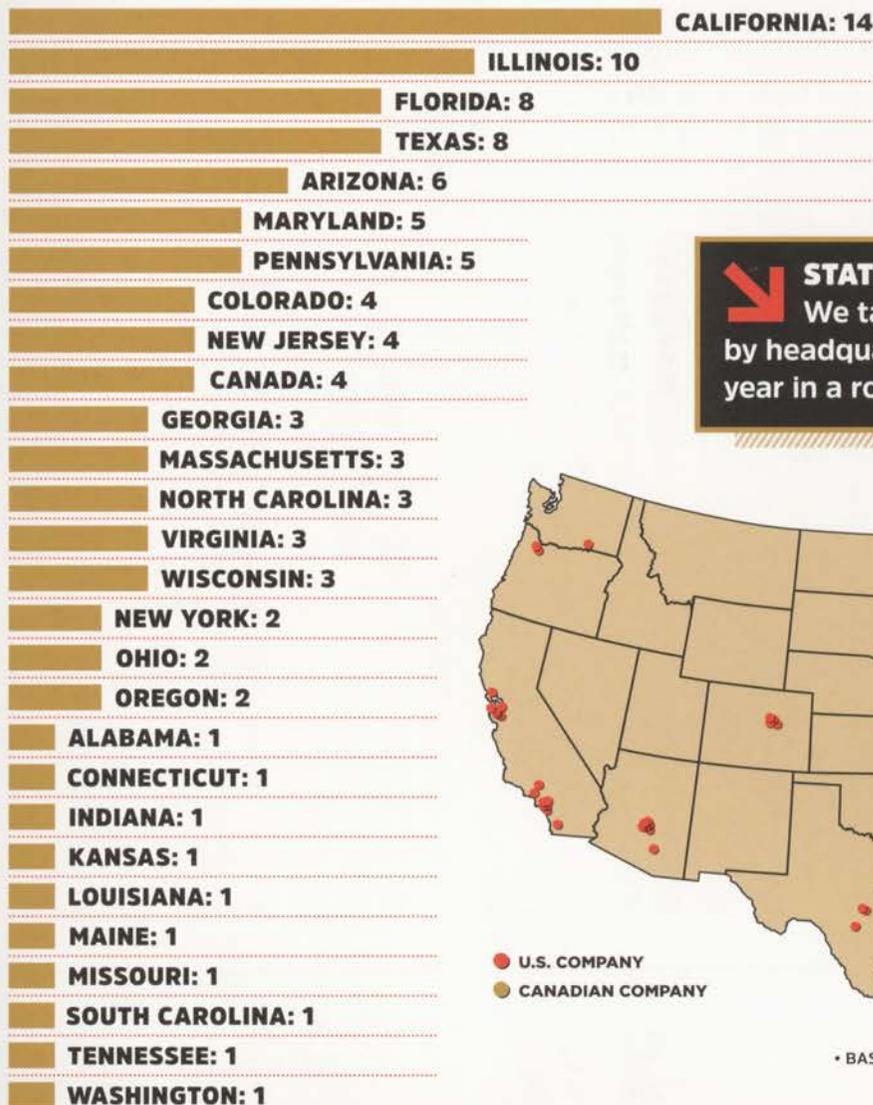
JUST ONE STATE REPRESENTS A THIRD OF THE TOTAL TOP 100.

Pennsylvania boasts 28 percent of total Top 100 revenue with \$2.6 billion from just five companies (BrightView, Five Seasons Property Management, Ambius, Merit Service Solutions and Shearon Design).

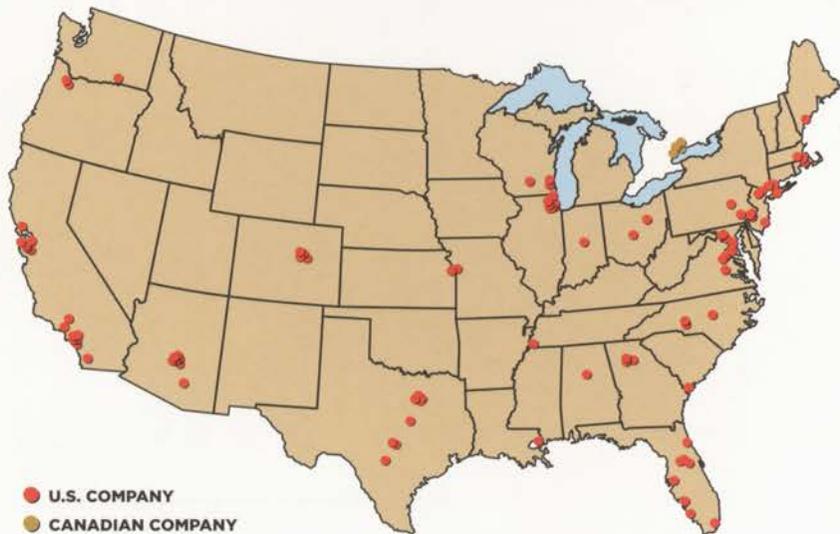
Tennessee comes in second place, but has only one company: TruGreen. The lawn

care giant posted \$1.3 billion in 2016 and represents 14 percent of the total list.

California is the third largest, but claims just 7 percent of total list revenue (\$648 million) with 14 companies. To put that in context, you'd need to triple all the Top 100 companies in California to equal just one BrightView.



STATE-BY-STATE CENSUS
 We tallied all 100 firms' locations by headquarters address. For the eighth year in a row, California tops the list.



• BASED ON DATA COMPILED BY LAWN & LANDSCAPE

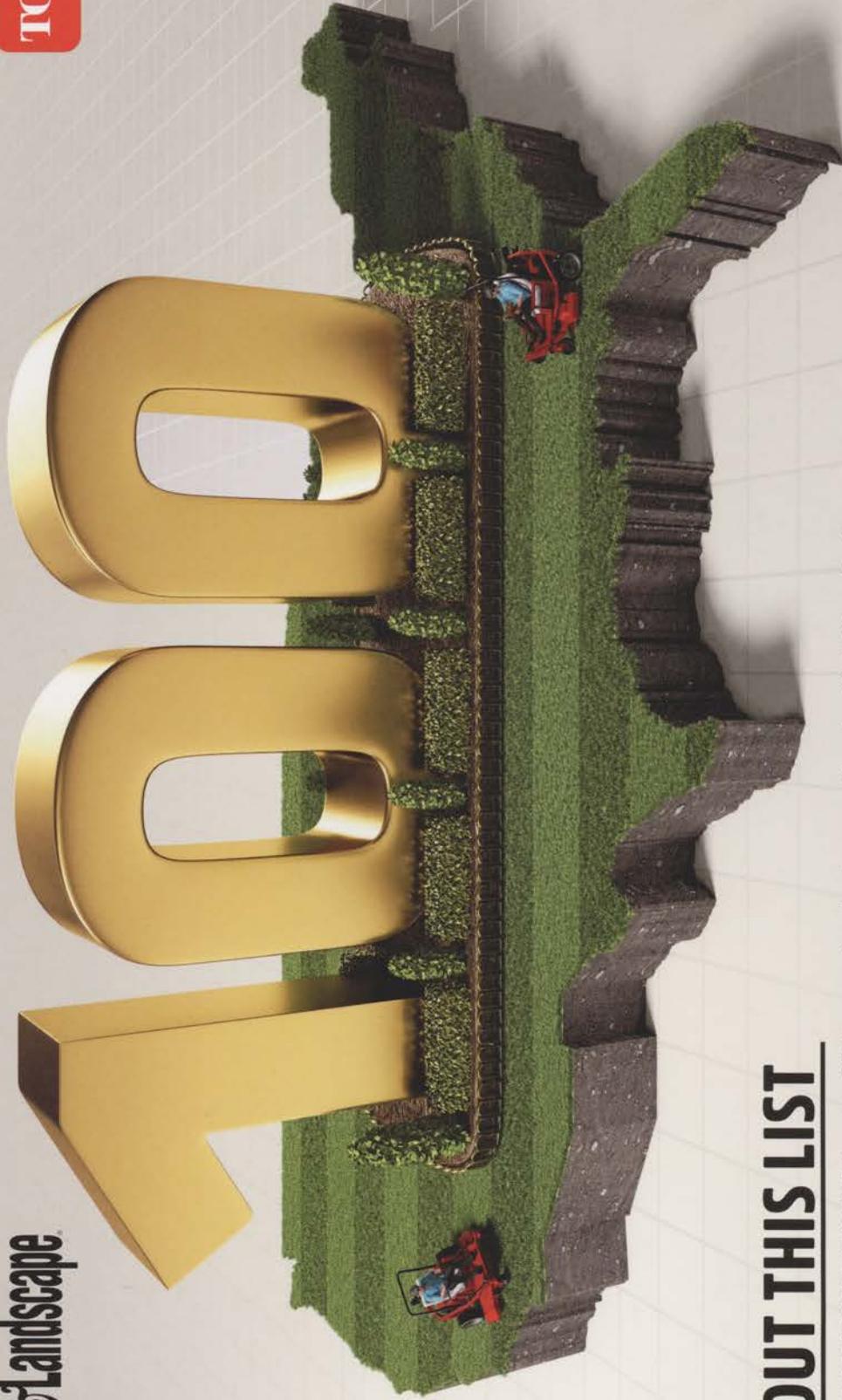
\$9.16 BILLION ↘ The total revenue for the Top 100 companies, an increase of \$594 million (or 6.9%) from 2016.

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ABOUT THIS LIST

THE LAWN & LANDSCAPE TOP 100 is based on 2016 revenue from landscape profit centers. Most information is reported by each company listed, and supplemental data are sourced from public records and reporting by L&L staff.

- ▶ A* indicates revenue estimated based on data from the 2016 Top 100 list.
- ▶ Companies on this list earned a combined revenue of \$9,161,843,124 in 2016, which is an increase of \$594,598,970 or 6.9 percent, over 2015. Companies on the list also reported total employment of 95,125. Based on the data, the average growth expected in 2017 is 9.9 percent.
- ▶ This year's list includes companies from 26 states and four firms in Canada. The states with the most Top 100 companies

- ▶ Baytree Landscape Contractors reported 60 percent growth, the largest jump on the list.
- ▶ Angler Environmental was acquired by Resource Environmental Solutions in September of 2016. RES is part of KKR, the same private equity company that owns BrightView.
- ▶ BrightView acquired the maintenance division of Marina Landscapes in early 2016. Its revenue does not include U.S. Lawns revenue, but does include franchise payments.
- ▶ Yellowstone Landscape acquired Ecoscape Solutions in

Abbreviations

- %MT: Maintenance
- %CLC/F: Chemical Lawn Care/Fertilization
- %LD/B/I: Landscape Design/Build/Install

are California (13), Illinois (10) and Florida (8).
 ▶ Companies that reported revenue in Canadian dollars have been converted to U.S. dollars using the 2016 average conversion rate of 0.76.
 ▶ The youngest company on the list is Five Seasons Property Management/Asplundh, founded in 2015 with the acquisition of Reliable Property Services (listed at 48 last year) and T.R. Gear.

December 2016.
 ▶ Merit Service Solutions was acquired by Eureka Capital in December 2016.
 ▶ TruGreen's revenue includes Scotts LawnService, which it acquired in April of 2016.
 ▶ Davey does not separate its landscape management revenue from its overall revenue.

%II/MT: Irrigation Installation/Maintenance
%IL: Interior Landscaping
%CR: Commercial Revenue
%RR: Residential Revenue
N/A: No Answer/Unknown

*** INDICATES NEW TO THE LIST**

2017 RANK	COMPANY	2016 RANK	2016 REVENUE	HEADQUARTERS	EMPLOYEES	% CHANGE FROM 2015	% CHANGE EXP. FOR 2017	% MT	%CLC/F	%LD/BI	%II/MT	%IL	%CR	%RR
1	BrightView	1	\$2,200,000,000	Plymouth Meeting, Pa.	22,000	10%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	TruGreen Cos.	2	\$1,317,054,000	Memphis, Tenn.	11,444	2%	7%	2%	86%	0%	0%	0%	14%	85%
3	The Davey Tree Expert Company	3	\$845,678,000	Kent, Ohio	8,600	3%	5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4	Bartlett Tree Experts	5	\$244,000,000	Stamford, Conn.	1,650	8%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	65%
5	U.S. Lawns	7	\$168,000,000	Orlando, Fla.	2,000	0%	5%	70%	3%	16%	3%	0%	100%	0%
6 (t)	LandCare	6	\$160,000,000	Frederick, Md.	4,000	-10%	0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	0%
6 (t)	Five Seasons Property Management/Asplundh	*	\$160,000,000	Philadelphia, Pa.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8	Park West Companies	10	\$150,745,000	Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif.	1,615	18%	14%	37%	0%	62%	0%	0%	100%	0%
9	Ruppert Landscape	12	\$149,000,000	Laytonville, Md.	1,275	21%	5%	41%	0%	52%	0%	0%	100%	0%
10	Weed Man	9	\$148,826,630	Mississauga, Ontario	4,050	4%	10%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
11	Ferrandino & Son	8	\$145,000,000	Farmingdale, N.Y.	350	-3%	7%	35%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
12	Yellowstone Landscape	13	\$137,500,000	Bunnell, Fla.	1,900	17%	10%	60%	10%	15%	10%	0%	100%	0%
13	Gothic Landscape	11	\$130,000,000	Valencia, Calif.	1,500	5%	15%	30%	0%	55%	15%	0%	100%	0%
14	Lawn Doctor	15	\$112,000,000	Holmdel, N.J.	1,350	7%	5%	0%	90%	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
15	Ambius	14	\$106,281,790	Reading, Pa.	975	2%	3%	0%	0%	3%	0%	97%	100%	0%
16	Merit Service Solutions	16	\$98,000,000	Malvern, Pa.	440	N/A	20%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	90%	0%
17	SavATree	17	\$89,700,000	Bedford Hills, N.Y.	695	6%	8%	0%	17%	0%	1%	0%	20%	80%
18	Massey Services	19	\$74,692,678	Orlando, Fla.	1,892	8%	15%	0%	26%	1%	4%	0%	12%	88%
19	Mainscape	18	\$74,019,000	Fishers, Ind.	1,000	4%	0%	68%	7%	6%	8%	0%	100%	0%
20	The Grounds Guys	22	\$72,480,000	Waco, Texas	600	25%	20%	50%	10%	13%	1%	0%	50%	40%
21	The Groundskeeper/Greater Texas Landscapes	20	\$68,000,000	Tucson, Ariz.	1,200	3%	3%	50%	0%	42%	6%	0%	100%	0%
22	Terracare Associates	29	\$62,422,947	Littleton, Colo.	1,200	30%	11%	67%	0%	21%	7%	0%	46%	54%
23	Denison Landscaping	24	\$60,150,000	Fort Washington, Md.	580	13%	10%	5%	0%	85%	8%	0%	98%	2%
24	The Greenery	34	\$60,100,000	Hilton Head Island, S.C.	890	39%	0%	75%	2%	20%	2%	0%	86%	12%
25	Garden Design	25	\$58,900,000	Farmers Branch, Texas	66	23%	5%	2%	0%	98%	0%	0%	35%	65%
26	Clintar Landscape Management	23	\$57,000,000	Markham, Ontario	900	-5%	2%	33%	0%	10%	2%	0%	99%	1%
27	NaturalLawn of America	26	\$56,042,988	Frederick, Md.	561	8%	8%	0%	99%	0%	0%	0%	3%	97%

Rank	Company	Revenue	Location	Employees	Change	Market Share	Customer Sat.	Revenue Growth	Profit Margin	Market Pen.	Brand Strength	ESG Score	Industry Rating
28	Metco Landscape	\$56,000,000	Aurora, Colo.	500	18%	n/a	10%	0%	40%	40%	0%	99%	1%
29	Spring-Green Lawn Care	\$53,832,000	Plainfield, Ill.	548	9%	10%	0%	97%	0%	1%	0%	1%	99%
30	Juniper Landscaping	\$49,000,000	Ft. Myers, Fla.	500	40%	25%	18%	2%	64%	16%	0%	99%	1%
31 (t)	Acres Group	\$48,000,000	Wauconda, Ill.	920	-8%	15%	39%	3%	25%	3%	0%	95%	5%
31 (t)	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	\$48,000,000	Falmouth, Maine	610	3%	4%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	96%	4%
33	Jensen Landscape	\$46,500,000	Campbell, Calif.	360	2%	+/-5%	35%	0%	65%	0%	0%	65%	25%
34	Heartland	\$45,000,000	Kansas City, Mo.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
35	Mariani Landscape	\$44,258,000	Lake Bluff, Ill.	509	-6%	12%	56%	0%	42%	0%	0%	11%	89%
36	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	\$44,000,000	Tampa, Fla.	N/A	5%	0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0%	100%	0%
37	Cagwin & Donward	\$42,000,000	Novato, Calif.	475	8%	6%	59%	0%	26%	5%	0%	75%	25%
38	Christy Webber Landscapes	\$40,300,000	Chicago, Ill.	435	0%	15%	45%	0%	47%	0%	0%	59%	41%
39	Girard Environmental Services	\$39,170,853	Sanford, Fla.	470	9%	7%	75%	0%	25%	0%	0%	100%	0%
40	Mission Landscape Cos.	\$38,930,547*	Irvine, Calif.	N/A	N/A	N/A	80%	0%	12%	0%	0%	100%	N/A
41	Sebert Landscape	\$38,700,091	Bartlett, Ill.	365	5%	5%	34%	1%	19%	2%	0%	100%	0%
42	Chapel Valley Landscape Company	\$38,200,000	Woodbine, Md.	500	12%	10%	65%	0%	20%	10%	0%	90%	10%
43	Rotolo Consultants	\$38,000,000	Sidell, La.	425	7%	25%	40%	5%	40%	15%	0%	85%	0%
44	CleanScapes	\$37,000,000	Austin, Texas	599	-3%	38%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
45	Dixie Landscape Co.	\$35,973,000	Medley, Fla.	305	5%	5%	5%	0%	80%	15%	0%	95%	5%
46	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	\$35,458,508	San Antonio, Texas	425	37%	7%	30%	0%	57%	13%	0%	45%	10%
47	Pierre Landscape	\$34,500,000	Irwindale, Calif.	225	25%	10%	8%	92%	0%	0%	0%	77%	23%
48	Choate USA	\$33,800,000	Carrollton, Texas	170	N/A	10%	0%	0%	49%	50%	1%	80%	20%
49	Somerset Landscape Maintenance	\$32,000,000	Palo Alto, Calif.	700	3%	15%	45%	15%	15%	15%	0%	90%	5%
50	Gachina Landscape Management	\$30,990,487	Menlo Park, Calif.	379	5%	5%	56%	0%	35%	9%	0%	N/A	N/A
51	Bemus Landscape	\$30,679,000	San Clemente, Calif.	400	4%	16%	64%	0%	2%	10%	0%	99%	1%
52	Greenscape	\$30,000,000	Raynham, Mass.	370	7%	10%	43%	0%	33%	0%	0%	100%	0%
53	McFall and Berry Landscape Management	\$29,682,000	Annandale, Va.	350	2%	N/A	58%	6%	20%	1%	0%	100%	0%
54	Landscape Workshop	\$29,560,000	Birmingham, Ala.	493	15%	10%	54%	0%	12%	5%	0%	95%	5%
55	AAA Landscape	\$29,100,000	Phoenix, Ariz.	385	13%	10%	55%	3%	36%	3%	0%	97%	3%
56	Environmental Management	\$28,900,000	Dublin, Ohio	300	15%	10%	28%	3%	53%	6%	0%	98%	2%
57	Landscape Concepts Management	\$27,942,000	Grayslake, Ill.	258	2%	2%	37%	0%	31%	6%	0%	97%	3%
58	Beary Landscaping	\$27,794,000	Lockport, Ill.	275	15%	11%	40%	3%	25%	4%	0%	85%	15%
59	Teufel Nursery	\$27,433,000	Hillsboro, Ore.	450	6%	10%	18%	0%	50%	32%	0%	100%	0%
60	Chalet Nursery, Landscape and Garden Center	\$27,400,000	Wilmette, Ill.	350	0.5%	2%	40%	4%	55%	0%	0%	0%	100%
61	Ryan Lawn & Tree	\$27,202,653	Ovland Park, Kan.	250	3%	10%	0%	60%	0%	15%	0%	1%	99%
62	Merchants Landscape Services	\$27,000,000	Santa Ana, Calif.	440	23%	15%	90%	5%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
63	Complete Landscaping Service	\$26,816,398	Bowie, Md.	286	34%	20%	47%	4%	26%	5%	0%	100%	0%
64	Southern Botanical	\$26,262,471	Dallas, Texas	250	10%	15%	23%	4%	55%	14%	2%	40%	60%
65	Angler Environmental	\$26,240,295	Warrenton, Va.	159	25%	10%	5%	0%	70%	25%	0%	20%	20%
66	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	\$26,240,000	Kennewick, Wash.	450	7%	8%	17%	53%	0%	3%	0%	30%	70%

67	R.P. Marzilli & Company	\$26,201,974	Medway, Mass.	150	4%	0%	18%	0%	77%	0%	0%	0%	9%	91%
68	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	\$26,195,414	Middleton, Wis.	329	4%	5%	18%	0%	44%	6%	0%	0%	80%	20%
69	EarthTones Design	\$26,100,000	Midlothian, Texas	165	39%	10%	2%	3%	65%	25%	0%	0%	85%	10%
70 (t)	Schumacher Companies	\$26,000,000	West Bridgewater, Mass.	245	-2%	0%	25%	2%	66%	3%	0%	0%	54%	46%
70 (t)	Yard-Nique	\$26,000,000	Morrisville, N.C.	450	2%	N/A	70%	0%	30%	0%	0%	0%	99%	1%
72	James River Grounds Management	\$25,952,083	Glen Allen, Va.	395	3%	5%	68%	0%	17%	4%	0%	0%	100%	0%
73	Shearon Design	\$25,500,000*	Plymouth Meeting, Pa.	N/A	N/A	N/A	30%	10%	30%	10%	5%	70%	30%	0%
74	Naturescape	\$25,096,897	Muskego, Wis.	265	10%	10%	10%	80%	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%	0%
75	Baytree Landscape Contractors	\$25,000,000	Chamblee, Ga.	240	60%	40%	30%	0%	70%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
76	Benchmark Landscapes	\$24,700,000	Austin, Texas	425	8%	1%	60%	0%	26%	11%	0%	98%	2%	0%
77	Caretaker Landscape and Tree Management	\$24,500,000	Gilbert, Ariz.	288	2%	11%	29%	0%	62%	3%	0%	100%	0%	0%
78	Scott Byron and Co.	\$24,245,000	Lake Bluff, Ill.	205	-8%	6%	35%	7%	58%	0%	0%	5%	95%	0%
79	Russell Landscape Group	\$24,176,000	Dacula, Ga.	360	16%	5%	43%	10%	15%	4%	0%	100%	0%	0%
80	The Loving Group	\$24,017,257	Charlotte, N.C.	150	35%	30%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0%	100%	0%
81	Swingle Lawn, Tree and Landscape Care	\$23,896,549	Denver, Colo.	275	6%	7%	0%	19%	4%	2%	0%	31%	69%	0%
82	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting	\$23,820,000	Germentown, Wis.	320	21%	8%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
83	Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping	\$23,551,220	Portland, Ore.	334	26%	22%	22%	0%	60%	0%	0%	50%	32%	0%
84	Gibbs Landscape Co.	\$23,500,000	Smyrna, Ga.	N/A	2%	2%	69%	9%	17%	5%	0%	57%	43%	0%
85 (t)	Kline Bros Landscaping	\$23,000,000	Ship Bottom, N.J.	140	10%	-4%	10%	0%	70%	10%	0%	25%	75%	0%
85 (t)	Parker Interior Plantscape	\$23,000,000	Scotch Plains, N.J.	135	N/A	N/A	1%	1%	5%	0%	93%	100%	0%	0%
87	Benchmark Landscape	\$22,244,108	Poway, Calif.	270	1%	0%	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%	N/A	N/A	0%
88	TBG Landscape	\$22,040,000	Whitby, Ontario	155	-12%	-12%	1%	0%	94%	0%	0%	N/A	N/A	0%
89	Stay Green	\$21,430,500	Santa Clarita, Calif.	335	9%	25%	55%	1%	29%	2%	0%	99%	1%	0%
90	SiteWorks	\$21,325,000	Chandler, Ariz.	143	13%	13%	30%	0%	60%	5%	0%	100%	0%	0%
91	Designs by Sundown	\$21,300,000	Littleton, Colo.	200	24%	12%	20%	3%	68%	6%	0%	10%	90%	0%
92	High Tech Landscapes	\$21,084,711	Branchburg, N.J.	362	5%	6%	58%	5%	15%	7%	0%	60%	30%	0%
93	Berghoff Design Group	\$21,000,000	Scottsdale, Ariz.	300	5%	5%	40%	0%	40%	10%	0%	0%	100%	0%
94	Nutrilawn	\$20,653,000	Toronto, Ontario	N/A	6%	5%	0%	90%	0%	5%	0%	10%	90%	0%
95	Ecoscape Solutions Group	\$20,608,800	Huntersville, N.C.	239	57%	15%	49%	0%	48%	2%	0%	99%	0%	0%
96	Frank and Grossman Landscape Contractors	\$20,599,000	San Francisco, Calif.	220	13%	8%	36%	0%	60%	4%	0%	25%	75%	0%
97	Cleary Bros. Landscape	\$20,400,000	Danville, Calif.	250	17%	10%	32%	5%	37%	10%	0%	20%	80%	0%
98	Munie Greencare Professionals	\$20,313,201	Caseyville, Ill.	325	12%	10%	70%	3%	23%	0%	0%	98%	2%	0%
99	Integrated Landscape Management	\$20,285,000	Tempe, Ariz.	304	6%	12%	52%	2%	26%	7%	0%	N/A	N/A	0%
100	Heron Lawn and Pest Control	\$20,148,622	Apopka, Fla.	202	28%	15%	0%	67%	0%	15%	0%	5%	95%	0%

The Top 100 list generates a lot of data: annual revenue, percentage changes from last year, percentage changes for next year, seasonal and full-time employee head counts, service breakdowns.

It's a lot.

But multiply all the data we collect from each of the 100 companies by 20 years of publishing the list, and you get a whole lot more.

The Lawn & Landscape team has spent the better part of the year so far compiling and sorting through not just this year's Top 100 data, but information from all the lists since we started publishing them in 1998. We wanted to give you even more context for what the list – and the companies on it – mean to the industry.

But the Top 100 and the companies that make it up are much more than just numbers. Each of the firms is made up of people – sometimes a few dozen, and sometimes more than the population of a small U.S. city.

So we've highlighted those people as well. We've gathered stories on what they're doing right, what they've done wrong and how they've responded to challenges both personally and professionally to continue to grow.

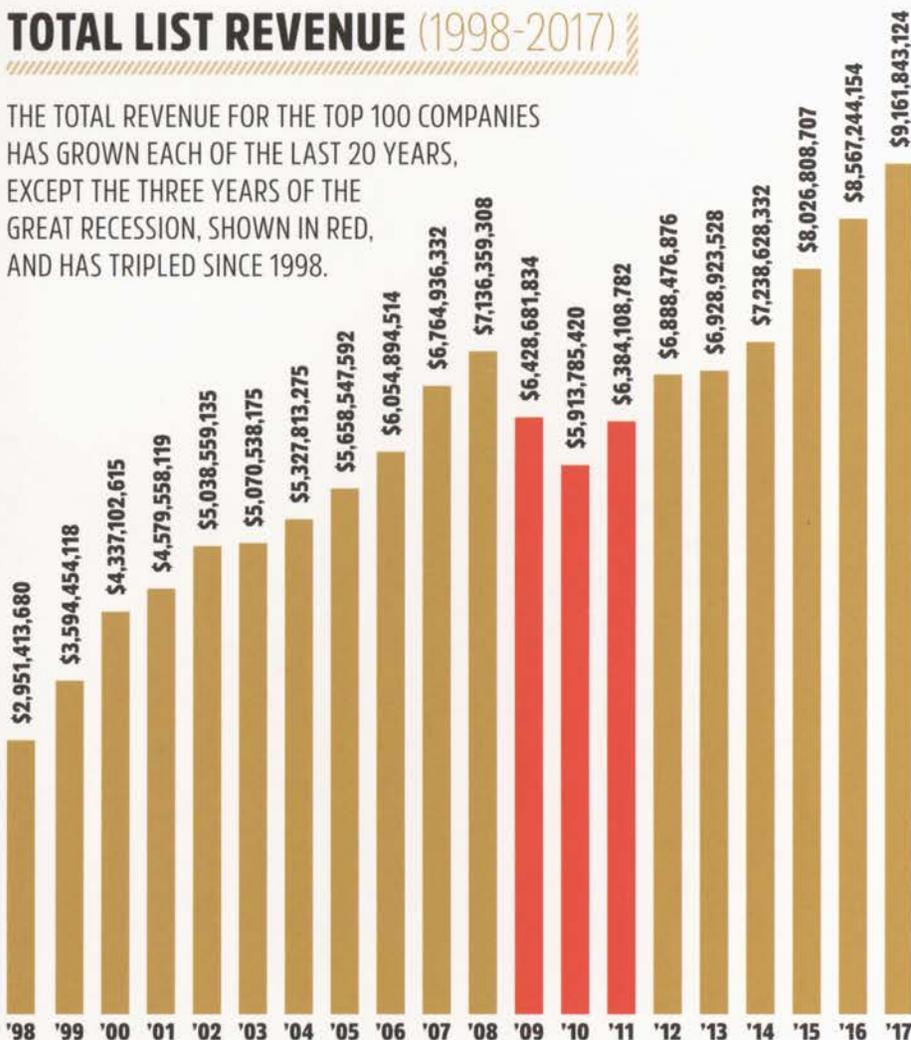
Read on and learn how they did it, and how you can, too. – *Chuck Bowen*

20 YEARS

WE ANALYZED TWO DECADES OF DATA TO GIVE

TOTAL LIST REVENUE (1998-2017)

THE TOTAL REVENUE FOR THE TOP 100 COMPANIES HAS GROWN EACH OF THE LAST 20 YEARS, EXCEPT THE THREE YEARS OF THE GREAT RECESSION, SHOWN IN RED, AND HAS TRIPLED SINCE 1998.



TRUGREEN COMPANIES X16

VALLEYCREST/ BRICKMAN (NOW BRIGHTVIEW) X4

IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP

WHILE THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST CHANGES EVERY YEAR, THE TOP COMPANY HAS REMAINED PRETTY CONSISTENT. TRUGREEN PLACED FIRST 16 OUT OF 20 YEARS. BRIGHTVIEW AND ITS LEGACY COMPANIES GRABBED THE OTHER FOUR.



OF TOP 100

YOU EVEN MORE INSIGHT INTO THE INDUSTRY'S BIGGEST FIRMS.



2 STATES

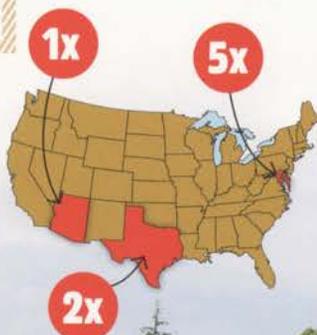
HAVE DOMINATED L&L'S TOP 100 LIST, WITH CALIFORNIA CLAIMING THE MOST SPOTS 15 TIMES IN THE LAST 20 YEARS, AND ILLINOIS WITH 5.

THE OTHER STATE AT THE TOP?

Florida, which has been either 2nd or 3rd all 20 years.

THREE FOR THIRD

THREE STATES HAVE BEEN TIED FOR THIRD FOR SEVERAL YEARS WITH EIGHT OR NINE TOP 100 COMPANIES EACH: **TEXAS** TWICE (2001 AND 2016), **MARYLAND** FIVE TIMES (2005, 2006, 2008, 2013 AND 2016) AND **ARIZONA** ONCE (2016).



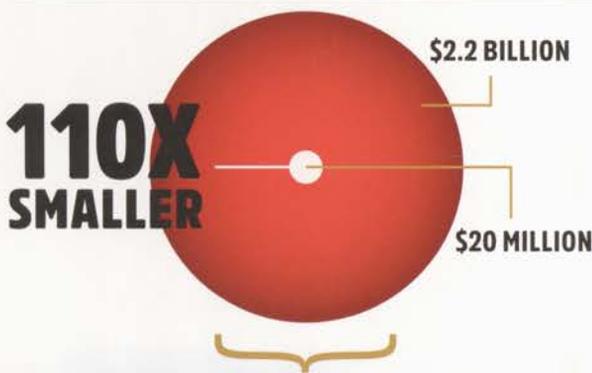
TOP TO BOTTOM

EVEN ON THE TOP 100, THERE'S A WIDE GAP BETWEEN THE LARGEST AND SMALLEST COMPANIES.

1998 HIGHEST VS. LOWEST GROSSING



2017 HIGHEST VS. LOWEST GROSSING



HIGHEST GROSSING

↑ **275%**

LOWEST GROSSING

↑ **382%**

IN THE LAST 20 YEARS, THE HIGHEST-GROSSING COMPANY HAS INCREASED BY **275%** AND THE LOWEST-GROSSING COMPANY BY **382%**.

One year after her husband's death, Jackie Ishimaru-Gachina has stepped up, taken the reins of her family's company and is steering it toward a future for her two sons.



Legacy & Leadership

By Chuck Bowen

Jackie Ishimaru-Gachina never intended to run the landscape company she and her husband, John, founded in 1988. But after John faced his third bout with cancer and died in 2015, she was left with a choice: step up and run the business, or acquiesce to the countless offers to buy it and cash in on the decades of work.

TOP 100

GACHINA LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT



The Gachinas: from left, Dominic, John, Jackie and Michael. After John's death in 2015, Jackie stepped up to run the \$30-million company in part to make sure it thrives until Dominic, 22, and Michael, 25, can take over as leaders in their own right.

Ishimaru-Gachina had worked as an adviser to the company and sounding board for John – her official title was co-owner – but had not served in any hands-on capacity. And she had big shoes to fill: John was gregarious and a tireless advocate for his employees, often giving them cash to cover car payments or unexpected medical bills, and giving them their jobs back after they were fired or left of their own accord.

After he died, the company also lost its general manager and a key branch manager, adding further turmoil to an already uncertain situation. Many in the industry assumed



“The most that they had ever heard about me was that I raised two sons and that I rode a horse. There was no mention before of any experience that I had that I could do the job.”

**Jackie
Ishimaru-Gachina,
CEO**

Ishimaru-Gachina would sell – a \$30-million company in a thriving Northern California market would be a prize.

But she didn't. She decided to step up, dig in and take the reins of the business, leading it out of one of the most difficult transitions it had yet experienced.

‘A TAILSPIN.’ John passed away in December of 2015. A few months later, in February 2016, the general manager that he had hired and groomed to succeed him in retirement, Craig Van Dorp, resigned over differences on how to run and grow the company. Ishimaru-Gachina stepped in as president and

CEO, and then in April, one of her branch managers left as well.

Ellen Ely, a human resources consultant for many years with Gachina – and who gave John's eulogy at his funeral – said the sudden departure of Van Dorp surprised everyone.

“John's passing wasn't sudden or unexpected,” Ely says. “What was is that the GM quit. That put it into a tailspin.”

So Ishimaru-Gachina, still reeling from the death of her husband, faced spring at the helm of a \$30-million company with almost 400 employees missing two key managers and competitors that wanted to buy up her company and all her talent.



She pulled her senior and middle managers into a room and told them she had decided to step in as CEO, and that she hoped they would all stay on. But she wasn't sure they would.

"They didn't know me. Because the most that they had ever heard about me was that I raised two sons and that I rode a horse," Ishimaru-Gachina says. "You know, there was no mention before of any experience that I had that I could do the job. And so, rightly so, they were skeptical. And so, it really took about six months for them to feel comfortable with me and believe that I could lead this company."

TRANSITION. Tyler Stocking, a branch manager for Gachina during this time and today, says middle- and senior-level managers had to work hard to keep crews calm.

"There was a lot of uncertainty. The (management) staff were not scared of losing a job – they knew it wasn't going to unravel overnight. But the crews felt that more because they don't see the whole operation," Stocking says. "It took our staff to calm them down and help them understand that we're not going anywhere."

Gachina Landscape Management in 2015 had 375 employees, and many were getting headhunted. "They were getting job offers left and right from all my competition. From the head all the way down to the field personnel, everybody was fair game for my competition," Ishimaru-Gachina says. "And so, it really is a testament to John and to the company that they see a future here and that they are willing to stay."



Jackie Ishimaru-Gachina and her husband, John, started Gachina Landscape Management in 1988.



GACHINA EXECUTIVE TEAM

Jackie Ishimaru-Gachina,
president, CEO, owner

Denise Ritch, director
of human resources

Sharon Chao, controller

**William Cruz and
Tyler Stocking**, senior
branch managers

**Joe DeSena and
Lauren Galanes**,
branch managers

Cristina Prevarin,
sustainability manager

Chad Sutton,
water manager

But that skepticism that Stocking and the other managers worked to assuage extended beyond her employees. Many in the industry assumed that

Ishimaru-Gachina would sell the company. She still gets calls from companies interested in buying. But she promised her employees that she would continue the legacy of John's leadership.

"I said to (the employees), 'The easiest thing for me to do is just to cash out, take that money, travel and not have ... the responsibility of the company. That's the easy way out. But that's not what I'm gonna do,'" Ishimaru-Gachina says.

OUTSIDE HER COMFORT ZONE.

But the transition to CEO has not been easy for her. In her new role, she had to become the face of Gachina both inside the operation and in the broader industry. In the past year, she has toured Mariani Landscape in Chicago, attended the National Association of Landscape Professionals' National Collegiate Landscape Competition and joined a CEO networking group in the San Francisco Bay area.

"I've had to come out of my comfort zone and make a conscious decision that this is right for the company and this is what I need to do to step up. John was just a natural at this kind of stuff. He thrived on it – loved having his picture taken, loved being interviewed. ... I have always been a background person. But I know what I need to do to keep this company viable and to continue John's legacy, and so I make myself do these things."

Continuing that legacy means one day passing the business to her sons – Michael, 25, is currently an account manager with the company, and Dominic, 22, is a horticulture student at Cal-Poly, San Luis Obispo.

And keeping the company viable means continuing its growth. Since 2012, Gachina's top-line revenue has grown by nearly half, from \$20.9 million to \$30.9 million last year. Employee retention was 95 percent last year, and the average employee tenure is 9 years, according to the company.

Ishimaru-Gachina has implemented new software for the business, examined its customer makeup and instructed managers to get rid of unprofitable customers, and doubled-down on sustainability initiatives.

Though the last year has been difficult professionally and emotionally for Ishimaru-Gachina, she says that the tasks ahead of her have not been impossible, thanks to her team.

"I've learned that with the support of my team, who I think are the best in the business, I can do this," Ishimaru-Gachina says. "And they believe I can do it, too." ●

TOP 100

SEBERT LANDSCAPE



Electric Avenue

Sebert Landscape embraces new technology to cut down on carbon.

By Kate Spirgen

As gas prices hit \$4 a gallon in 2012, Sebert Landscape was looking for an alternative to gas to reduce costs, cut down on noise and lessen its carbon footprint. So when commercial electric equipment became a viable option, the Bartlett, Illinois-based company jumped at the opportunity.

“It was about doing the right thing and, of course, if we could help reduce our energy costs, that was a benefit for us and create a healthier way of doing our work,” says Jeff Sebert, owner.

But Sebert needed to find an efficient way to charge all of those battery packs. Since the company’s LEED-

certified headquarters has solar panels, they decided to put the panels on the trailers to power equipment in the field.

“We knew immediately with the battery-powered equipment, we had to have on-board charging for that because you can’t have them go dead halfway through the day,” says Ralph Meyer, fleet manager.

The company built its first prototype in 2012 and crews really started rolling out in retrofitted solar trailers the year after. Employees were a little reluctant at the start, but now they’re embracing the technology.

“At first, they really didn’t like electric because it impeded their efficiency and that frustrated them. But, as the equipment gets better and more powerful, and the battery power is getting longer, they’re actually finding it to make them more productive, so they’re really embracing it and they’re really starting to like it,” Meyer says.

One branch liked the electric equipment so much, it requested five more solar-powered trailers and Sebert happily delivered.

Now with 16 operating trailers, the company is still improv-



Sebert made the switch to run on 90 percent propane mowers around the same time it started using electric handheld equipment.

ing on the technology. Every time they retrofit another trailer, they try to make it a little more efficient and cost-effective, and lessen the footprint to take up less space in the trailer.

The first solar system cost about \$10,000, but by switching to a smaller inverter, it's down to about \$5,000 now. "We actually cut our power source capacity in half," Meyers says. "We basically went through the learning curve of understanding how much we need and how long lasting. We

overbuilt it to start with and we kind of knew that but we didn't want our crews to run out."

On the mower side, Sebert made the switch to run on 90 percent propane around the same time it started using electric handheld equipment. Sebert says it reduces carbon, leaves less wear and tear on the equipment and in the end, it's better for both the operator and those around the crews.

Plus, Meyer says, upkeep is much easier. There are no repair costs for things like spark plugs,

air filters and recoils, and there are no carburetor problems. Crews don't have to worry about spilling gas or priming, choking and starting equipment

"The guys with the battery powers grab it and walk out of the trailer and they're working," he says. "There is increased efficiency. There's no doubt about it."

Crews can also start earlier in the morning without having to worry about noise disrupting residential areas.

Sebert says other companies in the area have been asking about their system, and if fuel prices rise again, he thinks more companies will jump on board.

"I think the manufacturers need to give us more options to be able to provide for the systems we're building because it's not the most simple thing in the world to do and the average landscaper probably isn't going to undertake this initiative but I think in the long run it's green, it's going to save money over the gas you're purchasing," he says. ●

EXPANDING THE WORKFORCE

FINDING GOOD, RELIABLE FIELD WORKERS is always a struggle, so Sebert decided to look into a market many landscape companies don't - women.

"So, we made a direct promotion to hire women and create crews that could do some of the work that they're very capable of doing," Sebert says.

Two years ago, Sebert put the word out to their employees to encourage them to tell friends and family members that the company was hiring. The company has 10 female crew members in three crews now.

The company is also working on a marketing video targeting both men and women to highlight the advantages of working in the green industry. Many of employees came from factories or warehouses, so Sebert wants to showcase the benefits of working outdoors.

"I would tell you that anybody that works in our industry, that's a reason you started out in the field and you liked what you were doing," Sebert says.

For now, female crews handle bed maintenance, planting flowers, watering and sometime shoveling in the winter months. But that could expand to maintenance services like mowing and line trimming. "They're very capable of doing that; they just haven't had the situation that has allowed us to do that yet," Sebert says.

And so far, the reaction from employees has been great. "I thought that there would be some sort of maybe negative perception from the guys in the field and we didn't see that and actually after promoting this and we kind of reached out to the guys and they embraced it and thought it was a good idea," Sebert says.



BEST ADVICE, WORST ADVICE

We asked executives at our Top 100 companies what's the best and worst financial advice they've received.

BEST ADVICE

When we were first starting out, my banker explained the following: Even though you may have the cash to pay for an asset, resist the temptation to pay cash. It is better to finance an asset over the life of an asset. This is because when you need cash in a tough market and the banks are reluctant to lend, then you will be glad you used financing when you could get it. In other words, always keep a cash reserve for when you need it!

Jon Georgio,
CEO, Gothic Landscape

WORST ADVICE

Pay bills the day they are due. People think you are a financial risk.

Larry Ryan, president,
Ryan Lawn & Tree

BEST ADVICE

To convert from a "C" corporation to an "S" corporation 15 years ago. It allowed us to develop and implement our company succession plan, transferring ownership to the third generation while minimizing tax consequences to the retiring principles.

Steve Glennon, president,
CEO & COO, Cagwin & Dorward

TOP 100 BRIGHTVIEW



BrightView has 23,000 employees spread out across almost 300 locations. The company posted \$2.2 billion in 2016 revenue.

An outsider's **PERSPECTIVE**

L&L sits down for an exclusive interview with the new CEO of BrightView.

By **Chuck Bowen**

In the years since the merger, BrightView has seen key leadership leave, including co-CEOs Roger Zino in 2015 and Andrew Kerin in 2016, and struggled to integrate the cultures and staff of the two legacy operations. Andrew Masterman joined the company last fall from Precision Castparts, a \$10 billion aerospace parts manufacturing company recently acquired by Berkshire Hathaway.

In an exclusive interview, Masterman shares his vision for BrightView, discusses the company's first major acquisition since the merger and what it means to have a leader from outside the landscape industry at the helm of the world's largest landscape company.

Chuck Bowen: There's nobody within the landscape industry that's ever led a \$2 billion company. But there's a contingent in the industry that says "This guy doesn't know landscaping. He's not one of us." Do you worry about that?

Andrew Masterman: I don't worry about it at all. Look, we have 23,000 employees. When you put in all of our sites, we have almost 300 geographical locations throughout the country. Managing that kind of an enterprise takes an approach to make sure you create the entrepreneurship and the autonomy within the structure of having all the advantages of scale.

It takes a different skillset to understand how to do that to go in and manage that kind of a scale. Fortunately, I'll tell you, the senior leadership we've tapped into in the organization, well, they may not all – some have – come from the industry. Taking that balance, taking that mixture of talent that allows you to understand the advantages we can do from taking a scale and then translating that into an entrepreneurial environment for our leaders in the field to excel at their craft I think is unparalleled in the industry.

CB: As we're talking today, you've got 100 days under your belt. Tell me what you see as BrightView's biggest challenges in the next year or two.

AM: Well, I think the challenges we face are no different than the challenges the rest of the industry faces. You said it right when we walked in, crew hiring, crew retention, the challenge you have on immigration. I mean,



all that continues to face us, just like anybody else. That being said, we're seeing an increasing number of just full-time U.S. workers that apply here and are just permanent residents.

CB: What do you think is driving that increase in employees who are not guest workers?

AM: It's just deliberate attention to making sure that we focus in on getting the communities that we have. Looking at diversified products that we can offer. We've made some push into looking at offseason activities, not just snow clearing. You look at our branches in Boston, you look at our branches in Chicago, we've had a heavy decoration growth. Most of Chicago's downtown holiday decorations are done by our Chicago branch.

CB: You talked about the immigration being in the news. You guys are a very large user of the H-2B program. What impact do you see the Trump administration having on BrightView?

AM: We're 100 percent E-Verify. So any new employees that we hire has to be – have to have the right to work in the United States. And that's not any change versus last season. It's something we just deal with.

CB: Tell me why Marina Landscape's maintenance business was an attractive acquisition for you.

AM: We're focused on organic growth with our current clients. We're also focused in on joining up and acquiring those companies that make sense from either a geographic footprint or from a culture, but mostly from a geographic footprint either matching



Andrew Masterman joined BrightView last fall from Precision Castparts. Despite not having landscape experience, he's not worried about how that will affect his role with the company.

with our current locations or providing potential opportunities to provide those services. We have places we don't exist. Marina was a great matchup with our current footprint in Southern California. Marina, culturally, the approach to business that the leadership has had matches up with how we approach running a business, which is a sense of accountability and a sense of – an orientation towards growth and an orientation toward safety and quality.

CB: For a long time Brickman or ValleyCrest was the exit strategy for a lot of companies. And I don't think that works anymore.

AM: No. The reality is we have a great national presence. And number one, we want to make sure we service our clients we have today and create great opportunities for the employees we have, number one. As we look



Andrew Masterman

Title: CEO, BrightView

Education: Bachelor's degree in political science, Colorado College; an MBA and two master's degrees in Japanese studies and industrial engineering from the University of Michigan.

Family: wife, Cheryl; three sons: Zachary, 6; Nicholas, 14; and Ryan, 12

outside of that for either areas we aren't present today or areas that make a lot of sense which complement our current activities, we'll absolutely entertain those companies that culturally

are going to fit within the way we run the business.

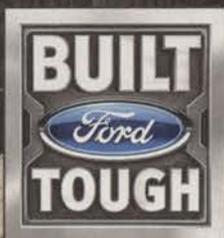
I think you said it well earlier. This is somewhat about the Marina acquisition and in light of that is what you asked and that it kind of that signaled BrightView's back. All the change that has occurred with the merger and some of the instability in leadership ... BrightView's here. We're solid. We have a committed group, a dedicated group of employees. We want to create safety, quality, excellence in the field. And we're focused here on making sure that we have a local approach with a national presence.

CB: How do you do that?

AM: Really by giving the branch manager as many tools and freedom to manage the business as they see fit within the branches. So many times, national compa-

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BrightView has moved away from all employees reporting to one national location. Instead, employees will report to someone regionally who understands the area.

nies will come in and manage it nationally with a local presence.

CB: What did you change for those branch managers that wasn't the case before?

AM: A lot of it is we decentralized functional businesses. So there was a strong central approach within the group and what we've done is really tried to take many of the central resources that we had and push them out into the field. For example, we had a very centralized sales organization. There was a head of sales here in Plymouth Meeting.

There's no longer a head of sales. Sales reports into the regionals. We've kind of taken out kind of the bureaucratic layer that we have centrally, try and get as much functionality down day-to-day touching clients, touching crew into the field.

CB: So for example, the sales force in western Pennsylvania will report to a regional sales rep?

AM: As opposed to someone like me. Or more appropriately probably from Western Pennsylvania. Let's talk about Phoenix, Arizona. OK. (Laughs) That guy in Phoenix, Arizona, is not going to report to somebody in Plymouth Meeting. That guy in Phoenix, Arizona will report up through a guy that's in the Southwest region, who knows the region, gets the customer base, gets the horticulture, gets what we're about in the Southwest.

CB: What about purchasing? Is that at the



"We've made some push into looking at offseason activities, not just snow clearing."

Andrew Masterman,
CEO

branch level? Is that at the regional level? Is that up here?

AM: We have buying programs that we negotiate nationally. We also look at individual branches on what's needed for those branches for specifically what operates and how they can effectively – if they need to do something that's unique, they absolutely should have the autonomy and flexibility to do something that's unique.

Something that's pretty unique on an equipment standpoint that we can do at BrightView: We're buying hundreds of industrial strength electric lawn mowers. (Mean Green Mowers is) working with us on developing a national platform to be able to go into verticals and really sell a quiet service in multiple markets.

Again, we can do this. We have scale. We have size. We can experiment with some

of these things. We have created dedicated vehicles and trucks with charging stations for this equipment that we'll be able to put electric lawnmowers, you know, both push mowers and standup mowers in the same trailer, be able to be plugged in with battery backup, do a job, come back in, plug them in.

That trailer's been outfitted to do this. And then to go to those clients, multiple clients in a string of routes where we can be a 100-percent electric crew.

CB: There are a lot of eyeballs in the industry and outside the industry on you, to a lot of people in the country, what BrightView does is what landscaping is.

AM: We pride ourselves on that. We are the leaders and we're going to maintain leaders, whether it's introducing electric mowers out into the field and taking all electric crews and seeing how that resonates within our client base, or whether it's just trying to take a quality standard and making sure that quality standard is the same whether you go to Boston or you go to Southern California.

That's an innovation, just an innovation in a different way. It's an innovation of quality. Every single one of our crew members should expect that we manage the company to the point where they arrive at work and leave work exactly the same. And we need to be the torchbearers that absolutely drive that message in, and proves that this is the best and safest place possible. ●

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Maintenance IN THE MIX

The team at Juniper made it a priority to focus on growing its maintenance side and the move has paid off with 40 percent growth. **By Brian Horn**

A commitment to growing its maintenance division without losing focus on the construction side has catapulted Juniper Landscaping in Fort Myers, Florida, from number 42 in last year's ranking to 29 this year.

Owner Brandon Duke says his father, Mike, who started the company more than three decades ago and is now chairman, intended to have a 50/50 mix

between maintenance and construction, but the construction industry was so busy, it was hard to keep up on the maintenance side. The company's 2008 revenue was \$3 million compared to \$49 million in 2016.

"We were growing so fast that to sit back and say we are growing disproportionately, we need to grow this other aspect of our business when you are doubling in size is not something you can

really do," Duke says. "Once we realized how disproportionate our revenue had gotten, we stood back and looked at some ways to even things out."

That meant hiring someone whose only focus was to obtain maintenance work, and having everyone in the company commit to selling a maintenance package after an installation job.

But changing the mindset of employees wasn't done overnight and took constant communication of the message.

"In all of our meetings, when we set goals for the company, when we have public conversations with staff, we continued to reiterate what our goals were and what we wanted to be as a company," Duke says. "And we wanted to be a stable and balanced company that is built to last and that can weather the storms of ups and downs in the economy."

Before the maintenance push, the company was at 85/15 mix but now have it closer to a 70/30 mix. Vice President Dan deMont says the company has succeeded in converting about 70 percent of their installs on a maintenance package. To avoid a slowdown on the construction side, the company has dipped its

LEFT: Brandon Duke and Dan deMont focused more on maintenance work in 2016 and grew the company by 40 percent.

toe in acquisitions by buying Turner Tree & Landscape in December, and now have private equity backing, though Duke and his father and still maintain majority ownership.

"It's a piece of our growth strategy going forward," Duke says. "Some of it is simple math of wanting to get to 50/50 and you don't want to stop growth in install so you may need to buy some maintenance focused companies."

One major benefit to acquisitions is expanding into new geographical markets quickly, deMont says. "If we were to buy a midsize maintenance company it gives us the opportunity to grow that maintenance only branch into a maintenance and installation branch," he says.

Mike Cox was hired as COO recently and the company now has employees whose job is not to only sell jobs, but manage it from start to finish and continue a relationship with the client.

"They aren't just selling the job and moving on," deMont says. "That's something we've never had." ●

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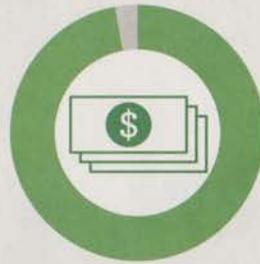
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¹Lawn & Landscape survey, Feb. 2017.

²Wells Fargo Outdoor Solutions merchant satisfaction survey, Sept. 2016.

³Wells Fargo Financial National Bank cardholder satisfaction survey, Aug. 2016.

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TURF RETURN

Gothic Landscape helped some unhappy California homeowners.

By **Brian Horn**

When a turf rebate aimed at reducing water consumption prompted some companies to get into the business of removing turf and replacing it with gravel, the results were not always what the homeowners envisioned.

That was the case with three properties that Gothic Landscape rehabbed. The Valencia, California-based company added grass back to the yards and installed plants that were mostly drought-tolerant and attracted wildlife.

“We are finding that a lot of folks who got badly designed turf conversions want their grass back,” says Michael Gillett, regional manager. “But those who received a well-designed landscape don’t miss their turf at all. There were a lot of suspect contractors doing bad work and taking advantage of the rebates during the drought. It’s too bad for our industry.”

Gillett says each job cost approximately \$9,000 each for roughly 10,000-square foot backyards. The projects lasted two days with irrigation installed on one day and planting done on the second day.

Gothic tends to stay away from residential work because it’s not a client they are built for, and Gillett does not expect many more jobs like this.

“But I see a great opportunity for good contractors to fix bad landscapes and add back usable turf areas,” he says. “Turf is not a bad word. You can still be environmentally conscious and have turf. Usable turf, smart nozzles, drought-tolerant plants and smart controllers make a pretty good landscape.” ●



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GOthic LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE



Gothic Landscape Maintenance's rehab projects lasted two days. Irrigation was installed on the first day and planting was done on the second day.



BEST ADVICE, WORST ADVICE

We asked executives at our Top 100 companies what's the best and worst financial advice they've received.

BEST ADVICE

Pay bills immediately. People really like doing business with you. And the best financial thing I learned was how to figure break-even and what contribution margin means. I found out I would much rather run \$1 million through one location than in two locations. It is much easier to find one strong manager than two strong managers.

Larry Ryan, president,
Ryan Lawn & Tree

WORST ADVICE

Not to invest in our own properties. We have been in business for over 60 years and only own two of our 14 locations. We pay over \$500,000 a year in rent for these 12 locations, one of which we have been in for over 30 years.

Steve Glennon, president,
CEO and COO, Cagwin & Dorward

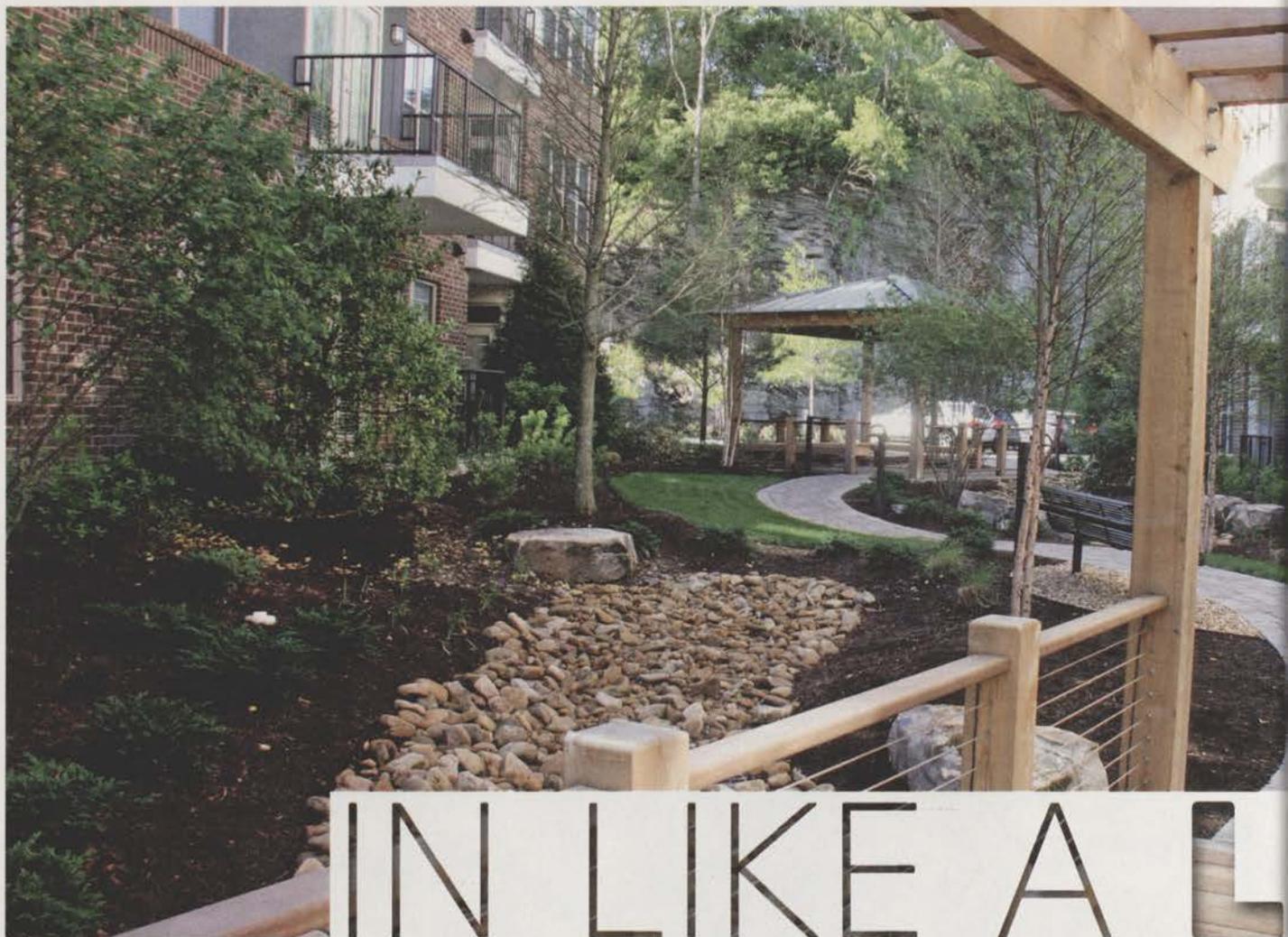
BEST ADVICE

Always know your numbers – at all times. And deliver on your commitments. Credibility is well and hard earned, but easy to lose.

Tim Portland, chairman and CEO,
Yellowstone Landscape



TOP 100 NEW TO THE LIST



IN LIKE A L

NICE TO MEET YOU!

This year's Top 100 list had 13 companies not on last year's list, one of which, Baytree, had our highest growth rate at 60 percent. On the next few pages, you'll learn more about what's working at some companies that weren't on our 2016 list.

With 60 percent growth, Baytree makes noise in its Top 100 debut.

By Katie Tuttle

The population in Charleston, South Carolina, increases by roughly 45 residents a day, according to U.S. Census information. Because of this, Baytree Landscape Contractors knew it had to change the way it offers services. "It's really a very hot market for housing, land development, multi-family houses," says Matt Maurer, co-owner of the company, which does 100 percent commercial projects. As more people move into the city, more shopping malls, banks, schools and other commercial facilities are built.

During the population boom in the mid-2000s, Maurer says people were buying up land and expanding the footprint of the city, but the most recent boom is different.

"It's up and not out," he says. "This emphasis is more on redevelopment. The emphasis is more on infill, on tearing down old projects and putting up a nice, mixed-use building."

He says previous apartment complexes would be 275 units on 20 acres, which created a lot of landscaping to maintain. Now, complexes that house 275 units are being built on

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BAYTREE LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS



ION

3 acres, cutting down on that landscaping.

“The size of landscaping projects was going down and down and down, just like New York City,” Maurer says. “There’s not a lot of green space in New York City. So, we had to find where we would still be able to be a company that could provide both services (maintenance and hardscaping) without specializing in one or the other.”

COMBINING ASSETS. Baytree was founded in the spring of 2014

as a landscape maintenance and construction company based in both Charleston and Atlanta. Each of the company’s four founding partners, Phil Walters, Todd Hunt, Drew Watkins and Matt Maurer, had been in the landscaping industry for more than

LEFT: Along with strong market growth, adding a hardscape division helped launch Baytree Landscape Construction to 60 percent growth in 2016.

20 years and had worked together in the past. “We knew each other’s strengths. We knew what each other could bring to the table and we felt like it was a successful mix to start Baytree,” Maurer says. “Knowing your partners and knowing what they’re capable of doing is very helpful. We all have our responsibility and we all know what that responsibility is, and when there’s four of us, it’s a little easier to manage than one person trying to do it all.”

The four partners were able to combine the resources and industry contacts they had to start the company in two key markets. Based in the Charleston location, Maurer is responsible for everything in the North and South Carolina markets.

Walters is responsible for landscape construction (which includes irrigation, hardscape and landscape) out of Atlanta. Hunt is the company’s chief financial officer, holding down the fort financially, and Watkins – based in Atlanta – runs the maintenance division for both locations. As it looks at expanding more, Baytree is keeping its eye on emerging markets.

“We are definitely looking to grow within the Southeast into some additional markets,” Maurer says. “We are a client-driven organization. Our clients do work through the southeast and we follow them. It’s how we build our loyalty with our clients.”

ADD-ONS. “We’ve lost many jobs because we were unable to provide hardscape services,” Maurer says.

Often, commercial properties in the company’s market will hire their hardscaping company to continue doing landscape maintenance when the job is done, leaving Baytree with fewer opportunities at contracts.

Additionally, the contracts are bigger.

“Typically, a hardscape contract is a lot larger than a landscape contract because of the cost of materials, the labor’s a lot more skilled,” he says. The appeal would be enough for any company to consider expanding its offerings.

“The landscaping on one of those jobs, a multi-million-dollar high-rise, could be \$50,000,” Maurer says. “Where now our scope of work could be a million and a half dollars because we’re doing the hardscaping around it as well.”

To make the shift to hardscaping, Baytree starting looking into the possibility of offering the service in house. Realizing they had the right personnel in place – something Maurer says was No. 1 – the company started bidding on jobs.

“We did see where it started to turn the tables,” Maurer says. “This guy can do landscape and



“We knew each other’s strengths. We knew what each other could bring to the table and we felt like it was a successful mix to start Baytree.”

Matt Maurer,
co-owner

hardscape, we’re going with him.’ That was a big driver.”

In 2016, the company saw a revenue increase of 60 percent, which Maurer also credits to the company’s age.

“We were able to open up some doors that we knew we could get in and work with these folks,” he says. “But in the early stages of Baytree, our capacity wasn’t there.”

While adding hardscaping definitely played a role in the revenue increase, Maurer says the growing market helped.

“The cities we work in, the markets increased tremendously over the last three years,” he says. “We had a very strong market growth.”

Quite a splash

Justin Crocker wanted to build a company he'd want to work for, and a new headquarters is one way he's doing it.

By Brian Horn

When the team at Earthtones Design needed to move to a new headquarters, owner Justin Crocker wanted a place that employees would not only want to come to during the work week, but also on weekends. So, he literally bought a spot where employees can do just that.

Crocker, president, bought a 38-acre lot complete with a pool, a cabana and a lake with a dock to fish on. That's where the 150 people employed at his Midlothian, Texas-based company, will be based, just outside of Dallas.

"At the end of the day we could have rented some office or industrial space that would have been pretty economical and saved us money overall but that's not what we were after," Crocker says. "We don't just go to an office we are stuck in every day."

That work environment resulted in 40 percent growth from 2015 to 2016, and Crocker says culture, in a roundabout way, was a big part in it. He credits the growth to his team serving clients at a high level.

But that service doesn't happen without great employees,

which he attracts and retains with his culture.

Crocker, who started the company with his wife, Christina, in 2003, says the base of his culture came from a question he asked himself: Would he want to work at his company in each position for the amount of money being paid?

You have to be able to put yourself in the employees' shoes and think are they getting fulfillment from working here, he says.



Work and play

Earthtones moved into a new headquarters, which includes a lake employees can use on the weekends.

Part of that is monetary, but the other part is culture. So, Crocker strived for a culture of respect. There's no yelling at each other when something goes wrong and that goes from the management team to field workers.

"That starts with your management and once they subscribe to that, it will trickle down through your company," he says.

And it makes him happy when he sees his management team giving fist bumps to crews before morning rollout.

"It sounds simple but just treating people the way you'd want to be treated in that position – that's a major part of how to set a basis for a culture."

But in the summer of 2013, the company was big enough where he could stop working in the field and really focus on being a CEO. He, again, asked himself what would make him want to work at Earthtones.

"I like to word it that I made a change ... from being a manager who had employees working for

him to become one that works for the employees."

By the summer of 2014, with 50 employees, he felt the company had a culture he wanted, so it was time to go the extra mile with an exciting office space. In fact, Crocker says a new main office was long overdue.

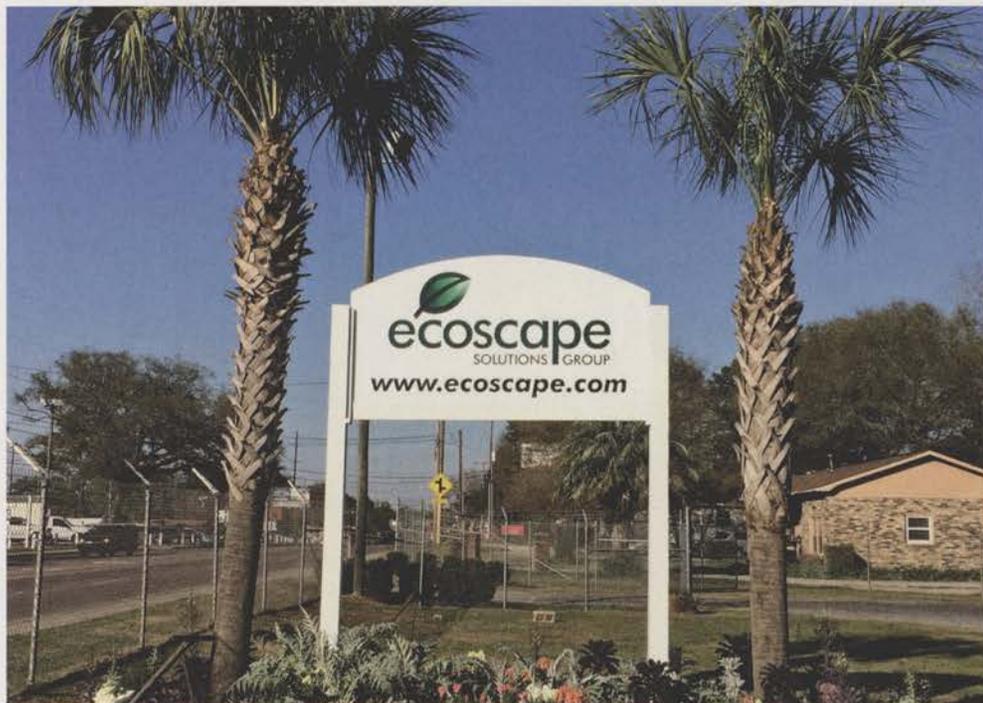
"I've been so frugal in that department. One of the reasons we were looking was I felt we were really behind on what our office space was," he says. "To me, it was old and dingy and didn't reciprocate the work environment I'd been working so hard to set up."

With a new office and a culture Crocker is comfortable with, he has seen improvements in hiring and retention with a turnover rate of less than 1 percent. In an industry where many companies can't find field labor, Crocker has employees showing up at his doorstep ready to work.

Crocker says he is paying market value, so, while he spent money on the new office, he isn't breaking the bank to recruit.

"We've been able to hire many new field workers in the last six months alone just based on reputation," he says. "When our guys are out in the field and they meet other people with other companies, they're telling them that they are well taken care of at this business.

"It takes longer to build that (culture) but you are better off in the long run if you can get to that point."



Sales SHIFT

Tony Pope tweaked the way his business development staff was treated, and that change caused more than 50 percent growth.

By Brian Horn

When business development managers at Ecoscapes were leaving at a much more rapid rate than any other positions at the company, CEO Tony Pope and his team chalked it up to the nature of sales positions. Pope says the company didn't have one business development manager who stayed at the Huntsville, N.C.-based company longer than a year. But after one sales manager, whom the team spent a lot of time and resources developing and had promoted, left, Pope and his executive team began to look at the company as the problem.

"We were griping about it and I said, 'When are we going to take responsibility that we can't keep somebody here long enough to be part of our team? Let's look in the mirror,'" he says.

So Pope hired consultant Mike Weinberg to help solve the problem. He found that the sales team felt isolated.

Addressing that has helped the company achieve 57 percent growth and land at number 94 on our Top 100 list, with \$20.6 million in revenue.

"It was the culture of making sure the salespersons feel part of the team more," Pope says.

"Maybe sometimes they felt like they were on an island because operations didn't have time to help them do this or measure a property."

The company also switched from doing group sales meetings to individual sales meetings.

The individual meetings lasted

no longer than 30 minutes and an agenda was established before the meeting. If sales were good, then the salesperson was congratulated and the meeting was over. If not, then meetings went longer and those involved tried to find out what went wrong.

"You get the group sales meeting and everyone clams up," he says.

Weinberg also stressed the importance of cold-calling potential clients by phone and in person.

"We'd get a couple opportunities and we'd go 100 percent focus on those opportunities and we'd stop the cold calling because we were trying to sell the jobs," he says. "If they sold or didn't sell, once that activity ended we didn't have anything to replace it because we haven't been focused on cold calling."

With all the changes, Pope says there has been no turnover the past 18 months in the sales department.

"It feels like everything is clicking," he says. "We just needed some tweaking a little. Sometimes it's good to have an outside set of eyes. Never be afraid to hire a consultant."

In December of 2016, Pope was acquired by Yellowstone Landscape companies, which is number 15 on our list and headquartered in Bunnell, Florida. Pope will stay on as a vice president, and says the Ecoscape name will not change immediately.

"It's quite a good fit," he says. "I've enjoyed working with them." ●

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The RIGHT tools

Get your hand tools
ready for a successful start
to the season.

By Kyle Brown

WHEN CREWS FROM **BIG LAKES LAWCARE** in San Antonio, Texas, go out in the morning, they have a standard set of hand tools to work with, says Chester Buczynski, president. Every truck carries two string trimmers, two edgers and two backpack blowers.

"We have a very simple model. From day to day, the mowing crew is going to be mowing. They know what they need and we've done research to determine what truck needs what," he says. "Once the season's running, there's not a lot of change every day."

That setup allows for a spare in case of a breakdown on site. Prior to taking on a job, Buczynski, whose company serves 85 percent residential customers, works with the client to choose the right services and tools so he can plan for any extra necessary equipment. His operations assistant has the responsibility of making sure those tools are on the trucks in the morning before the crews head out into the field.

STAY ORGANIZED. Having a baseline set of tools to work with helps keep jobs running smoothly and cuts down on having to run back to the garage for the right equipment or to grab a spare when a tool breaks down. At Ameriscape Services in Thonotosassa, Florida, John Amarosa's teams use a similar number of string trimmers, edgers and backpack blowers.

"That's standard stock on every trailer," says Amarosa, director of operations.

His crews, which serve 98 percent commercial customers, have a set of equipment assigned to them with a dot painted on each machine color-coded to a particular team, so there's no confusion about which string trimmer should be on which truck.

"We do it so we have an easy visual," he says.

CASH IN HAND

According to our 2016 expenditure survey, 65% of landscapers expect to spend more on handhelds in 2016 versus 2015.



At Lawnsmith Lawn & Landscape, trimmers are kept on a rack in the trailer that's locked before and after each job, as well during lunch and other breaks.

Though the blue crew might borrow from the green crew if a tool needs to be repaired, at the end of the day, the fleet manager knows where that tool should end up.

On top of the color-coding, the tools are inventoried by the last four digits of the serial number. When a crew returns after finishing a route, they complete an inventory on the back of the daily time sheet listing the equipment by that serial number code. By doing that as part of the daily routine, it's easier to track equipment that needs to be repaired or replaced.

The go-to hand tool for Robert Hansen at Robert Hansen Landscaping in Shelton, Connecticut, is the backpack blower, with two usually on each truck to handle cleanup. Each is marked for his crews, like all the other tools on the truck, he says.

"Things like gas shears and electric shears, or hedge trimmers, they're all numbered and categorized," says Hansen, who services 60 percent commercial customers. "The same groups take the same machines every day."

Procedures like color-coding or inventory can help cut down on lost and misplaced tools, but it can't stop thieves. Andrew Gettig, owner of Lawnsmith Lawn & Landscape in Dallas, lost a brand-new backpack blower from the back of his crew's truck.

"It was in operation for three days," says Gettig, who services 80 percent residential customers. "The crew came out (from break) and it was gone. Everything is under lock and key, but accidents happen."

On his trucks, trimmers are kept on a rack

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MAINTENANCE

that's locked before and after each service. Blowers are usually kept in a locked equipment box in the front or just in the trailer itself, he says.

"It's ideal to lock (the tools) up during service too when the machines are in operation," he says. "But at the same time, they want to get in and out. There are some points where it's nice to just keep it unlocked on the property. But during lunch time, break times, between service—it's always locked."

FINE-TUNING TOOLS. Once a week, Amarosa's crews clean hand tools, checking air and fuel filters. They wash, then lube

and grease them to keep them running smoothly, he says. If the tool has any blades, those are also sharpened once each week.

But the most reliable way to keep equipment running is just to make sure it gets regular use.

"That's the thing about two-cycle equipment: The best thing you can do is run it every day," Buczynski says.

"Most people, they use their chainsaw every week or the weed whip once a month, and the carburetor gums up and things get sticky and gooey inside, and then you're having issues with a seemingly brand-new chainsaw because you've only used it three times.

"A weed whip, if you run it 10 hours a day, five days a week, it can be a tank. It can last forever with just about no maintenance."

Though he doesn't specifically trade out equipment so it sees daily action, he does rotate it regularly through his crew so it's used as much as possible.

At the beginning of the season, Frank Capone at Capone Landscape in Wakefield, Massachusetts, makes it a point to have all handheld tools inspected.

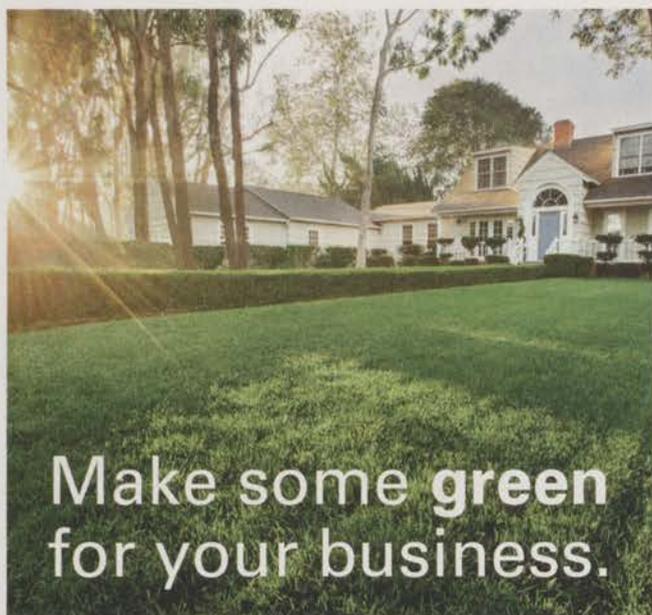
Taking stock of the tools gives him an idea of how many he'll need to replace later in the season.

"Every winter, we do air filters, oil filters, spark plugs and

fuel filters. We go over nuts and bolts and springs," says Capone, whose service mix is 70 percent residential. "We have a set number we need and we'll replace them as we go if necessary."

IT'S IN THE BUDGET. For tools like handheld trimmers and edgers, Amarosa considers the "useful life" to be about a year. Crews will continue to use the hand tools long after that point, but as they require maintenance, he starts weighing the cost against the benefits of a repair.

"If it's a \$300 piece of equipment and it has one \$12 repair, sure, we'll do that," he says. "But if it has a repair for \$75, and it's



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two-and-a-half years old, we're going to think about it."

As Capone replaces equipment, he keeps the older units around as spares or to be used for parts. If the repair costs closer to half the value of the tool, or they can't do the maintenance in-house, "it'll come back in a body bag. We keep it around for parts," he says.

As Hansen's crew gets new tools, they stencil the year of purchase onto the machine so it's easy to tell at a glance how old it is.

"They'll tell me that a tool broke, and I'll say, 'No, we just bought that,'" he says. "Then we'll look, and it's been five years already. Sometimes time flies like that."

Though it isn't a policy set in stone, Amarosa replaces about 30 percent of his handhelds every year, he says. There's money

“If it’s a \$300 piece of equipment and it has one \$12 repair, sure, we’ll do that. But if it has a repair for \$75, and it’s two-and-a-half years old, we’re going to think about it. We can keep the rest of the pieces for parts.”

**John Amarosa,
Ameriscape Services**

budgeted every month to replace and repair tools if problems arise.

"But right before we hit the start of the season, we'll budget more and get a bunch of new equipment and refresh our crew," he says. "Then, each month after

that ... if we don't use it, that money just rolls to the bottom line. But we do have it budgeted there." Gettig works without a timeframe for total fleet replacement, but he'll look for deals with distributors to get the most out of his investment.

"Every once in a while, a distributor will run a special where everything's 15 percent off," he says. "At that point, if we need to buy multiple units, that's when we would pull the trigger on that."

"For the older machines, we usually sell them. We might keep them for parts or backups if we have to. But for the most part, anything that's taking up space is costing storage money."

But keeping a backup can make a difference in a pinch instead of waiting for repairs.

"Every day, the guys need to get in the truck to make money. If that truck doesn't start, you

need to have another truck ready to go," Capone says.

"It's like that all the way down to the string trimmer. Every morning at 7 a.m. for five days, those guys are ready to go. But they could need a spare trailer, a spare weed whacker, spare blowers. It doesn't matter what it is, there's a spare. It's got to be reliable."

When replacing equipment, Amarosa tries to stick to the same brands and models to reduce the amount of parts required to keep on inventory, he says. Going from brand to brand, especially through a sale, could cost less up front, but will cost more in the long run, he says.

"We found a brand and model we like for each key piece, and we try very hard not to go in any other direction," he says. **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Ohio.





Mowing with more

A LONG WITH THE RIGHT HAND TOOLS, mower attachments can save time for operators in the field. For Frank Capone at Capone Landscape in Wakefield, Massachusetts, his main go-to is the thatch bar for his walk-behind lawnmowers, he says.

"We still go around edges with the hand thatcher, but it's pretty efficient," he says. "Last year, the lawns were so devastated. We used them before we would renovate lawns. We took the thatcher bar over the lawn and aerated right after. We had to create seed-to-soil contact."

It doesn't pick up everything perfectly, but one operator can thatch a yard clean if they go slowly enough, he says. His crews carry extra tines in the truck, and can swap them on the fly if necessary.

The attachment can also just help the machine move more quickly. All of Chester Buczynski's mowers at Big Lakes Lawncare in San Antonio, Texas, have a Velke attached.

LEFT: Crews at Ameriscape can cut 25 percent of their mowing time using a Velke to stand on instead of walking.

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"It never comes off," he says. "It allows the guys to ride all day instead of having to walk behind the mower. We can go as fast as the mower moves if you're using a riding mower."

He says his crews run roughly twice as fast with the Velke attachment than walking, but the biggest return is that they can work longer without tiring out, even in the Texas sun.

"The machines are faster than you can walk, so if you can ride on the platform behind them, you can operate faster in wide-open areas," says John Amarosa, director of operations at Ameriscape Services in Thonotosassa, Florida. "If you get in tight spaces, they might not be appropriate. But six hours riding

"It allows the guys to ride all day instead of having to walk behind the mower."

**Chester Buczynski,
Big Lakes Lawncare**

behind it or six hours walking behind it in the Florida sun, I think that's the greatest advantage of it.

"If it's a four-hour job walking and they get it done in three hours with the Velke, then they saved 25 percent of the time, and they can use that doing something else to add to the quality of the job."

The attachment has multiple grease points that need attention

regularly, Buczynski says. They also come stocked with a rubber air-filled tire, but his team replaced that with an after-market solid rubber tire to simplify. Even though it's an attachment, his crew knows that it needs just as much attention as the mower itself, he says.

"It's a daily routine to check them, because the guys know if it breaks, they're stuck walking," he says. "The mower still works."

The most common attachment on Amarosa's mowers is a fabricated line trimmer rack, a set of brackets where a line trimmer can snap in. The rack keeps the tool handy wherever the mower goes, he says.

"If you're trying to be productive around the property, there's a guy who's going to have to go

back and line trim around," he says. Having the line trimmer along with the operator mowing encourages them to mow tighter. When there's a spot that needs attention, the operator knows exactly where to go, rather than having to walk over the entire lawn.

The rack doesn't require any ongoing maintenance, but his team attached hard rubber on the rack to prevent metal-on-metal contact and wear while mowing.

"It saves a second person from walking around the property looking for all the areas they got with the mower, because he knows where he's been," Amarosa says. "Every property is different, but all that walking time is gone. That amount of time is probably 40 percent." **L&L**



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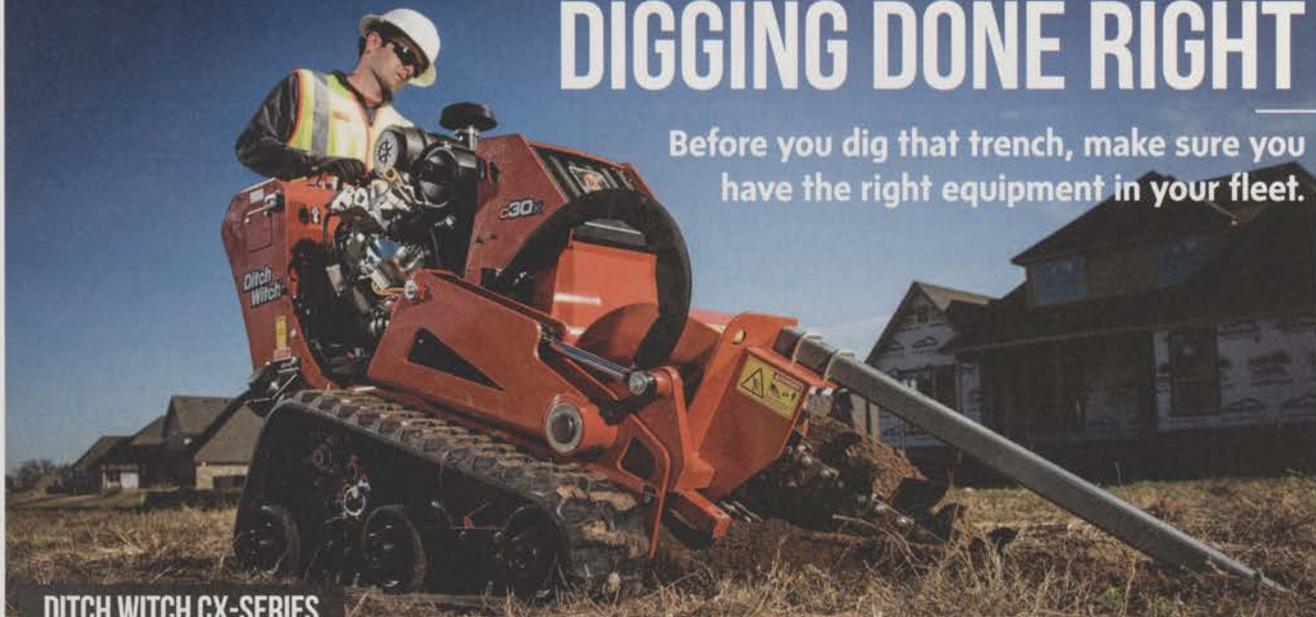
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DITCH WITCH CX-SERIES

The pitch: The Ditch Witch CX-series walk-behind trenchers are made up of the C16X, C24X and C30X trenchers, which share a common, compact frame.

- The models are equipped with engines ranging from 16 to 30 hp and offer up to 48 inches of digging depth depending on the model.

- The design allows the machines to maneuver in confined spaces, and easily fits on a variety of trailer options.

- A simple, open design provides greater service accessibility and eliminates daily grease points to improve reliability and provide more uptime.

For more information: Ditchwitch.com



BARRETO 1324STK/1624STK

The pitch: The all new Barreto 1324STK/1624STK track trencher has a hydraulic reservoir that can hold up to 7.3 gallons.

- The independent floating track system keeps a significant portion of the track in contact with the terrain at all times, reducing ground pressure and increasing traction.

- The STK features Adjustable Trenching Controls (ATC) that use rod linkage instead of cables, reducing wear and down-time.

- The 1324STKH features a Honda 11.7 hp GX390 engine, while the 1624STKB features a Briggs Vanguard 16 hp V-Twin.

For more information: Barretomfg.com



GEORIPPER

The pitch: The Georipper is a portable handheld commercial power trencher that can reduce time and labor costs.

- Easily trenches in hard to reach areas.

- Digs in all types of soils, including hard, rocky, clay and sandy.

- Has trenching depths of up to 27 inches and widths of 1, 1.5 and 2.38 inches.

For more information: Minitrencher.com



LITTLE BEAVER KWIK-TRENCH

The pitch: The Kwik-Trench features carbide-tipped teeth for cutting through soil, clay, road fill, asphalt and tree roots.

- The trencher offers a cutting depth of 12 inches and can trench up to 30 feet per minute.

- It's efficient for a wide range of applications, including installations of sprinkler systems and drainage lines, landscape edging and root pruning.

- It features push-forward operation and a locking swivel wheel to easily make straight cuts.

For more information: LittleBeaver.com

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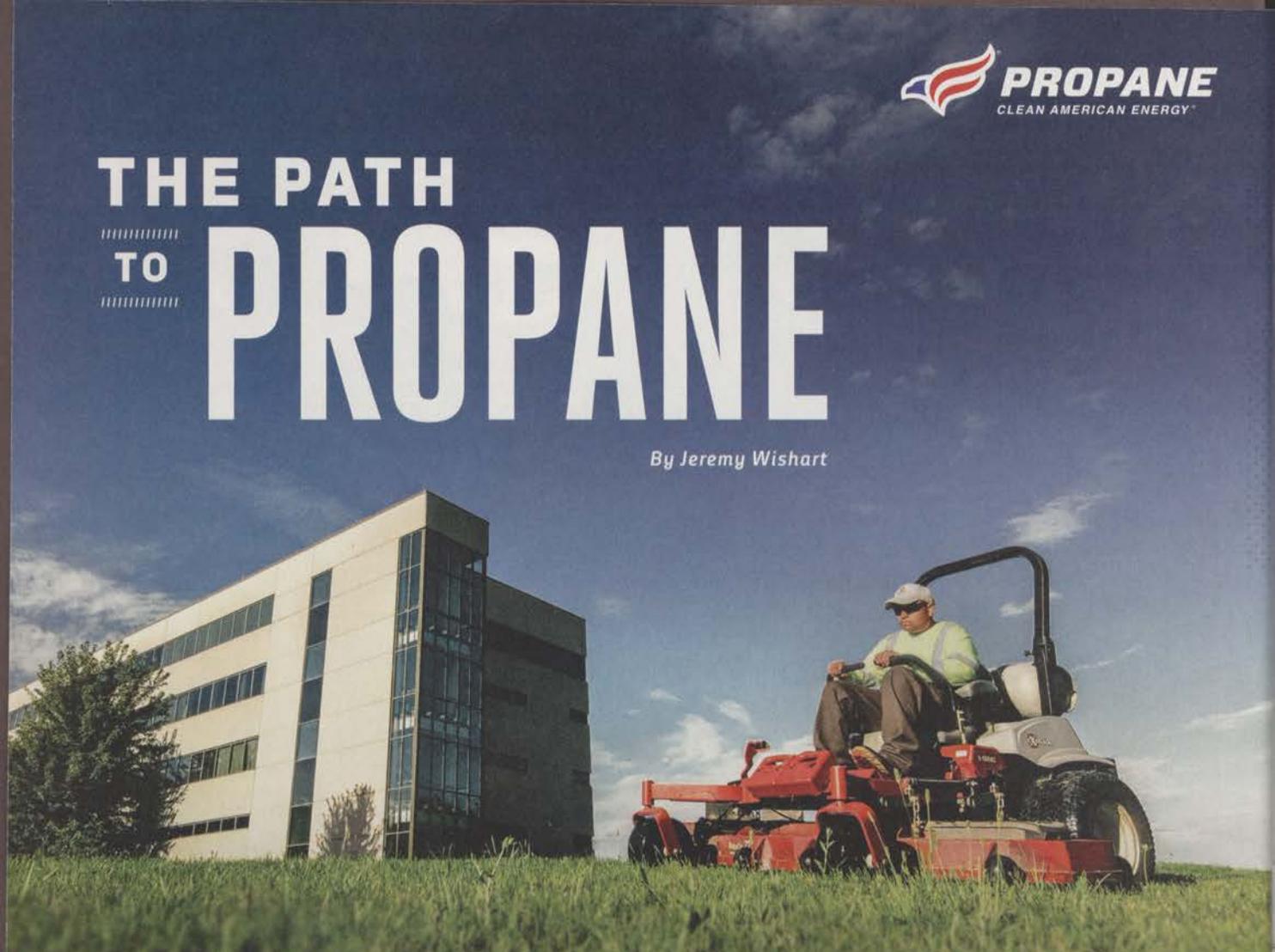
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THE PATH TO PROPANE

By Jeremy Wishart



A BETTER BOTTOM LINE AWAITS COMMERCIAL
LANDSCAPERS WHO FOLLOW THE PATH TO PROPANE.

Presently, with more than 15,000 propane-powered commercial mowers in operation across the country this spring, most contractors likely know a few peers who have successfully made the transition to propane equipment. And they likely know why their fellow contractors made the switch: Propane equipment increases productivity, decreases fuel costs, and reduces maintenance needs — all leading to an improved bottom line for their business.

It's nice, of course, to know how propane equipment can benefit a landscaper's business. But how exactly does a contractor go from simply knowing propane is a good business practice to actually transitioning a mower fleet to operate using propane? It's easier than contractors might think.

Following these simple steps can get interested contractors on the path to propane.



1. ESTABLISH A RETAILER RELATIONSHIP.

Contractors may not even know it, but there is already a propane professional in their area. A local propane retailer can not only provide fuel direct to the contractor's place of business, but they will also act as a propane partner for interested landscape contractors wanting to know more about transitioning a mower fleet to propane equipment.

Best of all, the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) has taken the guess work out of the search process. PERC's Find a Propane Retailer tool, at propane.com/FPR, allows contractors to find a knowledgeable propane retailer in their area to find the right solution for their business operation.

2. ASSESS YOUR CURRENT EQUIPMENT.

From the outset, it's also important to determine if the fleet in question is a candidate for new propane-powered equipment or if an aftermarket conversion of existing equipment is best. Again, a propane retailer can help walk through the considerations of each option.

Contractors will be happy to know that regardless if they purchase new or convert existing equipment, they likely won't need to deviate from their favorite equipment brand to integrate propane into their operation. More than a dozen OEMs now manufacture propane-powered mowers. Additionally, six aftermarket manufacturers offer EPA- and/or CARB-certified conversion kits.

Contractors also don't need to feel pressured into converting an entire fleet of mowers to propane at the same time, either. Consider converting three to five mowers to propane at first. This will help a contractor get a feel for operating propane mowers and build confidence with the crew.

3. REVIEW REFUELING OPTIONS.

Propane equipment provides a boost to productivity in part because there are options when it comes to refueling. And none of them include crew wasting costly time at the local gas station.

The two most common refueling options involve a cylinder exchange program and on-site refueling. The best refueling option will be dictated by a fleet's gallon usage and the number of mowers fueling with propane. A cylinder exchange program is the most common and quickest set-up option, but a contractor using 5,000 gallons of propane or more per year may be a candidate for on-site refueling infrastructure. For those larger operations, it's worth noting propane refueling infrastructure is the least expensive fueling infrastructure to install of any fuel type, traditional or alternative.

Contractors can talk through which refueling options works best for their fleet with their local propane retailer.

Converting a fleet to propane is easier than a contractor might think. The key is finding a knowledgeable propane retailer to act as a guide through the process. That relationship, combined with the tools already available on propane.com can set a contractor on the path to propane and the increase in productivity it provides.

4. CONSIDER INCENTIVES.

Contractors should be proactive in researching avenues of financial assistance when converting their fleet. There are programs and incentives available that help reduce the costs associated with transitioning to propane equipment.

The first step should be PERC's Propane Mower Incentive Program. The program awards applicants with \$1,000 for a new commercial propane mower purchase or \$500 for a qualifying conversion of a gasoline mower to propane. A list of qualifying mowers and conversion kits is available on propane.com.

Many state propane associations offer additional incentives for propane-powered commercial mower purchases. These offers can be combined with PERC's incentive program to further lessen the cost of entry for landscape contractors interested in propane.

Jeremy Wishart is the deputy director of business development at the Propane Education & Research Council. He can be reached at jeremy.wishart@propane.com.





NICOLE LLOYD

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER
LOTUS GARDENSCAPES,
DEXTER, MICHIGAN

PARTYING & PLAYING

A Michigan family tasked Lotus Gardenscapes to take their cramped outdoor area and make it more inviting.



WHEN CLIENTS CAME to Lotus Gardenscapes in Dexter, Michigan, saying they felt claustrophobic in their backyard, landscape designer Nicole Lloyd set out to create a space to entertain and for their two daughters to enjoy. The homeowners wanted a fire element, outdoor kitchen with pizza oven, a water feature and some lawn space.

PROJECT FACTS



1. Fieldstone was split by hand on site for the pizza oven and fireplace. The surrounding walls and kitchen area were faced with a natural stone veneer, which was mortared onto the concrete block.
2. A cedar pergola frames the square cut Pennsylvania bluestone patio to bring the eye back toward the focal point of the custom split fieldstone pizza oven and fireplace. The pergola was installed using pressure-treated posts with cedar facing and simple custom cut cedar beams to compliment the architecture of the house and stained in walnut to match the beams on the interior of the house.
3. The outdoor kitchen is enhanced with a leathered granite counter top which has a matte finish that compliments the texture of the natural stone on the walls and fireplace. The counter top also has a chiseled rock face to match the bluestone caps on the walls and fireplace.
4. Anchoring this feature is a pondless waterfall, which features a 6-foot wide sheet of water that recirculates and is fitted with an autofill to keep the feature as low maintenance as possible for the homeowner. **L&L**



NO JOB TOO BIG

Compact equipment can take on large jobs in tight spaces.

By Kate Spirgen

“Compact excavators are more convenient to move to and from jobsites.”

Michael Shebetka, Takeuchi-US

COMPACT EXCAVATORS and mini-track loaders aren't always go-to options for landscape contractors but they can accomplish a lot in small spaces where larger equipment just can't fit.

“I think one of the big things with these pieces of equipment is that they don't always get the attention because people are looking at skid-steer loaders or track loader to add the versatility that these pieces of equipment also do,” says Chris Girodat, Bobcat Company marketing manager.

Compact excavators are ideal for grading, hardscape work, retaining walls, placing rocks, trenching, planting trees, mulching and more. And with hydraulic attachments like post hole augers, trench compactors and hydraulic thumbs, landscapers can do even more.

“Hydraulic systems will continue to evolve on excavators because attachments are demanding more flow and precision to get things done,” says Jeff Jacobsmeyer, Kubota product manager.

Instead of bringing in a track

loader or a wheel loader, landscapers can do final grading or blade work with a compact excavator.

“In certain instances, for example, compact excavators can be used in place of compact skid-steers or other loaders to load trucks, especially high-sided trucks that may be beyond the reach of compact loaders,” says Jordan Dey, compact excavator product manager for JCB North America.

Larger compact excavators can handle jobs many landscapers use tractor loader backhoes for.

“They can be even more efficient in regards of being able to dig in tighter areas and not frequently needing to readjust position when digging,” says Michael Shebetka, product manager for Takeuchi-US. “In addition, compact excavators are more convenient to move to and from jobsites.”

Mini-track loaders are great for moving materials and pallets around in small spaces like between houses or through gates.

In spaces where wheelbarrow work seems like a necessity, a mini-track loader or compact excavator can lighten the load on your crews, and

move materials faster. A variety of attachments are available for both pieces of equipment to increase their versatility. Contractors can get many of the attachments available for skid-steers on a compact excavator or mini track loader.

“Many people just buy a couple of attachments – a bucket or maybe a clamp unit or something, but they don't really fully utilize the full potential of that excavator and all of the attachments that are now available,” Girodat says.

If you're thinking about taking the plunge and purchasing a compact excavator or mini-track loader, consider your workload and the equipment you already have. Can you haul it with your current fleet? Will it fit on your jobsites? Can it do all of the tasks you need it to do?

“For example, if you're looking at only one spec, like how deep you dig, you might be missing another spec like being able to dump it into the back of a truck or being able to lift a rock into place. So, there's a lot of things guys need to look at,” Girodat says. **L&L**

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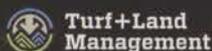
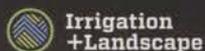
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The follow-up



Even if you treat a lawn in the beginning, you may still have to hit it with a post-emergent.

By Katie Tuttle

CREATING THE PERFECT weed control program is a strategy, says

Dean Mosdell, technical manager for Syngenta.

“Just simply seeing a weed grow in a lawn and picking a post-emergent product is probably short term,” he says. “But for a long-term strategy, think about what the turf is, what weeds are present and how you can control them.”

A pre-emergent herbicide is important in preventing the weeds, but it’s equally important to have a post-emergent plan to control the ones that pop up.

“Post-emergents represent a curative approach instead of a preventative approach,” says George Furrer, director of specialty business for SipcamAdvan. “You can have a sound, preventative program and still require some curative products or post-emergent products.”

Furrer says some companies choose to forgo the preventative approach to weed control and instead focus on curative, but

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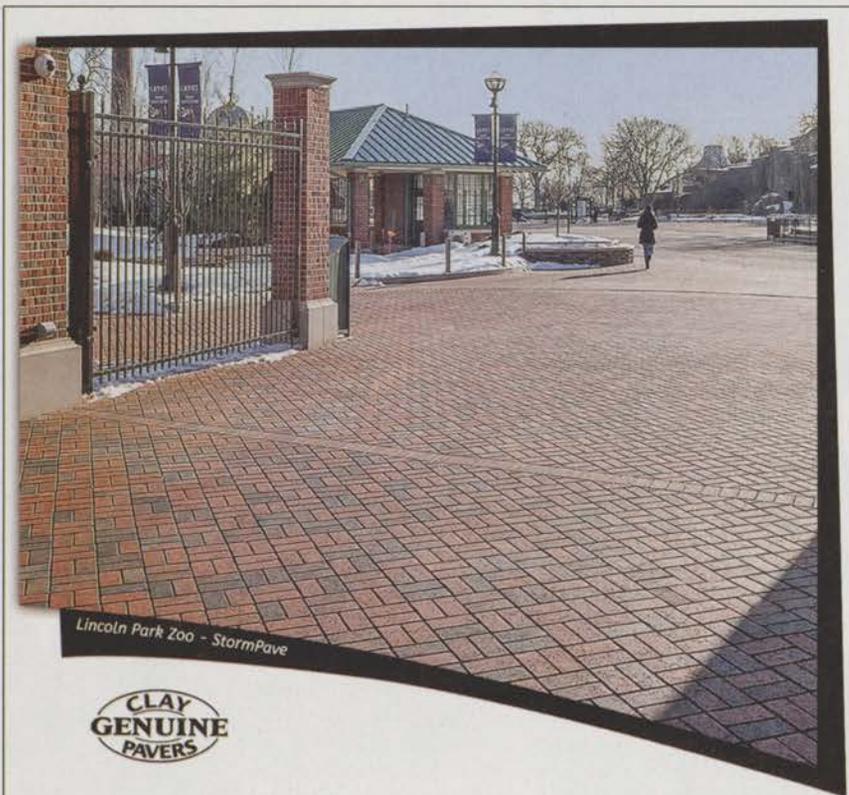
even companies that have a strong preventative program will still need to come back later in the season and touch up.

Jason Fausey, director of technical services,

turf and ornamentals with Nufarm, says a sound weed program needs both pre- and post-control to be effective.

"We can't control the weather, so it

becomes difficult to expect perfect weed control," he says. "(Pre-emergents are) a perfect foundation, but you always expect to see breakthrough and that's where our post-emergent aspects come from."



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MAKING A CHOICE. Picking the right post-emergent requires a knowledge of what you want to treat and how you want to apply it.

First, you need to decide liquid versus granular. Jim Goodrich, a product manager with PBI-Gordon, says granular products need to be applied when the weed is wet.

"On a granular product, you need it to stick to the weed," he says. "To make sure that your granular broadleaf product works, it really needs to be applied after the irrigation has applied in the morning, or a heavy dew situation."

For liquid products, he says you have to look at the temperature restrictions on the product, because you can't apply a liquid post-emergent if it's too hot or too cold.

In both situations, the weather can't be windy.

"Most products have a wind restriction because you don't want it to drift away from the target and hit flowers or ornamentals," Goodrich says.

The second decision to make is whether you want a selective or non-selective product.

"You've got your selective you can put down on everything but it won't kill your grass, it'll only kill the broadleaf weed," says Jeremy Bigler, landscape channel manager with Lebanon. "Or you've got the non-selective that will just kill everything. Whatever that stuff touches is going to die."

He says non-selectives are often used in areas with a grassy weed that can't be taken out with a pre-emergent. The only option is to kill out everything in the area of the weed and then reseed and start from the ground up.

No matter the decision, when you apply is most important.

"I would say timing is going to be the key piece to make sure that they're as effective as they can be," Bigler says.

Make sure the lawn where the application will occur hasn't been mowed for a few days

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Review the temperature restrictions on liquid products because you can't apply them if it's too hot or too cold.

so there's enough foliage growth for the product to stick to the leaves. It's also important to make sure there will be no watering or rain for the next 24 hours.

NOT PICTURE PERFECT. "Weed ID is really important," says Laurence Mudge, green solutions team manager at Bayer. "Making sure you understand what you're

controlling, so you can select the best product for the weed."

The best product isn't quite black and white. It depends on your location in the country, the

type of grass the weeds are in, and what the current climate is.

Along with a good product, it's important for your crews to be knowledgeable on what they're treating. Mudge says there are numerous weeds that are tough to control, and even though there are good products on the market, they're not perfect.

"It really comes down to expectations," Mudge says. "Some companies understand these weeds are harder to control and they do a little better job."

Mudge says the struggle to treat these weeds will depend more on the chemical companies, than the applicator.

"We need more products," he

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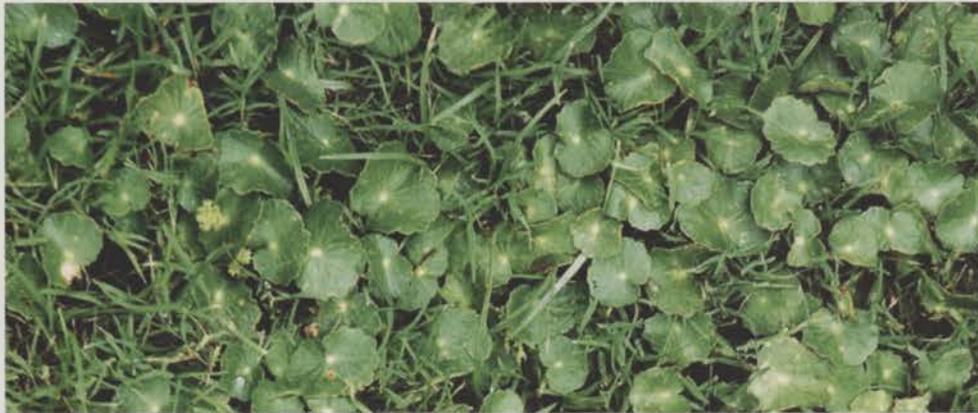
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Dollarweed – or pennywort – is a perennial broadleaf turfgrass weed that can be treated with a post-emergent.

says. “We need different active ingredients. We just don’t have that many tools in the toolbox for post-emergent herbicides. We’re relying on chemistry that’s really

old, but we just haven’t had a lot of active new ingredients come into the post-emergent world.”

NOT A CURE-ALL. Ask any chemi-

cal company what LCOs wish their herbicide could do, and the answer is the same.

“There’s really a desire for products that control multiple

weed species in a single jug,” Furrer says.

“As the manufacturer, we try to lean that way as well, and make it as easy and simple as possible,” Fausey says.

In the end, the effectiveness of the post-emergent you apply depends on how you apply it.

“The better coverage you can obtain, the more consistent the results will be,” Fausey says. “People that try to cut back on the spray volume or have larger droplets just do not obtain great coverage with the application. Results are going to be variable, but the best way to get more consistent results is to focus on the application itself.” **L&L**

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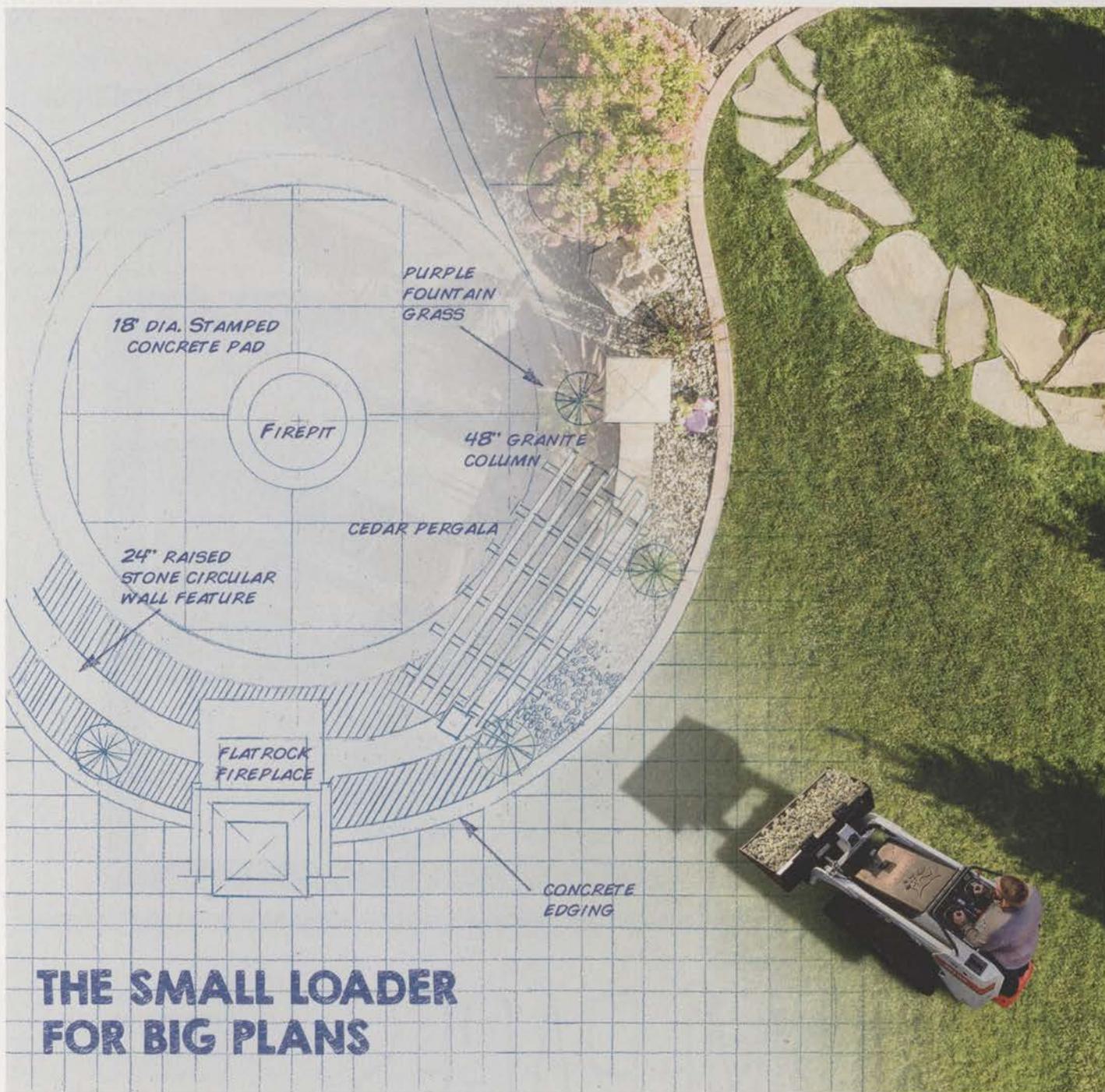
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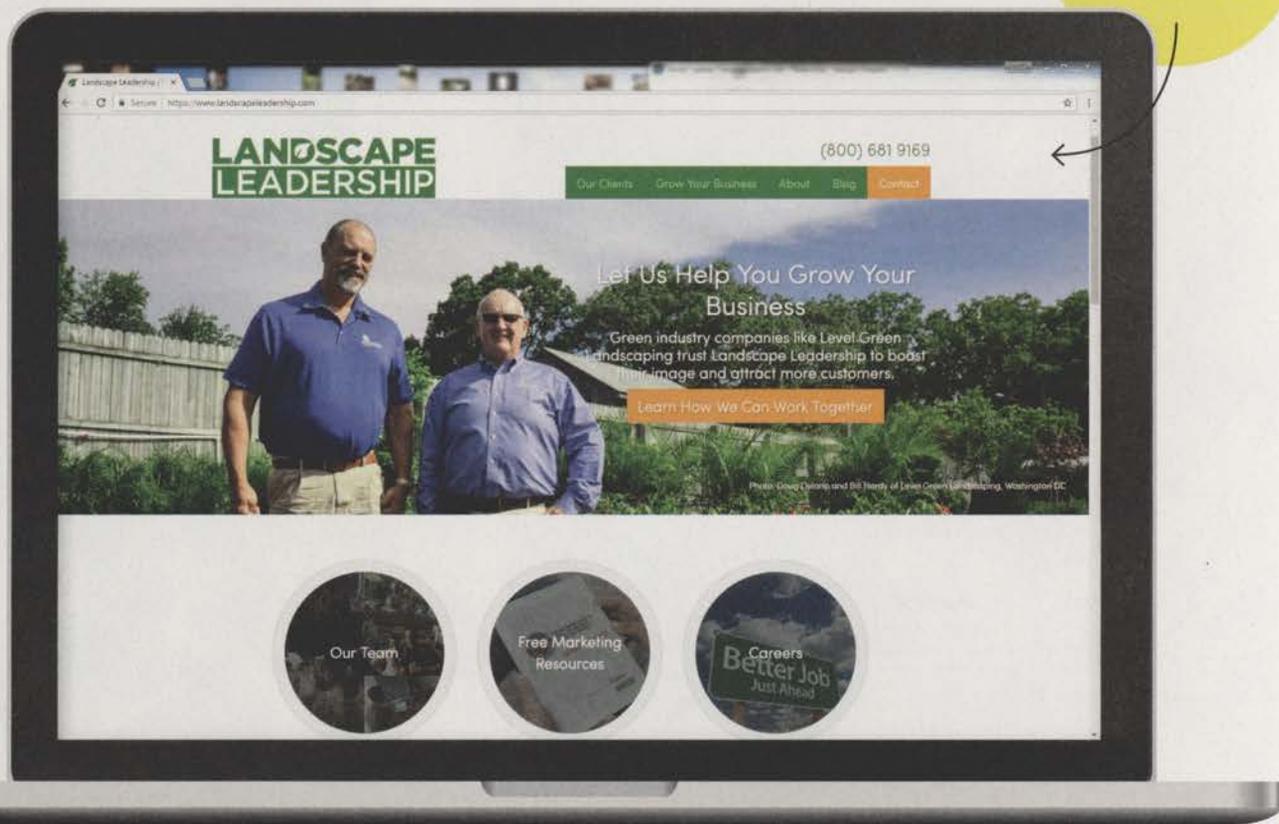


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Moving social media links, and adding more white space, can create a welcoming header that will attract visitors.



HIP HOMEPAGES

Trends are always changing, and that includes what is popular when it comes to website design. **By Chris Heiler**

Grab a cup of coffee to go with your trusted Lawn & Landscape magazine and open up that flashy website of yours – preferably on a mobile device. We’ve got some work to do. Let’s take a look at how your company’s website reflects the trends in web design that we’ve been seeing over the past couple of years.

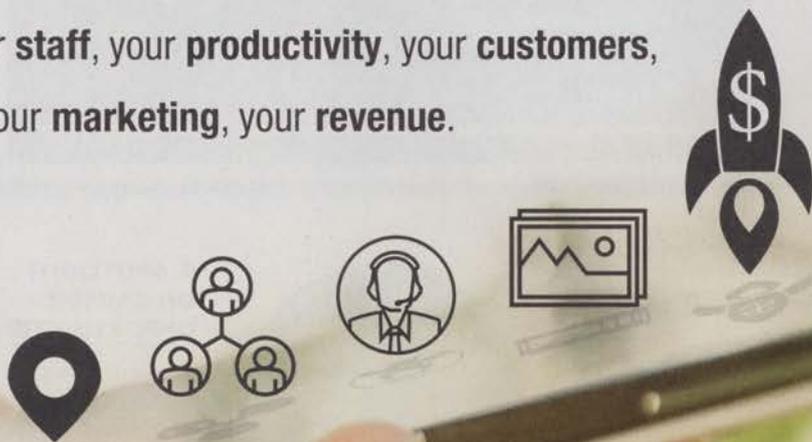
1. FULL-WIDTH WEB DESIGN

Backgrounds have been eliminated in favor of stretching websites to the edge of the browser window. In many cases this full-width design has eliminated sidebars on most web pages.

Without these sidebars, navigation has moved into the header of most websites, simplifying the user experience. “Sticky” navigation is also becoming more popular, where the navigational links of a webpage seem to “stick” at the top as you scroll down the page.

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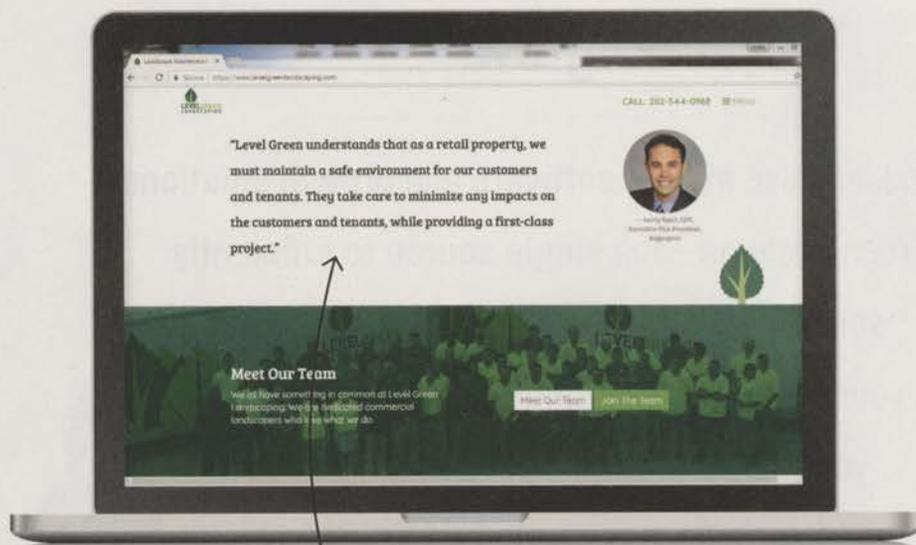


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2. A VISUAL 'HERO HEADER'

A hero header is the use of a hero image and text at the top of your homepage and other pages. These can be a fixed image or an image slider. Short video clips are becoming popular as well.

This prominently placed hero image and text is often the first visual a visitor will encounter on your website.

Including a call-to-action with a link to drive visitors deeper into your website is a popular strategy on a homepage.

3. MOBILE-FIRST APPROACH TO DESIGN

If your website is like most in our industry, 40-50 percent of visitors are most likely visiting your website on a mobile device. This calls for a mobile-first approach to the design of your website, which starts with responsive web design.

Built using responsive design, your website will automatically adjust to whatever device is viewing it. If a visitor pulls up your website on their iPhone, your site will "respond" to that unique device and render a more positive user experience without the annoying zooming, scrolling and tiny buttons.

Instead of devoting an entire page to customer testimonials, scatter them throughout relevant pages on your site so potential customers see them.

4. WHITE SPACE IS YOUR FRIEND

Let the elements on your website breathe. Adding more space between text, images and other design elements has been a popular trend in web design. Simplifying and adding more white space aligns with the mobile-first approach we just touched on.

5. A NEW HOME FOR SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS

The current design trend is to place social media icons and links in the footer of a website, as opposed to in the header which was common just a few years ago. Visitors know to scroll to the footer if they are interested in bouncing to your Facebook or LinkedIn page.

What about Facebook widgets and other social elements? Just get rid of them.

6. SPOTLIGHT ON CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Lawn and landscape companies are beginning to follow the trend set in other industries by doing a much better job showcasing the career path and opportunities that exist within the company.

This includes detailed listings of open positions, digitizing the application process and even separate blogs for recruiting purposes.

7. PROFESSIONAL IMAGES OF YOUR PEOPLE

People want to do business with real people. So show your people on your website. I'm not just referring to the boring headshots of your executive team. Show your employees in-action inside and outside the walls of your company. Stop talking about how professional you are and show it instead.

The homepage is a logical spot for one or two killer testimonials.

8. PURPOSEFUL USE OF VIDEO

The use of video is a trend that hasn't slowed down. What I would personally like to see – already adopted in many other industries – are companies being more thoughtful in how they use video on their website as well as improved production quality.

9. LEVERAGE CUSTOMER TESTIMONIALS MORE EFFECTIVELY

The time has come to remove the "testimonials" page from your website where you share all of your glowing customer feedback. Instead, leverage your absolute best (and most relevant) customer testimonials throughout the site.

The homepage is a logical spot for one or two killer testimonials, as are your service pages. This is where relevancy can be highly effective: use customer comments that speak about your specific services.

10. SECURE YOUR SITE

SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) is a security protocol that establishes an encrypted connection between the browser and a server. In addition to this extra security measure, SSL sites (sites accessed with an https protocol) may receive a positive rankings boost from search engines.

In my opinion, how secure your website is will continue to grow in importance as a positive ranking signal for the search engines like Google. There is really no reason not to implement this security protocol at this point.

Does your current website reflect these web design trends? If not, it's probably time for a refresh and re-build. **L&L**

The author is the founder and president of Landscape Leadership, a green industry marketing agency.

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FORD F-SERIES SUPER DUTY

The pitch: The 2017 Ford F-Series Super Duty chassis cab features the new F-350, F-450 and F-550 in the lineup.

- Features a front gross axle weight rating of up to 7,500 pounds that supports carrying bigger snowplows, taller utility buckets and cranes or other specialized vocational body upfits.

- The gross combined weight rating can reach up to 40,000 pounds – the combined weight of the truck and everything it can haul and tow – for both truck and trailer.
- With 330 hp and 750 lb.-ft. of torque, the second-generation Ford-designed, Ford-built 6.7-liter Power Stroke V8 turbo diesel – is created for Class 4 and Class 5 Super Duty chassis cab.

For more information:
Ford.com



BELAMY STRICKLAND BOX DUMP COMBO

The pitch: With a landscape and dump body combo, this vehicle comes with the option of either gas or diesel engine chassis.

- It features a 10-foot lawn box with 48-inch side door and 36-inch primary door.
- Comes with 10-foot dump that features 48-inch side – 24-inch solid lower and 24-inch expanded upper panels, 8-foot double swing driver's side pallet doors, rear barn doors and 24-inch upper expanded metal sections fold down on the passenger side
- Completing the truck are two 48-inch undermount boxes on the driver's side, and a 50-gallon non-potable water tank and pump on the passenger side.

For more information: Bellamytrucks.com

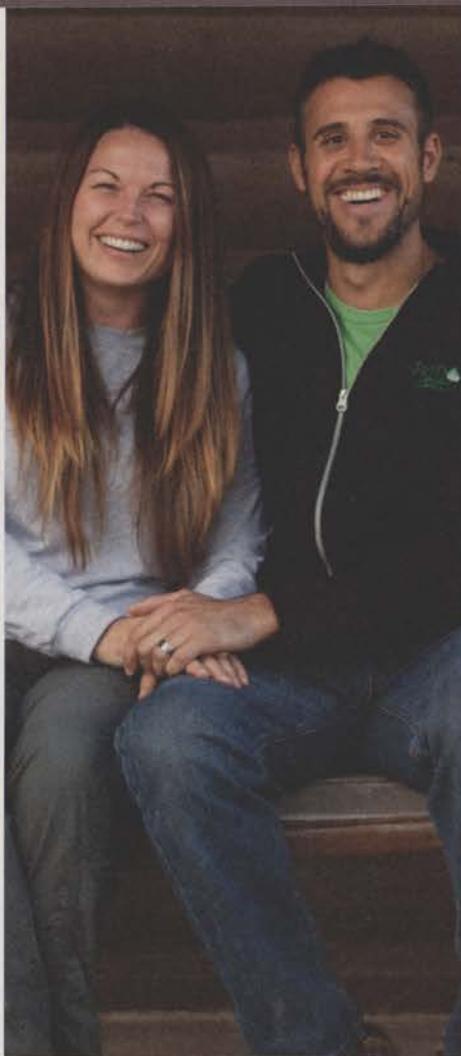
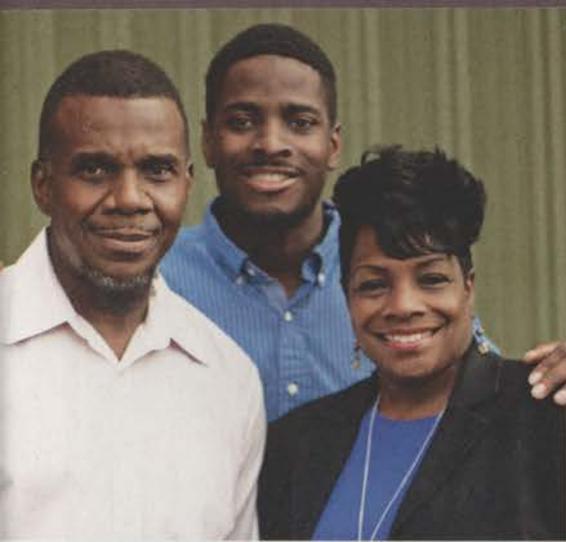


NEELY COBLE ISUZU NPR HD

The pitch: Isuzu's NPR HD features a dumping, removable dovetail landscape body and can go from a 19-foot landscape truck to a 14-foot dump truck in less than 5 minutes.

- Features a 6.0-liter gas engine or a turbocharged intercooled diesel engine.
- A towing package is included, and comes with electric brake control.
- It comes available with either a standard 2-door cab, or a 4-door crew cab, which seats seven.

For more information:
Neelycoble.com



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JUST LIKE MARRIAGE

Your relationship with your vendor is similar to one you may have at home.

By John Morrell

CREATING A SOLID relationship with suppliers and vendors is considered crucial in any business, but it may be even more so in the landscaping industry. The quality of a supplier's products directly impacts the contractor, since your clients will blame you for new paving stones that change color, or flowers that die a week after planting.

This is why regularly evaluating your suppliers and making sure everyone's on the same page can improve your overall business goals.

With so much at stake, here are some tips from industry pros on how to keep and establish good vendor relationships.

COMMUNICATION IS NUMBER ONE. In marriage, we're told that it's a big mistake to read your spouse's mind, and it's just as big an error to think they're able to read yours. The same advice applies to your suppliers.

"They might have an idea of the kind of projects you're working on but they're not in your head," says Jevard Hitch of Ascend Landscaping & Irrigation in Commerce City, Colorado.

"They'll guide you to something new in the market, but the contractor knows what the customers are looking for. So, a good



two-way street of communication is essential." Suppliers, for their part, work better when knowing how much product to get from their distributors, which is why you may be getting calls from your rep for fall items in April.

Getting a handle on your long-term needs can help keep your costs down (buying at low-season prices) and give your supplier a cue into what you may be needing later.

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE. In the same way that you have lots of different customers, so does your landscaping supplier. The fact that they probably also serve your closest competition means you may get suspicious about who's getting a "better deal."

Understand your rep is likely to be busy at times and won't be able

to return your call right away, but if you're getting longer and longer wait times for the callback, it may be time to find someone else. A good sales rep will listen when you talk and be responsive to your needs, but you'll have to decide if it's better to be patient with a company you see value in doing business with, or see what others have to offer.

IS THAT THE BEST YOU CAN DO?

It's likely that your customers ask for deals from you, are you asking for enough from your vendors?

If you've been doing steady business with a company for a good period, and you know



Having a good relationship with a vendor will come in handy the next time you need a product while in the middle of a project.

someone else is selling a particular product cheaper, there's no harm in seeing if you can get the same deal. There's also

the advantage, once you build up a good relationship, of the "unadvertised special."

"When some of my suppliers

are clearing inventory, especially of products I use regularly, they'll give me a good deal on it," says Mike Garcia, who runs EnviroScapeLA in Los Angeles.

"They'll also get inquiries from the public about what they sell and they'll forward me the contact information. I wouldn't be getting that from them if I was just an occasional customer."

If shopping solely on price is your strategy you may not get these extra benefits, but it pays to seek the best deal possible from a supplier you like.

THE RIGHT WORDS. If you have an operation where landscapers in the field place orders directly



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SUPPLIERS

with your suppliers, making sure there isn't a language barrier can help move things along. "Most big suppliers do this, but it really pays on the supplier side to have a large bilingual staff," says Jason Paulson of Ewing Irrigation in Riverside, California.

"Roughly 75 percent of the landscapers we work with are Latino, so we make sure that we've got people who can speak with them about their needs, on the phone or at the counter, and get them going on with their day."

FIXING A PROBLEM. When problems and misunderstandings occur, be sure to try and stay cool.

"We were doing a project

where we needed to install artificial turf at a job site within a short time frame," says Lauren Bloom of Bloom Concrete & Landscaping in Lakewood, Colorado. The vendor showed up with the delivery on time but it was the wrong turf. A quick call to her rep got an over-the-top response.

"He loaded the turf into his own truck and raced to the job site," she says. "We got it installed in time and his extra work was very appreciated."

Making sure you know who to call, a rep and/or manager, when something goes awry can ensure a positive experience.

If you're a long-time cus-

tommer, there's a good chance that the individual in charge will pay a visit to make sure you're happy.

BECOME A PARTNER. In an ideal situation, your supplier is ready to help you serve your customer.

"I recently had a lighting project where the customer wanted these new outdoor LEDs that changed color," Garcia says.

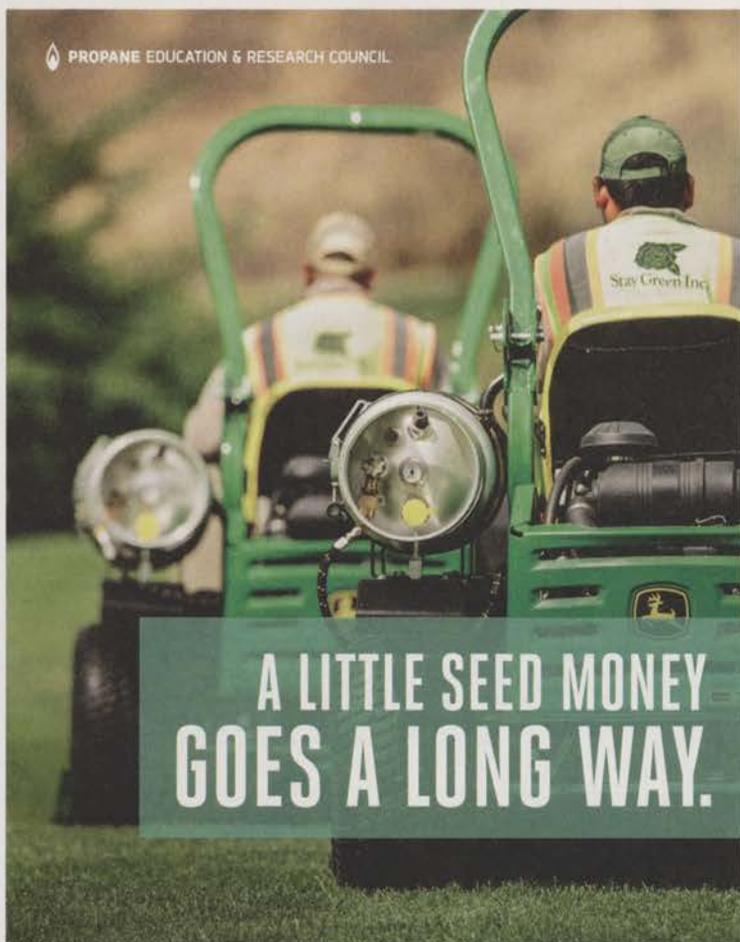
"I checked in with my supplier and not only were they able to get me expedited delivery, they sent a representative to show how best they should be installed and who worked with the customer, walking him through their operation. That really impressed me and the customer, I

wouldn't have received that level of service if I hadn't been a buyer from them for years."

Getting that kind of assistance happens regularly in good business relationships. Talking with suppliers about difficult projects can result in ideas or help. "A big part of what we do is education," Paulson says. "Whether it's showing a professional a new product or tool, or a new way to do a job, that's what we expect to do daily. If you have any kind of question, feel free to ask."

The bottom line, spending time on your supplier relationship is probably worth the effort. **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in California.



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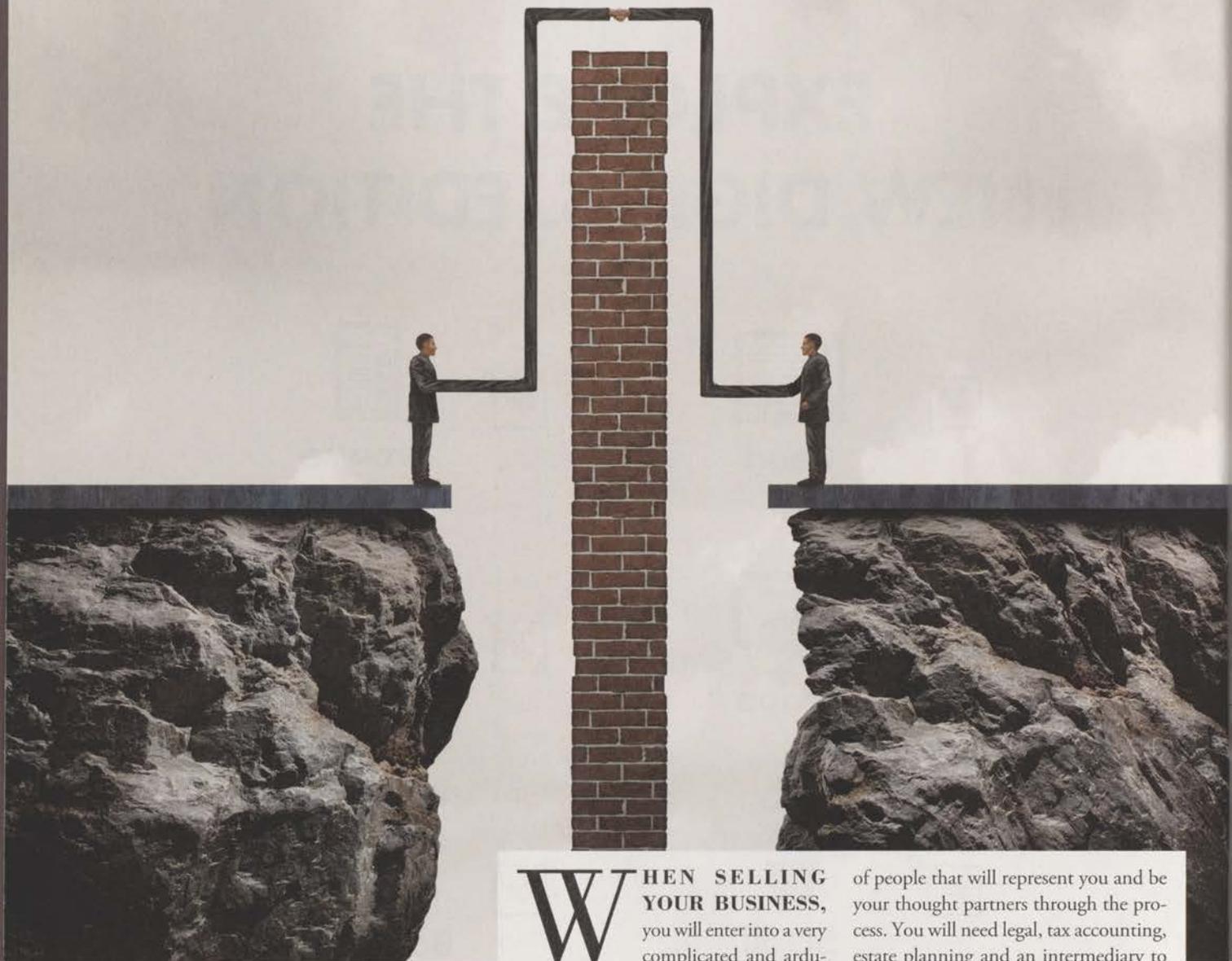


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THE LIFE OF A DEAL

If you have any thoughts about selling your business years from now, start preparing to sell your business now because the process to get to a final sale is a complicated venture.

By Tom Fochtman

WHEN SELLING YOUR BUSINESS, you will enter into a very complicated and arduous transaction that will consume you for three to six months, maybe longer. It will be the most intense business transaction you have ever dealt with.

To help you prepare for that moment, here is a simplified look at the process you will go through, from start to finish, in what I refer to as “the life of a deal.”

GETTING READY TO SELL. Gain clarity about why you are selling or transitioning your business – securing your financial freedom, health, age, burn out, about to happily retire, etc. This will help you get through the highs and lows of the process.

SELECTING YOUR TEAM. The first order of business is engaging with the right team

of people that will represent you and be your thought partners through the process. You will need legal, tax accounting, estate planning and an intermediary to coordinate the process. I do not recommend trying to go it alone, handling the coordination and negotiations by yourself. Most owners do not possess the proper skill set and you have a business to run while in the process. You should hire a business broker or engage with one of the few firms in the U.S. that specialize in the landscape industry.

Typically, an investment banking firm or intermediary can handle the entire process and has access to all of the professional service firms necessary to complete the transaction. This is much easier for you. Plus, it allows you to focus on managing your business during the transaction. The last thing you can tolerate as a seller is having your company show any signs of negative trending,

which can easily occur if you get overly distracted during the sales process.

EVALUATING INFORMATION.

Hopefully, you have an exit plan in place and have gotten your company ready for sale. Good management team, sales and profits are trending upward, equipment and fleet are current, systems and procedures are working well and your company is truly ready to go to market.

If not, you might get the message from your intermediary that there are some items that should be addressed prior to going to market, and those might take 1-3 years to address. If you do

not address them, you can expect to get a lower offer than you could if you addressed them. It will depend if you have the time and stamina to get your house in order. That choice will be yours.

SALES PROCESS. During the interview process to select your team, you will hear about using a controlled auction method or a process that is more selective. Generally speaking, a controlled auction will produce higher offers but it is also extremely hard to keep things quiet once the potential buyers hear about an opportunity. They will use their network to learn about your company and it's hard to keep

all of that quiet. You run the risk of your employees and possibly your clients hearing that you are for sale. If you are more selective and only approach buyers who your intermediary thinks are a good fit, they will be willing to pay a higher price to have the opportunity to purchase you off market. Off market transactions require a premium and will generate a very handsome offer; good intermediaries will play this angle. You and your intermediary will decide which is the best and agreed upon method to pursue.

KEEP IT CONFIDENTIAL. Once you and your team have agreed on which method to use, and

collected and evaluated all the relevant data, your team will create a confidential information memorandum (CIM). This is basically an offering statement about your company and will be the initial and primary tool that will be used to market the company.

They will also create a 1-2 page prospectus memo or teaser about your company that will be anonymous in nature but will give a high-level overview of your organization and the opportunity.

If a potential buyer likes what they read in the prospectus, they will agree to execute a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) or a con-



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LIFE OF A DEAL

Q. How long does the process take from start to finish?

A. Assuming a seller is truly ready to start the process, four to six months. Four months is a bit aggressive and eight months would mean there were some challenges during the process. More typical would be six months.

Q. Why does the process take so long?

A. From the time a potential buyer looks at a quick teaser sheet on your company, then signs an NDA, then receives the prospectus which hopefully will result in an LOI tendered, four to six weeks of time will have passed. Then Due Diligence starts. The Purchase Agreement is negotiated. Keep in mind most investor buyers will have other transactions going on. If it's a strategic buyer they have their own business to run during the process.

Q. What is all the buzz about having an exit strategy?

A. Most business owners get so focused on managing their business and don't take time to plan for the future. Don't be head down and butt up.

If you want to maximize your value and the price you sell for, you need to be following a plan to get your value up. It involves things like the power of your brand, the quality of your management team, having a 90 percent plus renewal rate on contracts, updated fleet and equipment, a low work comp MOD rating and a host of other very key items. Don't sit back and think it will happen. It won't. As an owner you need to have a strategy in place with the end game in mind - selling for the highest price possible.

Confidentiality agreement (CA) to receive the CIM. This gives you assurance that the information they are about to receive will be held in confidence and will not be discussed to outside parties. It also gives you some level of legal recourse if the agreement is broken. Frankly, this is a bit of fluff as the responsibility will be on you to pursue someone and it will be your legal fees that mount up. But the NDA/CA is meant to keep things on the down low. Once an agreement is executed the potential buyer will receive the CIM and your identity will be revealed.

It's possible you will receive a preliminary offer based on

the prospectus. We recently received a \$14 million offer for one of our clients based solely on the prospectus. That offer went up once we negotiated the letter of intent (LOI). But more typically some information will be exchanged and if the buyer is ready to move forward, they will tender an LOI and once final terms are negotiated, due diligence will begin.

LOI's are non-binding but they are the basis of the transaction. The LOI will include pricing, terms, warranty and representations that both parties agree to, non-compete and employment agreement language, etc. - the basic terms

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of the transaction. Again, an LOI is non-binding but the core terms of the document are important.

DUE DILIGENCE. I've heard a lot of analogies around due diligence and most are not able to be printed in this magazine. Due diligence will be the toughest, most stressful and arduous process you have ever engaged in. It is a more in-depth review of your company than any outside party has ever been involved with.

A secure data room will be opened (Dropbox, Citrix) and a serious amount of documentation will be uploaded. This includes contracts, customer data, everything related to HR,

workers' compensation, all levels of insurance, information on your fleet/equipment, your facility if that is involved, an environmental study on the facility and things like background checks on key employees, including the owner(s) if you are staying with the company. It will be you as the owner and anyone on your team that you trust to be involved or an outside party that you engage to assist.

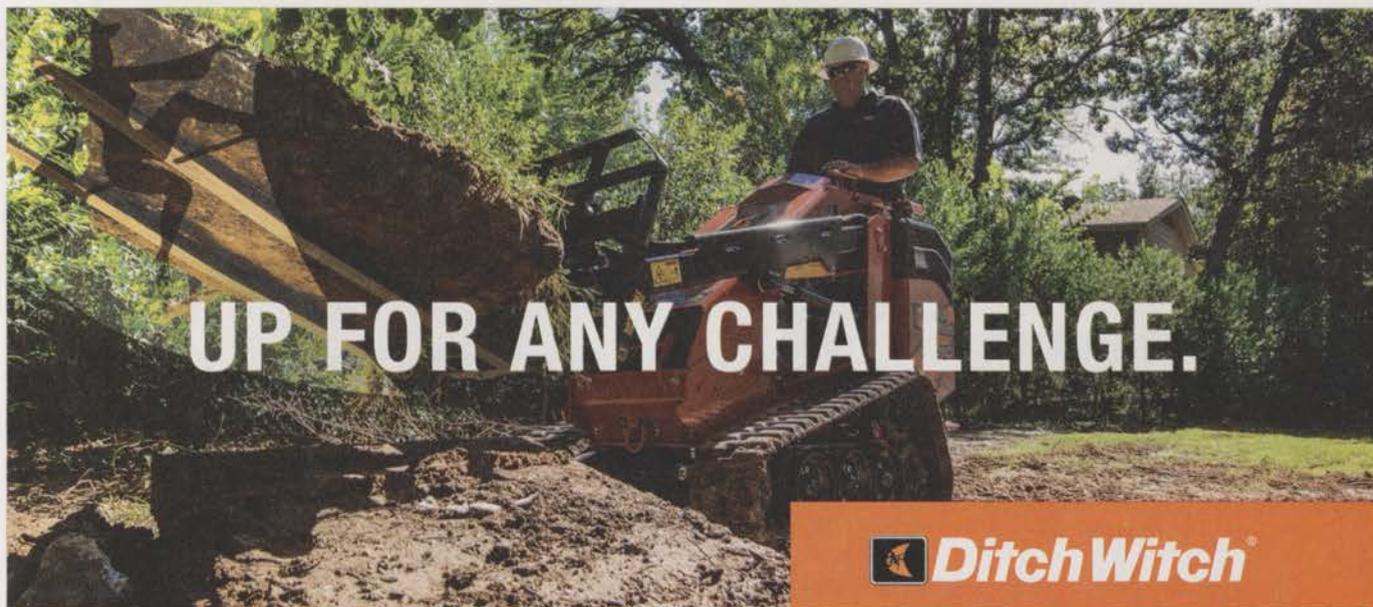
Something to remember is that the buyer is taking on virtually all the risk going forward from the day of closing. They must be 100 percent assured that the investment they are making is sound. Frequently there

will be outside investor money involved and the investors must be protected and reassured that their investment is a good one.

PURCHASE AGREEMENT. While going through due diligence, the purchase agreement will be negotiated. It will either be a stock purchase agreement (SPA) or an asset purchase agreement (APA). Most transactions today involve an SPA and the buyer and seller agree to use IRS election 338 (h) which will treat the transaction as an asset purchase for tax purposes. Election 338 allows the buyer to get the step-up in basis on the assets that they need to make the transaction work.

The advantage to the seller is the unforeseen and future liabilities of the company that might present themselves to the new owner. As the seller you will make very thorough warranties and representations about known and unknown liabilities but they will reside with the new owners post-closing. Additionally, money will be held back at closing for up to 24 months to pay any of these liabilities that might come up. It is not the intent of the buyer to keep any of this money but they do need some monetary protection in the event liabilities present themselves.

An asset purchase agreement is much simpler than an SPA.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LIFE OF A DEAL

Q. How many potential buyers of my company are out there?

A. It depends on the size and make up of your company. The most coveted acquisitions today are commercial landscape maintenance companies. Buyers would prefer 75 percent maintenance, enhancement and snow-related revenue and will consider up to 35 percent in new installation work.

If you combine all active buyers of landscape companies today, I would speculate there are about 35 potential buyers active in the marketplace today. Not all of them will be a fit for your company, but if you combine all active buyers today, there are quite a few.

Q. How do we know how much our company is truly worth?

A. Your advisers will counsel you on this all-important question. Generally speaking, my experience has been that most sellers think that their company is worth more than what the market is willing to pay. The price will most likely be based on your adjusted EBITDA. It is fairly easy to calculate EBITDA. Adjusted EBITDA takes into consideration all of what is commonly referred to as 'owner add-backs' and extraordinary expenses. Calculating adjusted EBITDA takes some very careful analysis and evaluation.

The old adage of "your company is only worth what someone will pay for it" is true. The key is positioning your company so a buyer sees great value in the company. Ideally you will have more than one interested party looking at acquiring your company. A key component of the adviser you hire is how well they take you to market and get potential buyers interested.

The warranties and indemnifications are significantly reduced, as well as the time spent on due diligence in general. And the buyer still gets the step in basis on the assets that they need. The past and future liabilities will stay with the seller since the stock was not purchased. The challenge is that all of your contracts have to formally be assigned to the buyer.

Every contracted customer has to receive communication and a document must be executed to assign the contracts. For larger companies this can be daunting. In a stock purchase transaction, technically

the customer does not need to be made aware unless the seller has executed contracts that have 'change of control' language in them. The APA is much easier but an SPA is much easier to deal with contracts, which is the primary reason most transactions today are handled as a stock purchase/sale.

At this point due diligence will have begun and once the buyer is comfortable with the proceedings, they will then invest the time to work on the purchase agreement. Part of due diligence will be scheduling a Phase I for the site(s) assuming the buyer intends to continue



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to occupy the property. The buyer may perform much of the due diligence themselves or engage a firm to handle it. As mentioned before, a wide range of documents will get uploaded into a secure data room. Your CPA will need to assist you and once you are comfortable that the transaction appears it will close, you will be doing tax planning with your CPA.

And you should be working with a succession planner and your CPA to talk about several types of trusts and ways to shelter your proceeds. The whole due diligence and negotiation of the purchase agreement will be a minimum of 2 months and could easily take longer. You have your business to manage and the buyer may have other transactions in play, or a business to run.

CLOSING. Ultimately your goal is crossing the finish line. A closing date will have been set in the Purchase Agreement and assuming it is met, a closing not too different than a real estate closing will occur. Attorneys are involved and possibly a closing agent. If the buyer and seller are in two different locations, the closing will be remote. You will sign a lot of documents and monies will be wired. With stock purchase agreement, typically several parties are paid at closing: The seller, the intermediary, the attorneys and possibly the CPA. This occurs because the new owner of your stock will not allow any of these involved parties to NOT get paid and have them come back at the company. These parties act as a sort of lien holder.

They are paid at closing so there is no risk of them not getting paid. As mentioned earlier, some of the seller's funds will be held for up to 24 months either in escrow or as a promise to pay from the buyer. There will be trigger point dates along the way and some of the funds will be released. Typically and assuming there are no liability issues that need to be resolved, all funds are released within 24 months. In most transactions 10-15 percent of the proceeds are held back as hold back money for the 24-month period.

Post closing: Happily ever after. If everyone has done their work effectively, buyers will be happy, and you'll be happy. This gives you the freedom to pursue what's next? **L&L**

The author is CEO of Ceibass Venture Partners in Colorado.



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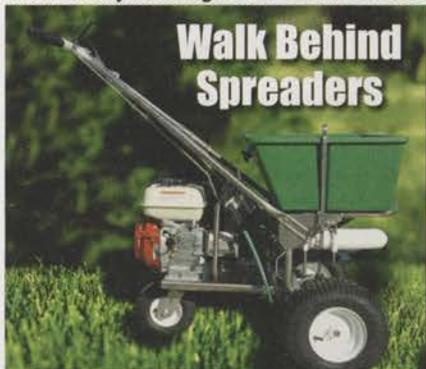
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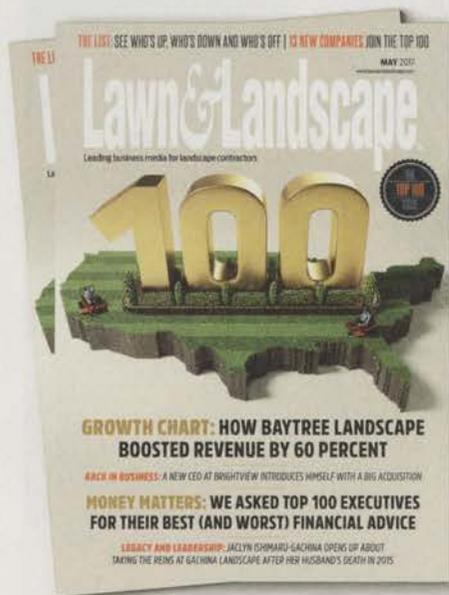
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AD INDEX

Advertiser	Website	Page #
1st Products	1stproducts.com	115
3M	3M.com	15
AM Leonard	amleo.com	50
American Honda	honda.com	5
AmericanHort	AmericanHort.org	107
AMSOIL	amsoil.com	21
Ariens/Gravelly	gravelly.com	cover band, 123
Barreto Mfg.	barretomfg.com	82
Bayer	backedbybayer.com	31
BioPlex	bio-plex.com	121
Bobcat Co.	bobcat.com	99
Boss LM	bosslm.com	121
Ceibass	ceibass.com	96
Cub Cadet	cubcadet.com/pro	47
Deist Industries	switchNgo.com	111
Dig Corp.	digcorp.com	112
Ditch Witch	ditchwitch.com	113
Dixie Chopper	dixiechopper.com	97
Dodge Ram	ramtrucks.com/commercial	52
Dow AgroSciences	dowagro.com	11
Ewing	EwingIrrigation.com	91
Exmark	exmark.com	79
FMC	fmcprosolutions.com	77
Ford	ford.com/commercial-trucks	62-63
FX Luminaire	fxl.com	124
GIE+Expo	GIE-EXPO.com	74
GPS Insight	gpsinsight.com	48
Graham Spray Equipment	grahamse.com	28
Greenworks Tools	greenworkstools.com	7
Ground Logic	groundlogic.com	22
Husqvarna	husqvarna.com	35
Isuzu	isuzucv.com	13
Jacks Small Engines	JacksSmallEngines.com	76
John Deere	JohnDeere.com	27
John Deere Construction	JohnDeere.com/ChooseYourDeal	43
Kichler Lighting	landscapelighting.com	51
Koch	KochTurf.com/lawns	83
Kubota Tractor Corp.	kubota.com	33
Lebanon Turf Products	LebanonTurf.com	18, 19
LMN	golmn.com	16-17, 36-37
Magna Matic Corp	magna-matic.com	30
Mean Green Products	meangreenmowers.com	96
Mercedes	MBVans.com	41
Mini Trencher	minitrencher.com	98
MistAway	mistaway.com	24
Neely Coble	neelycoble.com	85
Northeast CAT	NECatDealers.com/bcp	49*
Novae	NovaeCorp.com	34
Nufarm	nufarminsider.com	20
Pave Tech	pavetech.com	98
PBI/Gordon Corp.	pbigordon.com	25*, 80-81
PECO	lawnvac.com	82

Advertiser	Website	Page #
PermaGreen Supreme	permagreen.com	9
Permaloc Aluminum Edging	permaloc.com	32
Pine Hall Brick	americaspremierpaver.com	94
Pro Landscape / Drafix	prolandscape.com	114
Propane Education & Research Council	propane.com	86-87, 108
Rain Bird	rainbird.com	23
Real Green Systems	RealGreen.com	101
SavaLawn	savatree.com	34
Sprinkler Magician	MosquitoMagician.com/lawn&landscape	22
Stihl	STIHLusa.com	45
Takeuchi	takeuchi-us.com	95
Toro	toro.com	65
TruGreen	trugreen.com	78
ULINE	uline.com	78
Ventrac	ventrac.com	26
Vermeer	Vermeer.com	39
WAC Landscape Lighting	waclandscape-lighting.com	2
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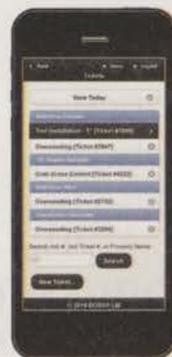
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IN THIS DAY AND AGE, establishing a multifaceted brand in an industry such as ours is a key component for business growth and employee satisfaction. Constant innovation in service offerings not only welcomes a new clientele, but also keeps old clients coming back.

Equipping your workforce with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide new services to your clients is one method of keeping your business on the path to success. Training is a great way for your workers to gain knowledge about industry trends and acquire new skills in the field.

According to a 2013 Forbes article, many business owners tend to ignore employee development when, in fact, they should be taking advantage of available programs to enhance and strengthen their existing workforce.

Although sometimes costly, training your employees is a long-term investment that contributes to the success of your company, and



JUAN TORRES is founder of Next Step Solutions and president of the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance.

facilitates upward mobility for those lower-level workers who are seeking to move up the business ladder. Starting sooner rather than later will have better payoff in the long run and increase employee retention.

With today's workforce shortage, we must prioritize employee development, workforce engagement and effective work practices.

Keeping open lines of communication with your employees is the best way to identify areas in which training is most needed. Your workforce

WHILE RESOURCES LIKE VIDEOS ARE EXTREMELY USEFUL ... HANDS-ON TRAINING DELIVERS THE BEST RESULTS.

should always be involved in the selection of which training programs make most sense for your team.

TEACH NEW SKILLS. Equipment operation training is a useful skill to have and a way to save time while bringing versatility and power to your workforce. Training your

employees on how to properly and safely operate machinery such as skid-steers, excavators, air spades, augers, etc., will cut down your need for additional manpower and increase employee efficiency, especially when tackling big projects.

TAKE A HANDS-ON APPROACH.

While resources like videos are extremely useful for employee development, hands-on training delivers the best results. Reading materials and passing exams does not make you an expert. Being able to put your skills to practice in the most effective way possible does.

The use of demonstrations and hands-on exercises guarantees that your employees obtain a thorough understanding of the material presented to them. Training increases morale and reduces employee turnover, two essential aspects of a strong business. Untrained employees lack the knowledge to use company resources properly, which in turn affects your clients and ultimately your bottom line.

FOSTER A LEADERSHIP SPIRIT.

Training your managers and crew leaders on different skill sets can allow for knowledge to be passed and foster a sense of growth. This is essential to building better leaders and adds a sense of diversification to your business.

It is important to explore other service areas in which training might be necessary such as software literacy, leadership development, communication skills, etc. This is a great way to bring added value to your staff as a whole, given that good management most often results in a productive and efficient workforce. **L&L**

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